THE POTENTIAL FOR PUBLIC OPINION TO
GENERATE CHANGE IN POLICY FORMATION

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Abstract

Towards the end of the Twentieth Century there were a number of examples of change to public policy that were not the product of political debate and public consideration. Rather, they appear to have originated in another less visible, and therefore less open to critique manner. It is argued that it is changes to the general thrust of public opinion that have given validity to these policy changes. The ways in which changes to public opinion are caused to change and by whom are investigated and a theory of ‘Australian Public Opinion Change’ is developed. This theory is applied to three examples of undebated policy change, leading to an analysis of how the changes come about and the political ideologies that drive them. This information is then used to identify, through the use of Critical Theory analysis, which social groups are the greatest beneficiaries of the changes and which are the losers.
I certify that the Research Paper entitled;

“The Potential for Public Opinion to Generate Change in Policy Formation”

and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this Research Paper (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed .............................................................................

Date ..............................................................................
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CHAPTER ONE
Unplanned Change in Education

Introduction

When policy change affects large sections of society it is important not to shrug it off
as merely a manifestation of the normal ups and downs of social life, as some policy
change has the potential to impact severely on the lives of individual members of
that society. To illustrate the ways in which this can happen, the following section
will provide overviews of three examples from the sphere of public education. A
thorough analysis of these examples appears in Chapter Nine as part of a
demonstration of the application of a proposed explanation that will be developed to
show how these changes occur.

Taken together, these three examples of public policy change prompted the writer to
question “What are the origins of these changes and what drives them?” As these
three examples were occurring at the same time, they offer both illustrative
examples, and sources of clues as to possible answers to the question posed. The
question seemed particularly pertinent as it appeared that none of these changes in
public policy direction had had its origin in decisions consciously made at
government level.

After the three examples are presented, the above loosely framed question will be
recast in a form amenable to systemic analysis, and a methodology for addressing it
will be outlined.

The Literacy Crisis in Public Education

During the last quarter of the Twentieth Century the term ‘literary crisis’ became
more and more common in Australian political debate as a by-product largely of the
extraordinary rate of social change that occurred since the Second World War. The
single most significant feature of this period was a major increase in the birth rate. "
The increase was from a pre-war level of 17 [births] per 1000 of population to
approximately 24 [births] per 1000 in 1946-47" (Hodgens 1998, p.8). The resulting
increase in the number of children of school-age, combined with an increased
expectation of material and social development, had a significant impact on education. During this period, education systems had to accommodate increasing numbers of children in the primary years and, at the same time, an expansion in secondary education as more students stayed on and into higher grade levels.

This period also saw the introduction of television, the emergence and popularity of which was instrumental in the development of youth culture with its potential for shaping “ways of thinking, ways of seeing, ways of talking about the world (Cunningham & Turner 1993, p.4). The different expectations of the generations became more and more marked as the media targeted their different, age-based markets in different ways.

All of this was happening in an international context which became known as the Cold War. The Government’s, the media’s and much of the population’s perceived need to maintain an advantage over the opposing side accelerated the rate of technological change. Any complacency that was held by Australia with its close association with United States of America was shattered by Russia's launch of the Sputnik. This served as a reminder that in spite of its isolation the USSR had the potential to represent a significant technological challenge.

These factors combined to reinforce an attitude that saw both the rate and kind of change that was occurring as deserving of a significant level of suspicion. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Australia had a series of conservative governments that maintained their position by characterising its opposition as being, at least partly, aligned with the socialism of their cold-war enemy. This situation came to an end in 1972 with the election of the first Labor Government since 1949.

After twenty-three years of conservative government, Labor, on coming to office, embarked on a wide program of reform in defence, foreign affairs, race issues, health, social welfare and education (Lawrence, Eshuys & Guest 1993, pp.377-78). The basis of the new approach to education was underpinned by a commitment to social justice and the associated concept of equality of outcomes for all. Those in opposition to Labor saw the pursuit of such equality as implying necessarily a concomitant erosion of quality. This viewpoint saw success as being quite properly and necessarily restricted to an elite few. The intent of allowing a much wider range
of students to achieve success was considered subversive in the sense that the elite’s privileged education provision would be compromised to allow for an education for the unworthy masses (Hodgens 1998, p.18).

After only a short time into Labor’s period in office the tenor of criticism from the opposition was taken up by the press. One of the many means used by the press to critique the Government was its promotion of the notion of a literacy crisis, as evidenced by comments such as "Employers had noticed a steady decline in reading, writing and basic arithmetic standards over the past four years ('illiterates turned out by schools', The Age, 14 March 1975, p.3).

As the number of school students grew after the Second World War as a result of the increased birth rate, there was, necessarily, a consequential increase in the number of teachers trained and employed. The majority of these teachers were young and their training included innovations and new approaches to pedagogy. This provided further ammunition for the media to use in its criticism of standards to demonstrate alleged failures of the education system:

Australia’s policy of ‘educating children in the way of life’ is having the reverse effect … and is leaving some of them next to unemployable in the big wide world outside the classroom …

Instead of learning the basic Three Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic – they are being taught subjects like social science, by trips and project work…(illiteracy: the crisis in our classrooms', The Australian, 18 May, 1977, p.9).

What started as one of a range of criticisms of a government became a regular issue to be repeatedly brought up when issues relating to change became topical. Although the context and the location of perceived problems may have changed similar reports appeared in newspapers over the ensuing twenty-four years with increasing regularity. This laid the foundation for an emerging and pervasive acceptance that there was, indeed, a crisis in literacy and general educational standards.

By the end of the Century debate on perceived standards in the country's schools had reached a point at which it had become a valuable tool in the political contest
between the, then Coalition (Liberal/National), conservative government and its Labor opposition. The by-then general public acceptance that there was in fact a literacy crisis created a climate in which it became politically acceptable to initiate policy action to correct the perceived deficit. Central in this was the introduction of nationwide testing of primary school children at selected Year levels. The efficacy of such testing remains moot with strong arguments being made by supporters and opponents. What is beyond debate is that education policy is being developed in response to the results of the testing even though the potential for resulting positive or negative outcomes for students is still being argued.

A more complete examination of this phenomenon is provided in Chapter Nine. The question of how it came to be accepted in popular opinion that there was indeed a literacy crisis in Australian education is a fascinating one. This fascination derives from the fact that in spite of repeated assertions in the media about the existence and extent of the crisis there was very little, if any, evidence to support either. Despite this lack of evidence, the repeated statement that there was a problem appears to have created a context in which a large proportion of the voting public believed the crisis was real. The changes imposed on school education did not have their origins simply in policy decisions of government. Rather, the eventual policy decisions aimed at correcting the perceived literacy deficit have been driven by repeated assertions and consequential public opinion that there is, indeed, a crisis.

The Demand For Accountability in Public Schools

At around the same time that the ‘literacy crisis’ first appeared in the press, international events transformed public concern for the economy from negligible to a virtual obsession. The 1960s had seen the advent of a vigorous questioning of the status quo in almost all fields and, by 1972, governments of some countries realised the power they held in being the major suppliers of energy in the form of oil. This oil had been essential for the enormous industrial expansion that had been going on since the end of the Second World War. When the leaders of these governments decided that it was time they saw a fair share of the benefits of the importance of their oil, the economies of Western nations that depended on this supply of cheap fuel were badly battered. This price rise caused a significant economic recession which, contrary to usual economic expectations, manifested with high inflation and
high unemployment. The prevailing approach to economics in the 1960s had been based on the theories of Keynes, the dominant economic theorist of the time, who maintained that governments should manipulate the economy to smooth the peaks and troughs normally produced by capitalism. In some influential quarters it was argued that the new phenomenon of ‘stagflation’ proved that Keynesian economics had been shown to be ineffective and that a return to neo-classical economics, last followed between 1918 and the early 1930s, was necessary to correct the economic problems being felt across the Western developed world.

One of the significant results of ‘stagflation’ was that the cost, to government, of providing services had risen sharply. Recession and inflation had combined to reduce the income from taxation, and government ministers - under pressure from the resurgent neo-classical economists -- felt they had no choice but to reduce their spending.

In Australia, one of the results of these economic problems was that the Whitlam Labor government in the early 1970s became vulnerable to allegations of economic mismanagement. In addition, its own inexperience and the mistakes being made only added to the perception that Labor was not up to the job of managing this new economy. After only three years, a Liberal government under the prime ministership of Malcolm Fraser replaced Labor in office. One of the icons of the successive Fraser Governments between 1975 and 1983 was the so-called ‘razor gang’, a colloquial term describing the Estimates Review Committee which repeatedly demanded a reduction of expenditure across all government departments. In various forms this process has continued into the beginning of the Twenty-first Century.

In an atmosphere where expenditure was constantly threatened, there was a natural tendency in most quarters to examine carefully the costs that could not be avoided. Managers would demand of their subordinates justification for the funds they were expending. Increasingly, all levels of the public service were expected to be accountable to the next higher level. The results of this approach included a reduction of service, the shedding of large numbers of staff and, with much support in the form of editorial comment in the media, a reduction of the expectation of what governments could do.
Public education, similarly, fell under the same torches of intense scrutiny as part of the ever-expanding drive for public accountability. The provision of public education, however, was, and is, different to many other government services. It is an arena in which the results of expenditure are extremely difficult to measure. However, this did not mean that it was not subject to cost cutting. Teachers, the providers of the service, had virtually no control of expenditure, making it impossible for them to account for the funds that they had spent. Even so, the notion of accountability had become so powerful that, in spite of the difficulties presented, there was still a powerful demand that teachers and schools be accountable.

In Education the meaning of accountability necessarily took on new hues. From the debate that grew up around educational accountability there emerged a growing, but largely unargued, expectation that it is reasonable to expect teachers and their schools to be accountable to the students, parents and communities that they served. However, the nature of the accountability that was expected of them by their bureaucratic masters took on a very different form. The Education Department of Western Australia, for instance, in its introduction to its curriculum improvement documentation (EDWA 1998, p.9), makes specific reference to accountability, stating that teachers are accountable to the School Principal, Principals are accountable to the District Director who in turn is accountable to the Chief Executive Officer. But nowhere in the document is there reference to students, their parents or to the school community. The only accountability referred to relates to the implementation of an approach to curriculum delivery directed by the Education Department. The development of the Department’s ‘Curriculum Improvement Plan’ has been an expensive process with an initial allocation of $15,000,000 (EDWA 2001). Accountability processes included in the plan relate more to the expenditure of money than the effectiveness of the plan in justifying the changes to those affected in terms of improved educational outcomes.

This process of accountability has evolved over a period of some 25 years. It was not the result of any specific decision taken at the beginning of that period. Rather, it appears to have been driven by an evolving general expectation that governments and their agencies should account for any expenditure that they make. This expectation appears to have had its origin in the demands emanating from the
proponents of neo-classical economic theory. Again the intriguing question is posed: What are the origins of this policy change, and how did they come to gain sufficient importance to stimulate this change?

From Academic to Vocational: Subject Choices Made by Year 11 and Year 12 Students.

On Monday 11 October 1999, the Minister of Education for Western Australia released a discussion paper outlining three options for the future organisation of post-compulsory education in that State (Ashworth 1999). The three models had one element in common: a significantly increased role for vocational education. The three options were described as representing: minimal change, increasing change and most change. In the terms of usual political practice it may be assumed that the Minister has a preferred (albeit undeclared) option that is located within the three that have been presented in a way to make that preference the one most likely to be accepted. The first option, ‘minimal change’, is offered in a formulation that suggests that it goes insufficiently far to address the perceived shortcomings of the current system. The third, ‘most change’, is radical and, as such, is acknowledged as a change that would inevitably increase workloads for school staff and the local community. Not surprisingly, one might expect, it is likely to be highly contested.

The second option, one infers, is thus the Minister’s preferred option, and the one most likely to be enacted. This option seeks to reposition the so-called (and previously quite separate) vocational courses as a legitimate component within the proposed new and broader tertiary entrance examination requirements, as do the other two to lesser or greater degrees. The increasing importance and status of vocational education in the final years of schooling is by no means a new phenomenon. In 1982 Meyer & Wise published the results of their research into the effectiveness of vocational courses in schools, Bates et al. (1984) termed it the ‘new vocationalism’, Watkins (1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991) has discussed the effectiveness of vocational education at length, and Kliebard (1990) has questioned how it has come to gain its ‘vital’ status.

Shortly after these concerns first started appearing in the public discourse, one of the effects of the increase in prominence and popularity of vocational courses in post-
compulsory schooling became increasingly apparent to this writer. At first no reason could be identified for the difficulties that were being experienced in running viable senior courses in Drama due to insufficient numbers of students choosing to study that subject. At the same time, courses such as Accounting, Small Business Management and Tourism were turning students away due to lack of space. This was occurring in the Northern Territory even though Drama, in that system’s schools, is offered as a publicly examined subject acceptable as a tertiary entrance subject. On further enquiry it was found that similar problems were being encountered in Art, and later, History and other Humanities subjects. This raises an important question: Does this migration from humanities to vocational subjects have any significant effect on the quality of education provided in schools?

Professor Marian Quartly of Monash University was sufficiently concerned, in 1995, by skill deficiencies she had perceived in her incoming school leavers -- which she attributed to the progressive elevation of vocational subjects over the arts and humanities (Healy 1995) -- that she made these concerns public. Professor Quartly’s argument was that commencing undergraduate students who had studied vocational rather than humanities subjects in senior high school lacked skills, essential for tertiary education, that are acquired through studying humanities subjects. The effects also apply to those not going on to tertiary education. In concluding a study of the effectiveness of vocational education that found that, in the main, it served little practical purpose, Watkins (1991b, p.55) stated:

… work force education is important, not so much merely to align any education training to the ephemeral requirements of the industrial sector, but to equip and train people with the more fundamental, expansive skills of being able to critique and reflect on the changes taking place in society and on the shop floor.

If it is accepted that these understandings are what arts, humanities and other traditional academic subjects deal with, and if it is true that there is little identifiable value in studying vocational subjects, it would appear that their growing prominence and assumed importance in secondary schooling is problematic

The preference for selecting vocational subjects in preference for humanities or ‘academic’ subjects suggests that a significant number of students, and their parents,
had come to see subjects that had an identifiable relevance to the perceived needs of potential employers as having more value in gaining employment. If it were to be accepted that this was the case, an argument could be developed to suggest a reason for this change. It would be easy to simply assume that as there was a growing unemployment problem students and their parents would look for subjects that could be demonstrated to provide skills employers demanded or expected. This raises two questions: firstly, why would people start to view school subjects in this way when there was no history or evidence of a correlation between subjects studied and employer demands beyond basic literacy and numeracy? Secondly, how does it happen that certain subjects come to gain an ascendancy over others in perceived value to potential employers?

As with the previous examples we are presented with, a change in public policy that appears to have little of its origin in government decision making. Rather it seems to be based on a change in the expectations of a large proportion of society, in response to which the government simply responds with legislated change. The root causes of this change in social expectation are not easy to identify but it can be argued that if they were to be identified this would provide valuable information relating to the factors behind the change and what drives them.

The Problem and the Question it Prompts

The three overviews of policy change not dependent on governmental decision making or public debate serve to show that there is a process occurring within society that has the potential to affect large numbers of people in ways, that may well be disadvantageous to them, while involving them directly in the process. The changes are totally dependent upon there being a significant proportion of society that is prepared to accept them as being a normal part of their social life. It could be argued that these individuals are willing, if uncomprehending contributors to their own disadvantage. As with the majority of social change where there is disadvantage to some, there is likely to be advantage to others.

The questions that derive from this problem are relatively simple:

- What processes occur that allow the changes to occur?
• Which social groups are disadvantaged by the change and what are their roles in the making the change possible?

• Which social groups benefit from this type of change and what are their roles in it?

While these questions appear to be discrete and worthy of investigating in their own right, it is likely that they are intricately linked and should be examined together if a satisfactory understanding of the phenomenon is to be gained. To make this easier to perceive it would not be unreasonable to condense these queries to one overriding question: Why does policy change occur when there has been little or no public debate or demand?

The nature of the question ‘Why?’ now begins to take shape. Using the examples above, the changes to the perception of education can be described as changes to attitudes to, or opinions about, education and the social understandings that are associated with it. Describing it in this way makes it easier to understand the nature of whence the pressures to change a view of social factors come. At the class-level, or even school-level, education practitioners deal with students and their parents as individuals. However, in view of the fact that these phenomena occur more or less simultaneously across Australia, the changes must be occurring within the opinions of a large group of people.

A Possible Answer begins to Emerge

Once it accepted that these phenomena may have their origin in changes to attitudes and opinions held by large numbers of people, one social indicator is identifiable as playing a major role. That indicator is “public opinion”. Public opinion is a concept so generally acknowledged that it has come to have a range of meanings: it can be used as a definition based on surveys; at times it is used to reflect current political allegiance of the majority of voter; and at other times it is something to be manipulated for political or commercial gain, most commonly through advertising.

The concept of public opinion is not new or even something peculiar to modern society. Public opinion has been used as a guiding principle of governance over several millennia under various forms of democracy: directly from Ancient Greece
to modern day Switzerland, Ireland and Sweden, via referenda; and indirectly in most democratic countries where governments could not continue in office if public opinion were ignored. The modern understanding of public opinion tends to be somewhat more all encompassing than it appears to have been in earlier history. It must be remembered, however, that although public opinion represents a consensus or possibly a majority view, it can not claim to represent a definitive value, as there will always be identifiable groups of individuals holding opinions contrary to those of the majority.

Accepting that there has been a change in public opinion implies that it must also be accepted that there has been a change in the nature of the information on which individuals’ opinions are based. It can be argued that this information is presented to the community by news, current affairs, entertainment media and by the education process itself. This argument can be developed further to suggest that these changes have occurred at a time when there has been a significant change in the dominant ideology among those who shape the discourse that the media reflect. Since the economic difficulties sparked by the oil price rises of the 1970s there has been consistent pressure to abandon the ‘Keynesian’ economic model in favour of one exclusively dependent on the principles of the free market. The argument, central to the thesis being developed here, is that there is a discourse that has accompanied this acceptance of neo-classical economics. This same discourse is also the driving force of the public opinion change that has, in turn, become the single most important legitimating factor in subsequent changes to public policy. It is these changes and the ways in which they occurred that have prompted the questions that this thesis attempts to answer.

**Public Opinion: An Agent For Change?**

The three examples outlined above represent changes that have not been initiated by any conscious decision of policy makers to change policy. Rather, the changes have occurred as an outcome of a process, which appears to be inherent in society itself. While there may well have been policy decisions made by governments relating to these changes, it may be argued that these policy changes, in varying degree, have either been driven by or at least are in response to changes in the expectation of large
numbers of people. Few governments will attempt to make changes that are not, at least, perceived to be supported by the majority of the electorate.

In relation to the literacy debate the policy that eventuated did so almost 30 years after the debate began. This is an example of how the debate can continue for many years, with increasing concern and support for one side of the argument leading to a situation where policy action is seen as having potential to win votes. Curiously, throughout this time, virtually no evidence was produced that showed there was in fact a literacy crisis.

The expectation of accountability in government schools was a debate that occurred over a much shorter period of time. Even so, the policies that were enacted in relation to it would not, and could not, have eventuated had there not been simultaneously an expectation for them among the general public.

Policies relating to vocational education are still (early in the Twenty-first Century) in the early stages of implementation, yet some ten years ago a de facto implementation began to occur. It would be difficult to argue that this phenomenon was the result of government policy. Certainly, there were enquiries being conducted, which recommended this type of policy, but the reality is that the wider public had very little knowledge of them.

Each of these instances of policy change has one thing in common; a well developed expectation and support within the wider community. If an understanding is to be gained of how changes such as these come to occur, it is necessary to develop a theory that shows how this expectation or support develops within the community. Any change of expectation or support among a large group of people must be based on the information that is available to that group. If this is the case, then that change must be concomitant with a change in public opinion in relation to the issue.

The present work aims to provide a satisfactory explanation of the ways in which the community accepts or even demands social policy change. The most promising possibility for such explanation, it will be argued, lies in gaining a full and explicit understanding of the nature of public opinion and the ways in which it is formed, developed and changed.
Towards developing an explanation

Public opinion is a many faceted social phenomenon with meanings ranging from statements of what large numbers of people believe (typically supported by research questions in the form of a poll), through rough guesses as to what people are thinking, to something that can be manipulated for commercial or political advantage (usually through advertising). This variety in potential meanings poses a major problem for anyone hoping to analyse the processes of public opinion formation, development and change that this project requires. For this reason this thesis is fundamentally different, from the majority of those produced as fulfilment of the requirements of academic study, in that rather than attempting to prove the existence of and describe a social phenomenon it attempts to show how particular examples of these phenomena occur. This presents something of a problem for the present work in that the range of approaches that serve well the majority of works, does not appear to be so useful for the work being embarked on here. In working towards achieving this the most appropriate methodology takes the form of an ‘analytic, synthetic essay’, which requires a contribution from a range of disciplines akin to what Kemmis refers to as “symposium research” (Kemmis 1998, p. 66). However, this kind of multidisciplinary work requires input from individuals skilled in areas such as psychology, sociology, history and cultural studies. This work requires that only one person be directly involved, consequently, that one person has to access existing knowledge of these areas and marshal the acquired information to make a convincing argument to explain the process of this particular type of policy change. In doing this, the work gains a number of features that help to describe the way in which it was conducted.

Once the notion of an unusual type of process leading to policy change has been established it is necessary to identify, through analysis, the range of disparate contributors to that process. These are then subjected to a process of synthesis to create a cogent argument that a viable description of the process has been produced. Necessarily, this approach will require a certain amount of speculation as there is no ready made ‘proof’ in the literature available to be slotted into the appropriate gaps in the developed description of how the changes occurred. To validate this speculation, the explanation that will be proposed is used to analyse the three
examples of policy change briefly described above as a means of demonstrating its viability as a model capable of, not only, describing the process of change, but also predicting how contemporary discourse may lead to future changes to policy.

Social change is never neutral. When social policies change there will inevitably be groups of people who benefit and groups of people who are disadvantaged. Investigating the types of change described here from a viewpoint that sees itself as value neutral inevitably prevents all avenues of investigation from being followed as values must be a factor in policy change. Due to the nature of this work it is important to find a unifying structure for the range of contributing disciplines used in investigating this problem. Critical Theory provides a framework that is ideally suited. Critical Theory specifically examines social phenomena from the perspective of various groups within society with the purpose of identifying who it is that benefits from them and the ways in which other, larger, groups are disadvantaged. The Critical Theory underpinning will not be explicit in some of the work, due only to the nature of approach that has to be used. In the remainder of this work, the approach will explicitly use critical theory principles although they may not be stated as such at the time.

To clarify, for interested readers, what is meant by Critical Theory in this instance, the following chapter offers a brief descriptive outline of the research paradigm on which much of what follows is based. That outline is not part of the investigation per se; it is included only to contribute to an understanding of how the research was conducted.

**Considering all parts of Public Opinion**

The principal ideas and concepts associated with an understanding of the mechanisms of public opinion are in common usage in the public sphere. This presents an initial problem, in as much as the meanings of words associated with them can be as varied as the people using them. To overcome this it will be essential to define formally the meanings of the main terms to be used in this work. Only when these definitions have been established will it be possible to undertake a thorough investigation of all contributors to the formation, development of public opinion, and to the mechanism by which public opinion changes or can be changed.
The bulk, if not the totality, of academic work on public opinion and attitude change
to date has focused entirely on opinion change. Adopting a similarly restricted focus
for the present study, however, would prove inadequate, given that much of what is
to be considered is concerned with attitudes or opinions that are very closely aligned
with the individual’s social and cultural life and, as such, may not have been
changed in any significant way. It will be shown that attitudes or opinions that are
normally available for change relate to what is normally considered to be in the
political arena. There are many attitudes or opinions that have their origins in the
formative life experiences of the individual and, as such, are less readily changed. It
would be difficult to argue that an attitude or opinion could be changed in the
political field in such a way that it contradicts an attitude or opinion that has been
formed early in life but has undergone little subsequent modification. It follows that
these fundamental attitudes or opinions must have to make a significant contribution
to the eventual attitudes and opinions of an individual. This being the case, to reach
an understanding of the ways in which opinion is formed, it will be necessary to
examine the early stages of an individual’s life, as it is at this time that the bases for
many opinions arguably would have had their origins. In spite of the fact that at this
stage of development the individual is engaged in the social milieu only to a very
restricted degree, it is important to examine the psychological processes that occur
and which affect, later in life, how the world is viewed. The literature relating to
psychological development during the early years of life will be used to develop a
framework onto which developmental features that can be shown to have the
potential to affect opinion formation can be attached. This information will then be
then synthesised to create an hypothesis relating to the formation of opinion.

It will be necessary to take this course as none of the available published literature
on opinion or attitude deals with this period of development. Rather, it concentrates
on the socially active individual. Any overarching theory of public opinion
formation, development and change should at least be aware of this stage in the
process, even if the contribution made is of little direct and obvious significance,
since to be unaware would be to leave a gap that may render the theory unbalanced.
Moreover, any such gap could well hold key to an understanding of the origins of
fully developed and changed opinions and attitudes in the mature individual.
**Developing and Changing Opinion**

Once opinions have been formed to a basic level they then become available for development. Becoming ‘available’ for development is an important notion, as not all opinions will be developed. Many may remain in their basic form, possibly for the whole of the individual’s life. Others will be developed almost immediately as factors impinging on the individual require the basic opinion to evolve to something more able to deal with a more advanced understanding of the environment in which he or she operates. There will, very likely, be some formed opinions that only come to be developed later in life in response to stimuli at that time. Nonetheless, the common thread in all instances of opinion development, it will be argued in Chapter Three, is that the nature of the development will depend, to some degree, on the level of psychological development the individual has reached at that time.

The psychological development of the individual will be examined in relation to a range of social factors which, inevitably, impinge on the individual to cause a development in the way in which he or she perceives the world and the people and structures that inhabit it. It is this perception, it will be argued, that stimulates the development of opinion. It is of vital importance that in this section of the work the fundamental tenets of Critical Theory remain to the fore as it would be easy, otherwise, to see many of the social factors considered as unproblematic. Accepted in an uncritical manner, the significant distortions they can bring to the process of opinion development may well be missed.

Having laid down a framework that carries an explanation of how opinion is formed and developed, it becomes possible to make a sufficiently grounded analysis of how these opinions become available to be changed. A range of psychological or ‘cognitive’ theories of opinion change will be examined. Although these theories are considered deficient due to a range of inadequacies, they do have a role to play in contributing support for aspects of the model of opinion change that will be presented in a subsequent section of this work.

The argument underpinning the essential core of this work is based on the proposition that there has been a range of policy changes that do not have their origins in the political decision making process. Rather, it will be contended, they
appear to be driven by changes to the expectations of a significant proportion of
Australian society. If this is the case it can be argued that the ways in which
important changes to society are made do not have the transparency that a healthy
democratic process demands. The argument is that if the policy debate is not being
conducted in the political sphere it is, necessarily, being promoted in some other way
in which the proponents are not identified and not all relevant information has to be
presented. As the stimulus for the eventual adoption of these changes to policy is in
response to a change to the expectation of a significant proportion of the population,
it will be argued that changes to public opinion are driving the policy change.
Rather than merely accept this, it will be argued that it is important to understand the
process by which this change to public opinion occurs, as this is the only way in
which the required transparency in the reasons for policy change can be achieved.

To gain an understanding of how this change comes about, the processes that occur
in the formation and development of opinion will be examined. This information
will then be incorporated into a development of a number of theories that deal with
opinion change. Finally, a model of how public opinion is caused to change will be
proposed.

Having reached this point the task central to this work presents itself: the application
of the model to a detailed description of Australian society and culture. The
reasoning here is that if the policy development process is to be transparent, the
process of public opinion change must also be rendered transparent.

It will be argued that the single most important contributor to changes in public
opinion is what will be defined as ‘elite discourse’, the bulk of which is transmitted
in the various media. To show the ways in which this occurs an analysis will be
made of the nature of the media industries in Australia. This analysis uses the
principles of Critical Theory to enable an understanding to be gained of the full
range of consequences of all facets of this industry’s organisation. An analysis of
the media industries in isolation, however, is not sufficient to achieve the required
transparency of the policy development process. The process of ‘elite discourse’
influence can not occur in its own right, it must operate in conjunction with an
existing body of opinion and its cultural foundation. For this reason this analysis can
not be complete without an examination, albeit brief and necessarily selective, of the history of Australia and the cultural understandings that have been stimulated by it.

*Towards a Theory of Australian Public Opinion*

At this point a fully supported theory of Australian public opinion development and change will be proposed. This will then be applied to the examples, given at the beginning of the work, to offer a full and detailed explanation for the ways in which changes to public policy have been caused to happen. The analysis this application generates poses a number of important questions relating to validity and desirability of the changes made. This demonstrates a significant value for the theory of Australian public opinion development and change that can be applied to a wide range of issues associated with the nature of democracy in Australia.

As this work is concerned with issues that concern the wider Australian public illustrations of the theories being proposed, and points being made, are used citing contemporary political issues. While many of these will have little or no discernible association with the substantive examples described in the application of the theory in Chapter Nine they have been used to show that the proposed theory can be used to explain a wide range of social phenomena.
CHAPTER TWO
Critical Theory

Introduction

Critical theory is a set of ideals based in the principles of Marxism. It goes significantly beyond orthodox Marxist doctrine, specifically in the aim to "… rethink and radically reconstruct the meaning of human emancipation," (Giroux 1983, p.8). To achieve this a process of critical examination of social and class based relationships is required to discover how what have become considered to be societal objects are in fact social factors which impinge on the emancipation of certain classes and groups. Critical theory sets out to explain why the institutions of society are as they are and why it is that a very small elite manages to maintain control while the vast majority of people have difficulty in merely surviving. Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) when commenting on the cinema industry of America illustrated the aim of critical theory:

The idea of "fully exploiting" available technical resources and the facilities for aesthetic mass consumption is part of the economic system which refuses to exploit resources to abolish hunger (p. 139).

Agger (1991) suggests that critical theory has three generations: the first generation is represented by the work of the early members of what has become known as the “Frankfurt School”, that is, the members of The Institute for Social Research (Institut für Socialforschung) who developed a body of theoretical work which outlines the theory. Beyond this, critical theory is also a process of critique that is self conscious and leads to the development of “a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions” (Giroux 1983, p.8). In his inaugural address as director of the Institute Max Horkheimer reinforced this aspect of critical theory when he stated that the philosophy grounding social theory must be “sufficiently open to the world to allow itself to be impressed with, and transformed by, progress in concrete studies” (Bronner & Kellner 1989, p64).
The second generation belongs almost exclusively to the theoretical work of Jürgen Habermas. The work of Habermas is broad and detailed in its attempt to reconstruct Marx’s notion of historical materialism as a social theory based on the requirement of equality in communication. However, much of it moves away from developing the empirical and political aspects of critical theory. A useful example of this position is described by Feenberg (1991) when discussing the social effects of technology:

...many more conservative theorists, who like Habermas, are in full flight from what they perceive as the utopian heritage of Marxism. Unfortunately, these theorists lapse back into a conformist view of the neutrality of technology that leaves them little critical margin (Feenberg 1991, p.18).

This is not to say that Habermas’s work has no value in the development of a vehicle for the analysis of social phenomena in the late Twentieth Century.

Critical Theory’s third generation is one that, necessarily, returns to the fundamental core of the first generation, that is, theoretically informed empirical social analysis. However, this alone is not sufficient to deal with the rapidly changing world. With it must be incorporated theoretical developments from postmodernism, feminism, and poststructuralism. Probably most useful of these is a combination of feminism and postmodernism. Theories of the Postmodern have in common an understanding that society is made up of many divergent groups that have a legitimate place within it. This social structure legitimates these groups and their ideologies as in the Postmodern “it is taken for granted that Postmodernity is saturated with diversity, that reality is the construction of ‘local narratives’” (Hinkson 1991, pp.5-6).

Feminism constructed in this context sees ideology as a process, practice and product that is an integral part of the everyday experiences of people rather than something that is almost disinterestedly read in texts that are distant from or alien to the reader. In conjunction with poststructuralism, a critical analysis identifies ideology in texts that appear as representations and simulacra in the wide variety of information technologies that combine to create an essential component of the Postmodern. Once identified, these ideologies can be exposed and incorporated into the model of society that is generated by the use of critical theory.
The First Generation

Critical theory ranges widely over many areas of social concern. In the questioning of social principles that have come to be considered as common-sensical facts there is one area which repeatedly appears: the questioning of scientific rationality in its own right and its application to social issues. Faith in scientific reason as a means of delivering the world from superstition is usually seen as having its roots in the era of the technological explosion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Critical theory holds that this reasoning may be tracked back as far as Plato and as such has been a central theme of the development of Western society, culminating in the work of Marx. Thereafter, scientific reason is seen as being a tool of capitalism by which rationalisation has been introduced into all spheres of human activity, in turn excluding the possibility of emancipation of the ordinary people from the constraints of capitalist ideology. Critical theorists speak of a 'crisis of reason' which is seen as being caused by the rationalisation of society which has caused it to lose the important aspect of critique by which it may pursue social harmony. "As a result, reason, as insight and critique, turns into its opposite, which is irrationality" (Giroux 1983, p.12).

Rational Positivism

Critical theorists argue that with the absence of the critical ability from society, a concentration is given to facts and the neutrality of values that went with them. The implication of this is that what is presented as scientific or empirical fact is beyond the realm of debate, it becomes unassailable and therefore not available for consideration as to what effects the background to these facts may have on members of society. The vital question of the difference between how society is and how it should be becomes reduced to a process of collecting data on existing facts. These facts have no meaning other than themselves, as knowledge is only concerned with what is and how it may be used; the underlying understanding of the world is not considered: "On the road to modern science, men renounce any claim to meaning. They substitute formula for concept, rule and probability for cause and motive (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973, p.4).
When considered alone this view of this principle of rational positivism has significant implications, but Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer, the developers of much of critical theory, take this further yet and suggest that "… such a stance serve[s] as a form of ideological hegemony that infuse[s] positivist rationality with a political conservatism that makes it an ideological prop for the status quo" (Giroux 1983, p.15). This appears to be a particularly cynical view of how some people must operate, as it would suggest political intent. The critical theorists, however, make a point of indicating that in most cases the hegemony is so entrenched that there is little, if any, awareness of the reproduction of the dominant culture.

As previously mentioned, Critical Theory has its roots in Marxism. However, in positioning themselves against positivism in all its guises the members of the Frankfurt School found themselves at odds with Marx, himself. In one of the central tenets of Capital, Marx (1976, pp.928-930) maintains that the downfall of capitalism is inevitable according to economic laws that are devised within the frame that has a rational positivist structure. In similar vein critical theory targets much of the approach to the social sciences as they rely heavily on theories and processes that depend on the supremacy of observable fact (Agger 1991). In this acceptance of ‘facts’ these scientific approaches exclude the possibility of there being an alternative reality that would allow for the empowerment of people to create a society that does not accept the current status quo as being the only possible social structure. What critical theory demands is an understanding of fact and the reason in which it is grounded which, in turn, is not constrained by a definition that is restricted to value free observability.

To illustrate this, consider two people standing looking out to sea from Australia’s Cape Arnhem. One is a traditional Aboriginal man with custodianship of the surrounding land and waters, the other a well educated North European. Each of these has a profound understanding of how this land and seascape came to be. These understandings are different in all ways beyond the tangible properties that can be immediately experienced. The European’s understanding comes from a positivist science base which maintains that it is developed from a value free perspective and only the results of empirical observations are included in the construction of that understanding. The implication of this is that the alternative understanding of the
Aborigine can not be countenanced; it must be rejected as metaphysical. Conversely the Aborigine will commence the description of the origins of this place with the words “We believe” and go on to describe an understanding that can encompass the beliefs of other observers. The question is: which one is right? Both descriptions work but the European’s version is based in logical positivism which has a significant flaw. It has the power to disempower the holders of alternative understandings and force them to accept a philosophy that places them at a significant social disadvantage, that is; the non-ownership of essential knowledge. The flaw in logical positivism is the basic contention that it is possible to view a phenomenon while disallowing the viewer’s cultural understandings (we could call these values) from affecting the way that person interprets the phenomenon. Haraway (1988) refers to this as "the god trick of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively" maintaining that this is an impossible feat. A critical theory perception of this situation is one that would accept that the Western man would intend no disadvantage to the other by demanding the veracity of his view of creation. However, the acceptance of the scientific and social “facts” that the view depends on have the potential to totally disempower the Aborigine from continuing to have control of the way his life is lived. It is the identification of the ways in which a logical positivist approach allows these situations to repeatedly arise that is one of the most important results of using a critical theory approach to social issues.

The Perception of Theory

With this view of reason it follows that there must also be a different perception of theory, as theory is closely aligned with the positivist approach to knowledge. The positivist use of theory is one that accepts that no value can be considered in relation to facts and that theory alone is used to discover facts. As a consequence it does not have any value associated with it, or as stated by Ayer (1948, p.34) “… we shall maintain that no statement which refers to a “reality” transcending the limits of all possible sense-experience can possibly have any literal significance”. This neutrality is contradicted in critical theory where an essential aspect of theory is seen to be an acknowledgment of the ideological values it represents and must offer a critique of the historical reasons for them and the implications of their existence.
What is essential to critical theory is the critique of accepted knowledge of society, it refuses to accept that things are simply as they appear. Adorno (1976) speaks of "…the temporally and fixed object [being thrust] into a field of tension of the possible and the real,…" (p.69). What is necessary is to search for the meaning behind the fact and show how this meaning impinges on the life chances and the potential for control of one's own existence by promoting the maintenance of the status quo.

As the basis of the positivist empirical approach to theory is that theory and fact are totally value neutral, it is easy to accuse critical theory of rejecting the worth of empirical study, which appears to be (undeniably) linked to positivist science. The reality is that the concern with empiricism that does exist relates to the way in which it is applied or what Giroux (1983) calls "… its universalisation at the expense of a more comprehensive notion of rationality" (p.17). Empirical study is, in fact, seen as important by critical theorists in that it is necessary in developing theory as opposed to the positivist approach that sees theory finished with once the value free facts are ascertained. This empirically supported development of theory has as its ultimate goal emancipatory practice, thus bringing together the three major components required to develop an equitable strategy for social change.

*Parallels with psychoanalysis*

In developing critical theory, the members of the Frankfurt School maintained that the dominant society imposed on the individual could only become open to modification if there was a thorough understanding of the tension, in the individual. This tension is created by personal desires and hopes and the constraints placed upon these by social expectations. A parallel was identified in the work on depth psychology by Sigmund Freud. Many of the areas that Freud examined in the individual’s ‘psyche’ have corresponding areas in critical theory. One of Freud’s main concerns was the constant contradiction created by human instinctual drives which dictate behaviour and the constraints that society places on the individual in relation to these instinctual drives. Fromm (1964) points out that the non-essential drives (ie. those not concerned with self-preservation) can be modified, and very often are, by the requirements of society. He adds that this is not necessarily an arbitrary process but “[they] permit the masses to be offered (and satisfied by) those
precise satisfactions that are socially available and desirable from the standpoint of the ruling classes” (p.120).

A particularly relevant aspect of Freud’s work that was focussed on by the Frankfurt School was the way in which it could be utilised to identify ways in which people unwittingly created barriers to achieving social change for their own benefit. By inaccurate use of Freud’s instinctive drives, it has been suggested that, liberal political ideology has created a reason for its own continuation in the ‘acquisitive drive’. This was then substituted for Marx’s historical materialism, which stated that human needs are the stimulant to the production of goods, quite neatly side stepping any Marxist criticism of this means of maintaining social control. In actual fact the acquisitive drive has been shown not to be ‘... the deepest cause of the need to acquire or possess things; it is rather the expression of a narcissistic need...” (Fromm 1964, p.128). This is particularly important in a society that elevates the wealthy who display their social status through the means of their success in acquisition. It is in helping to identify these hidden factors in the maintenance of the status quo that Freudian depth psychology is important in the development of critical theory.

In recent years Freud’s work has come under increasing criticism from various areas, particularly by feminist theorists such as Steinem (1994) who, to illustrate the problems perceived with Freud’s psychoanalysis, invented Phyllis Freud whose existence would help psychiatrists imagine that:

Female psychiatrist and psychoanalysts [the majority] were imbued with the philosophy of this female Freud, the founding genius who had proved that men’s lack of wombs made them anatomically inferior and terminally envious;

Men who dared protest were doubly pathologised by a diagnosis of womb envy, thus it was a belief system with no way out;

Freudian thought was accepted as a semiscientific rationale for men’s lower status in a matriarchal society – not just within the profession but within culture at large (Steinem 1994, p.23).

This should not be seen as a problem for critical theory, as the Frankfurt School, in the main, used only the basic principles that Freud went on to develop into the processes that are now being questioned. In addition to this the members of the
Frankfurt School have been aware of the potential difficulties of applying psychological principles, that relate specifically to the individual, to society as a whole. It has been suggested that there are areas that can not be extended in this way, but strong counter arguments tend to refute this (Fromm 1964, pp.121-122).

The Place of Culture in Theory

Culture pervades every facet of the lives people lead. Consequently culture came to be an essential component in the development of Critical Theory. Traditionally, culture has been considered to exist independently of economic and political life; just as theory and facts had been neutralised by positivism, so in this view, autonomous culture has been neutralised, divorcing it from its place in history and society that gives it its meaning.

Marxist theory had a differing view of culture, but this again was seen as incomplete as it held that culture was driven by economic factors and scientific laws. The members of the Frankfurt School were critical of this standpoint, partly because of the way the changing socio-economic conditions, particularly of the 1930s and 1940s, had created a new perspective for considering the integration of the working classes into the new social order. More significantly this critique relates to the contention that culture is a major force in ordering the lives of ordinary people in time and place.

Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) go to great lengths to explain how what they term the “culture industry” has a major role to play in shaping people’s lives. Their contention is that a very strong message inherent in popular entertainment, that has become culture for the masses, is that the mundane lifestyles of the workers is to be lauded and aspired to in the quest to become a valuable member of society. They argue that what has been considered to be culture has been replaced by stereotyped representations of what is easily equated with real life. Cinema in particular is seen as presenting a view of life that leaves no opportunity for the audience to imagine beyond its own limits or reflect on what is presented “hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality” (p.126). What this achieves is an acceptance of a position in society that is essential in maintaining the political status quo. Vested interest has a significant input to this as the owners of the means of
production in the “culture industry” are the same as the owners of capital in wider society, that is the ones who have the greatest stake in maintaining the status quo.

While Horkheimer and Adorno concentrated on the “culture industry” Marcuse (1964) was considering how what had been seen as “high culture”, e.g. opera or classical music, had ceased to be a relevant factor in social life. Through the progress made in technology humans could do more than cultural heroes, high culture had become devalued and could no longer provide people with the hope and truth that it was seen to have contained. This is taken further in the way in which the culture industry has absorbed high culture, Marcuse maintained this resulted in “the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted another dimension of reality” (p.57). These aspects of opposition that higher culture and its values hold are subsequently subverted and “in fact, they serve as instruments of social cohesion” (p.57).

This critique of culture maintains that it has been reduced to mere entertainment and this reduction implies the division between work and play is one that must not be broken. The division confirms that work must, by its nature, imply boredom, drudgery and little return with culture being the only means of escape, but it is a culture that serves only to strengthen this fact. In response to this, the objective of critical theory is the:

… exposure of the ideological fraud that constitutes this division of labour.
Rather than being an escape from the mechanised work process, the cultural realm becomes an extension of it (Giroux 1983, pp. 21-22).

*The Essential Early Critical Theory*

Critical theory as developed by the members of the Frankfurt School represents a very wide-ranging social philosophy. It is a way of examining the social world which may be summed up as a theory “… which seeks to uncover those systems of social relationships which determine the actions of individuals and the unanticipated, though not accidental, consequences of these actions” (Fay 1975, p.94).
The Second Generation

Much of the first generation of critical theory has its basis in ideas developed during the early 1930s. As the members of the Institute were concerned with developing the theories of Karl Marx, Germany progressively became a more and more dangerous place to be. The Institute moved from Frankfurt to New York where work was continued and added to by new members. The most prominent of these new members were Jürgen Habermas, and Karl Offe. This generation is typified by Habermas who attempted to develop theory that preserved orthodox-Marxist theories of class struggle, while introducing perspectives that owe their origin to non-Marxist social theory. Whether this was totally successful is open to debate, but Habermas has produced a wide range of work that is most valuable in the construction of current theory.

Habermas’s Response to the Debunking of Marxism

By the time that Habermas had established himself as an important social theorist Marxism had been thoroughly critiqued and debunked by many writers. Much of the evidence used was based on changes to the structure of capitalism or the ways in which capitalist society had adapted to deflect the results of areas of contestation that Marx had identified as inevitable, catalysts to the overthrow of the capitalist system. While Habermas agreed that these arguments were partly valid he was hostile to the way in which they tended to “separate Marxism into economics, sociology and political prescription” (Outhwaite 1994, p.14). He maintained that to argue in this manner was to embark on theoretical asset stripping which builds an argument by removing aspects of “theory envisaging society as a totality and related to practice” (Habermas, 1986, p.205) out of their unifying theory. He went on to explain there were two further themes that were not subjected to this process of critique that added to the concept of an all-embracing society and gave a degree of legitimacy to a theory containing these contested components. These were:

the dialectical conception of society as a historical process ... which in the conflict of specifiable tendencies drives forward to produce one situation out of the other; and finally, a relation between theory and praxis which Marxism explicitly incorporates into reflection. For Marxism’s structure, from the
perspective of the philosophy of science, corresponds to that of a philosophy of history with practical intentions (Habermas, 1986, p.205).

Habermas saw, with the passage of time, the need to move beyond the analysis of economic crises by Classical and contemporary Marxism to include new forms of crisis. These were emerging as capitalism made adjustments to accommodate the changing demands created by the inequities inherent in its own system. In *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), Habermas details a range of crises faced by capitalist governments. His argument is that if the economic and political sectors are to operate effectively there must be sufficient motivation among individuals to act in ways that the system requires. In turn the system must be seen as legitimate for these motivations to be provided. The important factor here is the role of culture in reproducing society and this is where the system’s greatest vulnerability lies. In times of economic crisis individuals question the system’s components and expectations as they are not seen to be valid in providing for needs. If the legitimation of these components and expectations fails the system can no longer provide the motivation it requires. When this occurs attempts are made to provide legitimation through alternatives such as

- increased consumerism,
- a highly aggressive ideological culture industry,
- rebirth of religion and traditional ideologies,
- and efforts to refurbish bourgeois ideologies of possessive individualism and achievement (Kellner 1989).

Whether these efforts are successful in providing legitimation is debatable, as is whether indeed they have to be if enough people can be convinced that the system is providing them with what they need.

*Marx and Positivism*

One of the more interesting aspects of Habermas’s work is his critique of Marx’s own positivism. As previously discussed the critical theorists maintain, as a vital component of their work, the absolute rejection of positivism. In his *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971) Habermas argues that Marx was not clear in his distinction between knowledge gained through self-reflection and that gained through causal analysis. “As a result, Marxism has not been able to secure an adequate ground in voluntarism, instead falling back on the fatalism of positivist determinism” (Agger
Leading from this view of the role of positivism in Marx’s theory, Habermas argues that it is necessary to be vigilant that historical materialism be reconstructed to clearly show the essential difference between knowledge gained from causal analysis and technique and that gained from self-reflection.

This concern can be seen reflected in Habermas’s support for critical theorists’ earlier work with Freud’s approach to psychoanalysis. In Knowledge and Human Interest (1971) he suggests that psychoanalysis can be seen to be important as it rejects causality as an absolute explanation for behavioural disturbance by allowing the personal origins of behaviour to be understood. This understanding demands that the importance of self-reflection be recognised in explanation of behaviour.

Habermas draws heavily on this understanding of the importance of self-reflection, in turn leading to the reconstruction of historical materialism, for the basis of his work that eventually led to his communication theory (1984, 1987).

How Inequity in Communication Prevents emancipation

Up to this time Habermas had been working with many aspects of the emancipatory objectives of critical theory. This work had led him inexorably to an understanding that most of his areas of interest depended on effective communication for their success. It was in this that he saw a potential for a unifying theoretical underpinning for critical theory (Outhwaite 1994, p.39). Initially, Habermas worked on broadening Noam Chomsky’s theory of linguistic competence to become one of communicative competence, based in universal pragmatics (Habermas 1979).

Unlike linguistics, universal pragmatics studies utterances rather than sentences and unlike sociolinguistics these utterances are not related to context. In describing this Habermas (1979) states:

> The task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding (Verständigung)…. I take the type of action aimed at reaching understanding to be fundamental (p.1).

Habermas became aware of untenable suppositions in this initial theory, as many situations occur in which there must be an inequality in communicative ability. Where this occurs emancipatory potential can be reduced. To address this, the concept of systematic distortion of communication leading to the lack of interactive
competence was developed. Interactive competence is a requirement if the process of mutual understanding is to be preserved, even in conflict situations. In conflict situations speech is usually separated from the context of the actions it refers to. When this happens speech is subject to, firstly, external organisation, that is, the restrictions of when and where it takes place and who can participate and in what order. Secondly, internal organisation which depends on the factors of understandability, sincerity and truth for its ordering. If there is a failure of the internal organisation of speech it can be redressed immediately if it is occurring within the context of the conflict. However, if it is removed from the context of the conflict, failures in the external organisation give rise to systematic distortion that serves to disguise the real nature of the conflict, thus denying the possibility of equitable resolution.

The eventual development of these ideas concerning communicative competence is encompassed in the two volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984 &1987). In this Habermas posits, as one of the theory’s central elements, that there is a

… distinction between the genuinely communicative use of language to attain common goals, …, and strategic or success-oriented speech, parasitic on the former, which stimulates a communicative orientation in order to achieve an ulterior purpose (Outhwaite 1994, pp.45-46).

While the intent of this aspect of theory is clear the practical potential it depends on is less obvious. Since publication there have been many critics who have pointed out that the identification of these two uses of speech is all but impossible. In response to this Habermas changed the emphasis of his description of the intents of speech. In spite of this it remains a useful tool in the armoury of critical theory in its analysis of the structure of society and the ways in which that structure serves to deny emancipation.

Habermas’s work has opened some new windows in the wall that obscured the ways that, as critical theory maintains, society protects the status quo. However, his concentration on self-reflection and communication may have agendas of social change limited to that area. In this instance people can only “rationally discuss
alternative social policies and attempt to build consensus about them” (Agger 1991, p.26). Some critics use this to reject Habermas’s reconstruction of historical materialism. It can be argued that this goes too far as there is much in his work that is of value in the development of critical theory. In addition it is not necessary to reject the argument of earlier critical theorists, such as Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno, who maintained that our whole technological interaction with nature can be changed, simply because Habermas did.

In addition Habermas’s ‘new social movements’ (1981) theory adds to earlier Marxism and neo-Marxism by acknowledging domination based on race and/or gender. This represents a contact point with the third generation of Critical Theory which is not only inclusive of gender and race but is also, to some extent, dependent upon it for its theoretical grounding. In spite of this contact point with the third generation of critical theorists, Habermas rejects much of the philosophical background to their development of the theory as it embraces many aspects of postmodern theory. Habermas absolutely rejects the notion of critical theory working within the postmodern:

Habermas himself has been in continuing controversy with Lyotard and Foucault and is committed to critical theory as an extension of the modernist project- not its supplanting by the postmodernists (Bates 1999, pers.com.).

As discussed below aspects of the postmodern arguably provide the grounding for valuable developments in critical theory which have the potential to increase its value in providing analyses of social phenomena. That a split has occurred among major critical theorists should not provide an argument that either ensuing path is not valid.

*The Third Generation*

The third generation of critical theory moves back to the social basics as laid out by the original members of the Frankfurt School. In addition it introduces essential aspects of emerging social enquiries that have been introduced by those who have been working in the areas of postmodernism, poststructuralism and feminism. Despite the listing of these as separate entities, they are very closely intertwined.
Postmodernism

Cultures from all around the world have phases in their history, which may be identified as having a particular theme. These themes have varied aspects to them but the artefacts that survive each phase tend to be, in the main, of an artistic or architectural nature. As a consequence, the phases come to be associated with and described by the type of artefacts that survive the cultural phase, for example: Ming Dynasty (China), Norman (England), Renaissance (Europe) etc. It is argued that Western Capitalist culture is entering a new phase that is coming to be described as ‘postmodern’. The postmodern was first recognised in art and particularly architecture, which are, partly, typified by a juxtaposition of styles from previous cultural phases and a moving away from the accepted direction of producing single purpose artefacts. This leads to descriptive terms such as "cities within a city" (Hinkson 1991, p.4), "multi-function polis" and the "global village" (Hinkson 1991, p.3).

The implications of the actuality of these terms are most important in understanding the fundamental philosophy of the postmodern. Throughout the history of Western culture there has been a basic underlying accepted development of that culture, whether it be on the level of the clan, the principality, the nation or the culture as a whole. The postmodern condition is one that no longer accepts what Lyotard calls these "grand narratives of legitimation" (Lyotard 1984 in Hinkson 1991, p.52) as a driving force. Rather the driving force is reduced to the objectives of groups, which align and realign themselves in relation to their perceived needs at the time. This fragmentation is an essential aspect of how the postmodernists see the way in which Western culture is developing, where the metanarratives no longer legitimate social objectives:

Rejecting totality, Lyotard and other postmodernists stress fragmentation- of language games, of time, of the human subject, of society itself (Sarup 1989, p.135).

This fragmentation relies very heavily on the development of information technology, which is an essential component in the "global village". The ability to communicate the contents of electronically stored information in data bases is the
basis of a commercial and social structure that is no longer bound by national or regional boundaries. The information required to start up a manufacturing plant anywhere in the world is available from these data banks, making it possible to chase the lowest possible cost structure, based on labour, land, building and ecological protection costs that may be found; usually in third world and developing nations. The location of manufacturing facilities is not the only flexibility that is provided by information technology. More recent forms of capital accumulation are given much greater rein than before; playing the stock, futures and money markets has become a twenty-four hour a day concern in which fortunes, both personal and national, can be made and lost while business hours follow the sunrise and sunset around the world. These endeavours bear no allegiance to country, state or social good (metanarratives), rather, only to the makers of the rules for this fragmented "little narrative" (Sarup 1989, p. 139), that only holds allegiance to itself.

There appear to be many contradictions in postmodernist theory, possibly the most important being the understanding of knowledge and information (knowledge and information are terms which appear to be interchangeable in Lyotard's writings). Lyotard maintains that the nature of knowledge is drastically altered in the postmodern due to the abilities of information technology. He maintains that technology is moving towards the ability to hold all necessary information in electronic data banks that could be universally accessible by information technology:

Data banks are the Encyclopedia of tomorrow. They transcend the capacity of each of their users. They are "nature' for postmodern man (Lyotard 1984 in Hinkson 1991, p.63).

Because of this he sees the nature of education changing enormously as:

... learning is translatable into computer language and the traditional teacher is replaceable by memory banks, didactics can be entrusted to machines linking traditional memory banks (libraries, etc.) and computer data banks to intelligent terminals placed at the students' disposal (Lyotard 1984 in Hinkson 1991, p. 62).

It is here that the lack of delineation between information and knowledge appears in this postmodern perception which in turn leads to a quite new interpretation of the value of knowledge. In "modern" culture there has been a valuing of knowledge for
its own sake as well as for what may be achieved with that knowledge. The postmodern perspective is that knowledge is only of value if it has direct utility, Lyotard (1984) goes further to suggest that the question that is asked of knowledge in postmodern culture is "Is it saleable?" rather than the 'modern' question asked of knowledge is "Is it true?" (p.62). This view of knowledge as stored information leaves gaps that should be filled by acquired skill and experience, but it seems that these have no value because they can not be stored and sold.

In addition to this perception of knowledge Lyotard sees that the role of pedagogy will change completely, the computer taking over virtually the whole role of the teacher, with the student interacting in isolation with the computer to gain the necessary discrete chunks of efficient or saleable knowledge. Educators should not despair, however, as Lyotard is convinced there will be an ongoing requirement for their services; in teaching students how to use the technology! This acceptance of an extreme view of a deficit model of education, where students arrive at an educational institution as empty vessels needing to be filled with knowledge is not entirely unproblematical.

Of the established critical theorists, both Habermas and Adorno have spoken out against postmodernism in the most strident terms. In a series of lectures on the “Philosophical Discourse of Modernity” Adorno

suggested that the theories of postmodernity which had their roots in Nietzsche and Heidegger were aligned with the counter-Enlightenment and irrationalism, while exhibiting a disturbing kinship with fascism (Kellner 1989, p166).

Following from this lead many of the third generation critical theorists have echoed these criticisms. The implication of this is that “critical theory stopped developing and articulating new social conditions and developments” (Kellner 1996). Kellner goes on to maintain that at the same time

postmodern social theory and theories of postindustrial society lack the sustained commitment to social research, social critique, and political practice found in the best contributors to critical theory (Kellner 1996).
Postmodernism's Emancipatory Potential

There are, however, theorists who have been able to see beyond the nihilistic aspects of postmodern theory to a potential that it holds for the emancipation of a wide range of groups of people who have been traditionally disempowered by the very capitalism that postmodernism tends to describe. Postmodernism can be shown to have many negative aspects in relation to emancipation and advancement for large groups within the community. However, the acceptance of the rights of interest groups has gone some way to empowering minority groups to take action for their own objectives which will be given credence as an aspect of the postmodern. Feminist writers and researchers have recognised this and welcomed the opportunities that it has presented them with. Mouffe (1988) illuminates this when she remarks: "far from seeing the development of postmodern philosophy as threat, radical democracy welcomes it as an indispensable instrument in the accomplishment of its goals" (p.44).

Implicit in critical theory based research is the notion of standpoint epistemology which "begins with the idea that less powerful members of society have the potential for a more complete view of social reality than others, precisely because of their disadvantaged position" (McCarl 1990, p.10). The reason for this is that those people from a disadvantaged position perceive more of the way in which society works. This is the case as they have first hand experience of not only the surface features of the social structure but also the ways in which the domination of the powerful members of society impinge on the way in which they have to live their lives. An important consideration of this view is of women as a disadvantaged group in society. To view policy decisions from a standpoint that acknowledges this and the disadvantaged situation of other groups is likely to be one that uncovers a more comprehensive "truth" than traditional research methods. These traditional methods have only been able to perceive 'truth' from a viewpoint that does not consider the experiences of the majority of people involved in that society. The members of the dominant group in a culture are only able to experience the dominant culture. This group’s existence implies there must be subordinate groups with their own subcultures within society and the members of these will experience both the dominant
and the subordinate cultures giving them a wider perspective in the identification of "truth".

**Conclusion**

In spite of the perception of Marxism as a philosophy that the passage of time has proved irrelevant, it has many aspects that still hold a great degree of validity in helping to reach an understanding of contemporary society. The methodology devised by the original members of the Frankfurt School is valid in its own right. This becomes significantly more valid and useful when conjoined with the developments of their successors.

When faced with a phenomenon that is grounded in the structure of society, critical theory offers a research paradigm that has the potential to uncover reasons behind the mere existence of a problem. In rejecting the positivist view, that is often an essential component of traditional research methods, a greater range of information becomes available for consideration. Critical theory remains a research paradigm that has a continuing role to play in the examination of change that occurs in society and is often accepted as an aspect of the Postmodern. It is not accidental that much of the argument against Critical Theory originates from the established power base of the holders of authority. It is this group that has most to lose from the way in which Critical Theory is able to examine the structures of power acquisition and maintenance. It is this attribute that makes this research paradigm attractive for researchers concerned with social factors that have the potential to cause change within the community.
CHAPTER THREE
The Nature of Opinion

Introduction

To understand how public opinion is formed it is necessary to first look to the development of opinion in the individual. While public opinion is something more than a collection of opinions held by the individuals that go to make up that public there must be a correlation between it and the opinions of those individuals.

In this chapter definitions will be made of the terms that are associated with opinion and of the term opinion itself. These will assist with the identification of the relationship between opinion and the behaviour of its holder. Having made these definitions the factors that work towards developing that opinion will be analysed. These factors come into play at different times and have differing degrees of impact on opinion formulation. The purpose of this chapter is to define a somewhat simple model of how opinion is formed that will lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters. In these later chapters a closer look will be taken at each of the components of opinion development and how they bring salience within the structure of society.

Opinion and associated terms

Many words are used to express similar concepts when discussing opinion or public opinion. To go on to use these terms at this stage may cause confusion if each were not defined in relation to the way in which they will be used in this study. Below are definitions of the terms which will be used or, at least, referred to. These definitions are specific to this thesis and do not necessarily coincide with definitions of other writers in the field as these writers in turn have different definitions for most of the terms that are used here.

Attitude

Attitude, as a term, has common usage in the English language in many contexts. For example, a person described as “with attitude” would be expected to have very
strong critical opinions regarding the establishment that are readily expressed. By
contrast the original meaning of the term attitude referred to posture or bodily
position. This usage is now almost exclusively restricted to the phrase “an attitude
of dejection”. However, the term is occasionally used in a similar manner when
describing accidents involving the collision of vehicles.

In the normal process of the change in language usage the term attitude has now
come to be associated with personal ideas about a particular subject or object, that is
a “posture of the mind” (Oskamp 1991, p.6). Even here, however, there is confusion
as to the detail of meaning. Katz (1972, p13) states that “[a]titude is defined at the
individual level, namely, the specific organisation of feelings and beliefs according
to which a given person evaluates an object or symbol positively or negatively.”
This definition does not encompass the magnitude, strength or permanence of these
feelings and beliefs.

In contrast Cantril (1944, p.17) defines attitude as “a more or less permanently
enduring state of mental organisation which predisposes an individual to react in a
characteristic way to any object or situation with which it may be related.” This
definition not only introduces the concept of permanence but also that of preparing
the individual to act or react. This latter concept is one that is repeated frequently in
more recent studies. Indeed, Allport (1935), after considering earlier definitions
posed his own:

An attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organised through
experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s
response to all objects and situations with which it is related (Allport 1935, p.
810).

A common thread of the definitions Allport cites is that an essential aspect of
attitude is its leading to a preparedness to take action. Attitude does not describe or
entail a behaviour, merely a preparedness to display a certain behaviour.

Cantril’s reference to endurance is, arguably, essential as one of the vital attributes of
an attitude is that it is not permanently fixed. Oskamp (1991, p.8) refers to an
attitude’s “relatively enduring nature”, while it is relatively enduring it can be
adjusted for reasons that relate to the individual’s social situation (see definition of opinion below) and, of course, this may change quite radically from time to time.

Another important facet of attitude is its motivating force. Attitudes are not merely responses to experience; rather they have active functions which direct the behaviour of the attitude holder. Callan, Gallois & Noller (1986, pp.77/78) define these as:

**Adjustment:** Attitudes may be adjusted so that we receive more rewards and fewer punishments…

**Ego-defensive:** Attitudes could serve an ego-defensive function, where certain attitudes are adopted to protect ourselves from the harsh realities of what we or the world are really like.

**Value-expressive:** We use attitudes to help establish what sort of person we are…

**Knowledge:** Attitudes serve to give meaning to a rather chaotic universe. Attitudes link up pieces of knowledge gained from experiences in our world, help make sense out of that knowledge, and direct us in determining how to view the new situations.

There is an aspect of attitudes that points also to their evaluative nature. That is, an attitude is formed or modified in response to an evaluation of the associated attitude object. The implication of this is that attitudes are likely to change in response to powerful evaluative images being generated in relation to that attitude object.

From the above it is clear that the concept of attitude is a complex one and a comprehensive definition of it is required. Callan et al. (1986, p.77) suggests that “attitudes can be regarded as clusters of beliefs, feelings and behaviours toward a person or object.” This does not go far enough as it does not embrace the longevity or the motivation of the attitude. Oskamp’s (1991, p.8) definition “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object” goes further but again does not deal with its possibly transitory nature. Based on these definitions the meaning of attitude that will be used in this study is:
“a learned cluster of beliefs, feelings and behaviours, which are derived from a deeply held conviction or ‘opinion’, that give rise to a response in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given attitude object. Being learnt this cluster is available for change when further information becomes apparent, or other influences come to bear, thus changing the nature of the original motivation for the attitude.”

**Beliefs**

Beliefs are related to attitudes. They state the individual’s assignment of either truth or falsity to a proposition relating to an attitude object. They may also “state a relationship between the [attitude] object and some characteristic” (Oskamp 191, p.12). An individual may, for instance, express beliefs such as ‘Technology is important to the development of modern society’ or ‘It is important that a child be brought up in a supportive family environment’. Wilker & Milbrath (1972, p.42) express a clear relationship between attitudes and beliefs:

In our perspective, belief systems are broader and more inclusive than are attitudes; they are the context from which attitudes derive and in which they must be understood.

This implies that attitudes are dependent on beliefs for their structure. Beliefs are the concepts over which existence is an issue. These become important when the belief refers to “the existence of a relationship between that object and some other or some quality” (Rokeach, 1960, p.207). Belief in the existence of Australia does not qualify as a belief in this context. However, belief in the relationship between Australia and its place in working towards nuclear disarmament has significant importance that will motivate attitude development. (see Wilker & Milbrath 1972).

Oskamp (1991) suggests that it may be possible to consider beliefs to be the cognitive components of attitudes. He further suggests that this may cause problems because there is an implication of consistency between them and the associated attitude. This is not necessarily a problem as in conjunction with a definition of opinion it will be demonstrated that there is a potential inconsistency in attitudes that has a very specific relationship to opinion.
Likes, Dislikes, Sentiments, superstitions and prejudices

Likes dislikes, sentiments, superstitions and prejudices are parts of what comes together to form an attitude. Likes, dislikes and sentiments are clearly emotional attributes while superstitions and prejudices have their roots in the emotive base of culture. They are a product of the emotions that are brought into play in the development of a cohesive cultural history on which members of society can base their value systems.

However, prejudices may hold a special importance in the overall definition of the ways in which opinions and attitudes are created and changed. Bloom (1987, p.43) argues that prejudices are vital attributes of the individual and, more importantly, that they do not necessarily have the negative connotation that is often ascribed to them. He states:

Prejudices, strong prejudices, are visions about the way things are. They are divinations of the order of the whole of things, and hence the road to a knowledge of that whole is by way of erroneous opinions about it. … The mind that has no prejudice is empty. It can only have been constituted by a method that is unaware of how difficult it is to recognise that a prejudice is a prejudice.

Values

Concepts such as freedom, justice, human rights and aesthetics as well as more concrete concepts such as money and material possessions can be referred to as values. Values represent a special group of attitude objects that point to the central tenets of an individual’s attitudes and beliefs (Oskamp 1991, p13). Values and value systems, as attitude objects, represent the individual’s goals and social standards and will, as a consequence, generate very strong positive attitudes towards them.

Elaborating on this central attribute of values, Zaller (1992) draws a connection between values and ideology. Values, by their very nature, (with the possible exception of religious values) almost exclusively occupy an aspect of the political domain and are often referred to as political values. When described this way the
articulation between values and ideology can more readily be seen. While there is
no clear logical connection between the various values an individual may hold, the
fact remains that there will be a general tendency to one of ‘leftism, centrism or
rightism’. Zaller (1992, p.26) maintains that this tendency does not have sufficiently
strong correlation to suggest there is one overriding value dimension. However, it is
sufficiently powerful to be able to make some predictions concerning ideology and
political values.

Zaller (1992, p.26) defines values

as domain-specific organising principles, such as economic individualism, …

“Ideology” may then be defined as a more general left - right scheme capable of
organising a wide range of fairly disparate concerns, where the concerns being
organised include various value or issue dimensions or both.

This linking of ideology and values presents us with a very powerful tool in the
analysis of opinion development. Values are no longer independent concepts, rather
each is part of a group which conceptually correlates to ideology. Conversely,
ideology is no longer the isolated concept it is usually portrayed to be; rather it is
made up of many related values.

**Opinion**

While Lippman (1960) uses the term opinion exclusively in his seminal work
subsequent writers in the field have debated the accuracy of the term compared with
attitude and even belief. Ippolito, Walker and Kolson(1976) prefer to speak of
attitude while Berelson and Steiner (1964) use a combination term “OAB”, meaning
opinion-attitude-belief. What is maintained is that these three terms are very similar
in meaning and, in many cases, can be interchangeable. Ippolito et al (1976) argue
that using the term “attitude” maintains a link with social psychologists “who have
contributed to the development of ‘attitude theory’” (p.19). This will become
relevant when considering a psychological aspect to the development of opinion.

In this vein it would be simple to use the term ‘opinion’ in these situations as this
maintains a closer link with normal usage of such terms as ‘opinion polls’ and
‘public opinion’ which is frequently cited in social discourse as a justification for
action. However, there is a significant distinction between what these usages refer to and another aspect of the opinion-attitude-belief landscape that has not been considered and it is this that will be defined as opinion.

While attitude has a “relatively enduring nature” (Oskamp 1991, p.8) it is likely that there is a psychological foundation that attitude is built upon which is fundamentally more enduring. This psychological foundation has much of its origins in the individual’s formative years and how the experiences of this time lead to the morality that Lawrence Kohlberg refers to in his Theory of Moral Development. The developmental psychology aspects of this, as well as its other contributing factors, will be analysed in detail later in this chapter. This reference serves sufficiently to indicate the origins of what will be defined as opinion.

While attitudes can and do change in response to salient factors which arise in social discourse, these attitudes must have a foundation that provides a starting point. It is this starting point that will be defined as opinion. Under this definition, which is now discussed at length, opinion is a deeply held conviction formed over a relatively long period. For example, a seven year old may have an opinion that has been formed over a period of possibly as little as one year, while a thirty year old’s opinion would probably have been formed over two thirds of her life. What is implicit in this is the very stable and enduring nature of this opinion. In spite of its endurance, opinion can change, but it will change slowly and with very little “rebound”. The term “rebound” is used in the sense that what is known as public opinion (that is, that which is most closely aligned with the definition of attitude to be used in this study) is volatile. In response to salient discourse public opinion often quickly sways towards a particular position and subsequently retreats, somewhat. It is this retreat that is referred to as rebound.

To illustrate this meaning here let us use the example of a person Z who’s moral development and other shaping factors have led to the existence of an opinion relating to Aboriginal people that would be considered fairly liberal. Z sees Aboriginal people as a disadvantaged group who are much worse off than Z and have few chances to improve their situation. Z is aware of a number of Aborigines who are far worse off than the majority. Z has difficulty understanding why these individuals can not do something to solve some of their problems but does not blame
them for that. Z’s attitude to Aborigines and the Mabo decision of the Australian High Court (Butt & Eagleson 1993), establishing indigenous peoples’ ownership of land, are in line with this. Due to enormous publicity some of the content of the Member for Oxley, Ms Pauline Hanson’s maiden speech in Parliament becomes known to Z. The common sensical and non-critical positions expounded in the speech strike a chord with Z and Z begins to question the Mabo decision - why should this group of people have special consideration when every one else is being asked to make a sacrificial contribution to righting the economic wrongs caused by the previous government - again highly publicised. This line of thinking leads to further questioning which in turn leads to an associated negative response to all Aboriginal issues. At this point a public opinion poll would locate Z’s position as very anti-Aborigine while Z’s deep-seated opinion is still relatively unchanged; merely submerged by the salience of the current debate. It is very likely that extreme positions held by Z in the early stages of this process will be retreated from under the influence of the underlying opinion over time.

In the longer term, the debate may continue and if insufficient counter argument is presented by elite discourse, Z’s opinion poll position, or attitude, may have the effect of drawing the deep seated opinion closer to its own position. What is important is that changes to opinion happen over a period of time and usually under the influence of persistent dominance of the issue in the media. Opinion is not easily modified and when it is it is a gradual process. Opinion can also be changed in the absence of media dominance through the process of education. It seems likely that education is a factor that is most likely to cause change in an individual’s deep seated opinion on matters of social import (see Ginsberg 1986, pp.92-94).

Taking the preceding into account the definition of opinion to be used in this study is:

“the underlying conviction of an individual that has been generated in response to his/her fundamental life experiences. This may be overridden by temporary salience given to a different perspective from time to time which in turn may come to be included as a component of the individual’s fundamental life experiences so creating a partial change in the underlying conviction.”
The Initial Formation of Opinion

When considering the formation of opinions, whether public or of the individual, it is
common to view the process as one of change or development. This view of opinion
development is one that depends on there already being an opinion to develop.
Using the definition of opinion, which sees it as something that is deeply held by the
individual, it is not sufficient to accept that there is an underlying opinion that may
be operated on by certain factors to create a new opinion. What must be done is to
look to the formation of this initial opinion or opinion tendency. To do this it is
necessary to look to the work of developmental psychologists such as Erikson,
Piaget and Kohlberg and to the work of those who have followed Pavlov’s
investigations into the creation of conditioned reflexes. These areas of psychology
are important as the basis for an individual’s opinions are set early in life and are
dependent on experiences that can be analysed in relation to the point in
psychological development the child has reached at that time.

The Formation of Temperament

In dealing with opinion in the very young child the question of when the foundation
of opinion can be observed must be addressed. Thomas and Chess conducted a
study into the temperament of young babies in which a significant finding was made
that is important to this study. They found that “temperamental individuality is well
established by the time the infant is two to three months old” (Thomas & Chess
1977, p.153). They went on to show that there were three identifiable basic
temperamental types: easy children, slow-to-warm-up children, and difficult
children. Easy children included in their temperament the qualities of adaptability
and not being easily upset. Slow to warm up children were slower to adapt to
change and had only moderate reactions to stimuli. Children described as difficult
were resistant to change, had intense reactions to stimuli and were easily irritated.
Even at this early age it is possible to see the beginnings of the ways in which these
different groups of children may develop deep seated underlying opinions and
possibly how they may then be modified as a result of their temperament.

It is possible to use this as a starting point because as Thomas, Chess & Birch (1970,
p. 104) found “Our long term study has now established that the original
characteristics of temperament tend to persist in most children over the years”. The researchers came to this conclusion after finding that a child’s temperament at ten years of age was a fairly accurate reflection of its temperament at three months.

Having established a starting point for the development of opinion the inevitable question will arise; what determines these temperamental types? The answer to this is not known but there are a number of factors that are known to contribute. In chronological order the first contributory factors would occur during the foetal stage of prenatal development. Malnutrition of the mother is known to cause neurological defects in severe cases (Stechler & Halton, 1982) but in moderate cases there is evidence to suggest that apathy and irritability may result (Zeskind & Ramey, 1981). Drug usage during this stage is also known to have effects that could modify the temperament of the new born child. Barbiturates are known to cause lethargy in the newborn, hallucinogens can cause behavioural abnormalities (Weiten, 1989) and alcohol from heavy drinking during pregnancy is known to cause (among other effects) irritability, hyperactivity and retarded mental development. More recent studies into the effects of low doses of alcohol during prenatal development show that they may cause similar effects (Haynes, 1982). The effects of other factors such as emotional fluctuation during pregnancy are little understood but it is believed that they too could affect the unborn child (Weiten 1989, p.390).

In the first two to three months of life, that is, the period leading up to the point where temperament may be discerned, the child is most likely to be affected by the people with whom she has most close contact. In the majority of cases this would be the parents of the child, since parents’ reactions to their children and their styles of child rearing can influence a child’s temperament” (Thomas & Chess p.152). Leading on from this initial association is emotional bonding, which can be affected by the interaction between the child’s temperament and parent’s expectations. Children who have developed a strong emotional bond with a parent respond well to unfamiliar people and display more persistence, curiosity and self-reliance (Londerville & Main 1981, and Joffe & Vaughan 1982).

It would appear from the above that by the time a child reaches the age of three months she has had experiences, both physical and emotional, that have contributed to the preparation of a temperament that will provide the foundation for the
acquisition and modification of opinions. The ways in which temperamental attributes of young children are described provide a very strong indication of the directions in which early opinions are likely to tend. If Thomas and Chess’ (1977) “easy child” category were considered it could be expected that these adaptable and not easily upset children would develop opinions of the world that perceived it as an environment that did not hold any great challenges or dangers for that individual. Conversely, a difficult child, being resistant to change and easily irritated, would be more likely to develop opinions based on an understanding of its environment that was likely to present situations that were worrying or even frightening or presumed to be dangerous. The easy child’s opinions would be likely to reflect an open and confident view of her world, whereas the difficult child’s opinions would be more likely to reflect a closed and self protective relationship with her environment. As is reflected in the descriptions of the different temperamental types, responses to people would be expected to have similar characteristics and, as opinions are almost exclusively held in relation to social factors, the response to people would probably be an accurate predictor of social opinions.

From Temperament to Personality

If there is a temperamental foundation for subsequent opinion formulation, even at a very early age, there must be factors that work on that foundation to erect the eventual opinion. To attempt to identify these early factors it is useful to consider approaches used in developmental psychology to describe personality development. There are three major contributors in this area that are of particular use at this point: Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. The work of these theorists superseded groundbreaking work at the turn of the Century by Sigmund Freud and Ivan Pavlov. This section consists of a brief overview of both Freud’s and Pavlov’s work in this area and more detailed analyses of the work of the three more recent contributors. The latter will include a linking of their work with the development of opinion in the individual.

Freud’s Structure of Personality

Freud’s concern was for the explanation of the behaviour of individuals. To achieve this he posited that personality was made up of three components: the id, the ego and
the superego. He maintained that it was the interactions of these three components of the personality that gave rise to decisions, whether conscious or not, concerning behaviour.

The id is the component that contains the biological needs and urges that are essential for the survival of both the individual and the species (to eat, sleep, reproduce etc.). These have a significant impact on the individual’s behaviour, they operate on the pleasure principle, that is one that demands immediate gratification of its urges. The cognitive processes associated with the id are of primary-process thinking, that is, primitive, irrational and illogical and have an association with fantasy.

The ego houses the secondary-process thinking; it is the decision-making component of the personality. Where the id operates on the pleasure principal, the ego operates on the reality principal, which serves to postpone behaviour leading to gratification until appropriate conditions apply. Necessarily, the ego’s approach must mediate between the demands of the id and the outside world which imposes various restrictions on behaviour. These restrictions may be social or environmental but all have the potential to create a situation that could be detrimental to the individual. Freud described the role of the ego as being “like a man on a horse, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse” (Freud, 1923, p.15). Like the id, the ego wishes to maximise gratification, but the secondary-process thinking, which is rational, realistic and problem solving, strives to avoid negative consequences and achieve long term goals.

The superego is the component of the personality which is concerned with moral issues, that is the social concepts of right and wrong. Training is a constant factor in life. This training shows the individual what is good and bad behaviour and these social norms are often internalised. This process is particularly important during childhood. Freud maintained that the superego emerges from the ego at around three to five years of age.

Possibly the most relevant aspect of Freud’s work to the study of opinion development was his recognition of how the unconscious workings of the individual can affect behaviour or opinion. Freud maintained that there were three levels of
awareness: the *conscious* which is made up of whatever the individual is aware of at a given time; the *preconscious* being easily retrieved memories or awarenesses such as appointments or how to get to work; the *unconscious* which contains thoughts, desires and motivations that do not break into conscious awareness. This last group of attributes is one presenting some debate but is thought to include things such as forgotten childhood trauma or hidden resentment of a parent. It is common to think of these as negative feelings that are repressed due to their negativity, yet Freud saw the unconscious as being a very large component of total awareness. It follows that the unconscious must also contain much that is positive.

Whatever is contained in the various components of awareness, they will all, to some degree, have a bearing on the formation and modification of opinion. This implies that what is expressed as opinion will have much of its origins in the unconscious mind and it is the experiences that add together to contribute to the unconscious that also go towards developing opinion based on interpretations of experience, or as Freud put it: “the news that reaches your consciousness is incomplete and often not to be relied upon” (Freud 1917, p.143).

*Classical Conditioning*

While considering the role of the unconscious mind it is useful, also, to spend some time considering the contribution of conditioning to opinion formation. Shortly after Sigmund Freud commenced working on psychoanalysis, the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov stumbled over what came to be known as the conditioned response. Pavlov was conducting experiments in his speciality area of digestion, particularly in dogs, when he found that the noises made by equipment, designed to measure the salivation caused by feeding meat powder to the dog, actually caused salivation before the meat powder was administered. This phenomenon intrigued Pavlov prompting him to investigate further. The experiment he devised is now very well known; he started off by sounding a bell at the same time that meat powder was delivered, after the meat presentation and bell sounding together was repeated a number of times the bell was sounded alone. Pavlov found that the salivation response remained the same as when the meat powder had also been presented. Pavlov referred to this phenomenon as a “psychic reflex” (Pavlov 1906).
The process that Pavlov observed is one where an unconditioned stimulus (meat powder) evokes an unconditioned response (salivation). Sounding the bell (a neutral stimulus) elicits no response before conditioning. If the neutral stimulus is administered at the same time as the unconditioned stimulus the process is referred to as conditioning as after some time the sounding bell will change its nature from a neutral stimulus to that of a conditioned stimulus which on its own elicits a conditioned response very similar to that elicited by the unconditioned stimulus.

This conditioning process is important to opinion formation as it has been shown that it can have significant impact on the behaviour, attitudes and, consequently, opinions of people. Goldstein and Chambless (1978) through clinical studies have shown that patients suffering phobias, in many cases, do so as a result of classical conditioning. This conditioning may take the form of seemingly harmless interaction with close relatives or friends. For example, a powerful fear of heights could be caused by a father pretending to push a child off the edge of a high place. Further research has shown that positive attitudes to items or situations may be generated by previous pleasurable emotional or physical experiences. These positive and negative conditioned responses will inevitably have an effect on the formation of opinions in the individual.

_Erickson’s Stage Theory_

Some fifty years after Freud’s work on personality, Erik Erikson proposed significant changes to that position. The main thrust of Erikson’s (1963) work was that although events in early childhood leave a permanent mark on the personality, personality continues to develop throughout the entire lifespan. Erikson devised a stage theory for personality development with each stage being typified by what he termed a “psychosocial crisis”.

Each of these crises is seen as a potential turning point and the way in which the individual deals with them shapes the personality (see Table 1. below).
### Table 1. Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Psychosocial Crisis</th>
<th>Significant Social Relationships</th>
<th>Favourable Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. First year of life</td>
<td>Trust versus mistrust</td>
<td>Mother or mother substitute</td>
<td>Trust and optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Second and third years</td>
<td>Autonomy versus doubt</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>A sense of self-control and adequacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fourth to sixth years</td>
<td>Initiative versus guilt</td>
<td>Basic family</td>
<td>Purpose and direction; ability to initiate one’s own activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Age 6 through puberty</td>
<td>Industry versus inferiority</td>
<td>Neighbourhood; school</td>
<td>Competence in intellectual, social, and physical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adolescence</td>
<td>Identity versus confusion</td>
<td>Peer groups and outgroups; models of leadership</td>
<td>An integrated image of oneself as a unique person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Early adulthood</td>
<td>Intimacy versus isolation</td>
<td>Partners in friendship and sex; competition, cooperation</td>
<td>An ability to form close and lasting relationships to make career commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Middle adulthood</td>
<td>Generativity versus self-absorption</td>
<td>Divided labor and shared household</td>
<td>Concern for family, society, and future generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Aging years</td>
<td>Integrity versus despair</td>
<td>“Mankind”; “my kind”</td>
<td>A sense of fulfilment and satisfaction with one’s life; willingness to face death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Erikson 1963
The favourable outcomes listed in Table 1. show clearly the ways in which opinions may be developed and changed at the various stages of personality development. There are, of course, negative outcomes possible at each stage. Both positive and negative outcomes will mould the way in which opinions are held by the individual.

The negative responses for each stage are:

- Insecure, more distrusting personality would result from basic needs not being provided
- Parents not being satisfied with the child’s performance leads to personal shame and self-doubt
- If the child fails to consider others, family members may begin to instil guilt feelings and self-esteem may suffer.
- Failure to cope with social expectations would lead to lack of confidence in personal skills.
- If confusion is the result of the crisis delaying commitment to life paths an apathy that precludes the ability to confront challenges may result.
- Failure to develop intimate relationships leads to manipulativeness and social isolation.
- Self-absorption and self-indulgent behaviours are predicated by a negative response to the crisis of generativity.
- If no meaning can be found for life the individual is likely to become bitter and resentful.

*Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development*

While the theories considered so far concentrate on mainly the ‘unconscious’ mind, there are important factors relating to opinion formation that are more closely associated with the conscious mind. Our understanding of this area has been developed by the researcher Jean Piaget (1929, 1952, 1983). Piaget, in the same manner as Erikson, divided the development process of the individual into stages as
a convenient means of describing the various levels of cognitive development. While this presents observers with some problems in that subjects may display behaviour representative of one or more stages, it nevertheless provides a useful framework to use in the identification of factors leading to the development of opinion.

Piaget describes cognitive development in four discrete stages. The first covers from birth to two years of age which he calls the Sensorimotor period. During this time children “acquire understanding primarily through sensory impressions and motor activities” (Ripple, Biehler & Jaquish 1982), hence ‘Sensorimotor’. An important skill that is acquired during this stage is that of ‘object permanence’ in which the child comes to realise that an object that is taken from view continues to exist.

The understandings that the child acquires during this stage are vital to the eventual formation of opinion as it is at this stage that the child begins to develop an understanding of the world. If the child is over-protected or neglected during this period its view of the world must be distorted and this distortion will become part of the foundation of the opinions to be formed.

Following on from the Sensorimotor period is that of the Preoperational stage which Piaget described, in the main, as a period in which there were significant cognitive shortcomings. Best known of these is the concept of conservation in which children at this stage are shown to be unable to see the connection between a number, volume, length or area and its maintained value when presented in a different form; the most famous of these is the pouring of the contents of a wide container in to a taller narrow container, the Preoperational child will maintain that the tall, narrow container will now hold a greater volume than the shorter one it was poured from.

Two other attributes important to this stage are irreversibility and egocentrism. Irreversibility is the inability of the child at this stage to mentally reverse a process such as pouring the water into the narrow container form the broad container. Egocentrism describes the inability to share another person’s point of view; an attribute that mirrors Erikson’s crisis in his third stage of personality development.

When the child overcomes the shortcoming of the Preoperational stage, usually at around the age of seven years, she enters the period of concrete operations in which
she has the ability to apply cognitive thought to objects that are actually present at the time or that she has experienced directly or concretely. Children at this stage do not have a fully developed ability to generalise problem solving from one situation to another and the ability to deal with a hypothetical situation is completely lacking.

When the skill is developed, to deal with abstract problems, such as those described above, the child moves into the stage of Formal operations. Most individuals enter this stage around the age of eleven or twelve. This stage is one that is not occupied consistently by most people, frequently an adult will use a random trial and error process for problem solving, a process belonging to the Concrete operational stage, rather than a theoretical approach that is usually associated with the Formal Operations stage. This is a stage in which adolescents move more and more towards the use of abstract concepts in their everyday lives as they grow into adulthood, yet Piaget did not see this as a finite stage beyond which cognitive development comes to a halt:

He did not mean to suggest that there is no further cognitive development once children reach this stage. However, he believed that after children achieve formal operations, further developments in thinking are changes in degree rather than fundamental changes in the nature of thinking (Weiten 1989).

From this point on, the individual becomes more systematic in problem solving, envisioning courses of action and using logic to predict likely consequences of the actions involved.

If the various levels of Piaget’s theoretical development and the likely responses of significant people around the child at those times are considered in relation to the formation of opinion it can be seen that each of these is very likely to have an affect on those forming opinions. For example if in the stage of formal operations the individual does not receive appropriate support and success in decision making it is very likely that continued operation at that level would be attenuated. If this were the case the forming opinion would be very likely to be lacking in theoretical support: a situation that could be argued to exist after analysis of a large proportion of the attitude displayed in open forums in the various media. The important thing in this is that what is happening in the environment of the individual at the various
stages of development will inevitably have an impact on the way in which that individual’s opinions will form.

While looking at the role of what he calls attitudes, Pratkanis (1989 p.74) refers to the make up of an attitude (or opinion) being dependent on “constructs such as proposition, knowledge structure, image, set of beliefs, and schema to describe the mental representation or cognitive structure of an attitude.” Each of these attributes has its origin in the cognitive development of the individual. The stages of cognitive development described by Piaget provide important insights into the ways in which opinions may be affected at the time of their formation. In the same way the stages of personality development described by Erikson provide the basis for similar understandings in relation to the ways in which factors affect personality will also affect the development of subsequent opinions.

**The Role of Moral Reasoning in Opinion Development**

While factors that affect personality and cognitive development can be argued to have a significant role to play in the formulation of the individual’s initial opinions the case to be made for the impact of moral reasoning is far more clear-cut. As the definition of opinion is of an underlying conviction responding to fundamental life experiences it is clear that the ability to reason about moral issues must have an important role in forming these underlying convictions.

**Piaget’s Analysis of Moral Judgement**

Following on from his work on the stages of cognitive development, Piaget (1962) directed his investigations to the ways in which children of different ages responded to social rules. He concluded that, in very broad terms, there were two significant stages of moral development that could conveniently be described by the typical responses of six year olds and twelve years olds. Although this, again, is a stage based description there is no suggestion that the transition from one stage to the next occurs at one distinct point in time, rather it is a gradual process that may have reversals and attributes from both stages may be displayed concurrently.
Table 2. Differences Between Morality of Constraint and Morality of Cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morality of Constraint</th>
<th>Morality of Cooperation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Typical of Six-Year-Olds)</td>
<td>(Typical of Twelve-Year-Olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, absolute moral perspective</td>
<td>Awareness of differing viewpoints regarding rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(behaviour is right or wrong)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception of rules as unchangeable</td>
<td>View of rules as flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of guilt determined by amount of damage</td>
<td>Consideration of a wrongdoer’s intentions when evaluating guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of moral wrongness in terms of what is forbidden or punished</td>
<td>Definition of moral wrongness in terms of violation of spirit of cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note that these first four differences call attention to the tendency for children below the age of ten or so to think of rules as sacred pronouncements handed down by external authority.)

| Punishments should stress atonement and does not need to “fit the crime” | Punishment should involve either restitution or suffering the same fate as a victim of someone’s wrongdoing |
| Peer aggression should be punished by an external authority | Peer aggression should be punished by retaliatory behaviour on the part of the victim |
| Children should obey because rules are established by those in authority | Children should obey because of mutual concern for the rights of others |

(Note that these last three differences call attention to the tendency for children above the age of ten or so to see rules as mutual agreements among equals.)
Beyond the age of twelve, adolescents increasingly affirm that reciprocal reactions, or “getting back,” should occur in response only to good behaviour, not bad behaviour.

(Ripple, Biehler & Jaquish 1982, p.361)

As could be predicted there are several points of similarity between these attributes and those relating to cognitive development, for example the six year old child thinks of only one thing at a time and is unable to contemplate alternatives or different points of view. This inability leads to the child having difficulty comprehending a situation in which a rule may be changed to allow for special circumstances.

Some years after Piaget was conducting research in the area of moral development Lawrence Kohlberg (1964, 1969, 1976, 1981) became interested in that work. He expanded on Piaget’s work, developing descriptions of six stages of moral reasoning. These stages are further sub-divided into three levels: pre-conventional, Conventional and Post-conventional (Principled). While the stages of moral reasoning are the basic structure of Kohlberg’s theory, he also developed the idea of ‘cognitive dissonance’, through which he suggests that people operating at different ‘levels’ of moral development would have great difficulty communicating with one another.

In effect these people are operating from completely different paradigms, that is, speaking different moral languages. This has great significance in opinion formulation as, to a much greater degree than earlier theorists, Kohlberg states that his theory does not provide a fixed description of an individual at any stage of development. He makes it clear that some people do not reach the highest levels and most people operate in ways that display attributes from more than one stage at one time. The significance of this lies in the fact that opinions that are developed by the individual do not necessarily reflect the accepted stage or level of moral or psychological development that her chronological age would predict. Just as behaviours may reflect attributes from different levels of development then so the opinions developed by that individual will have their basis in different levels of development.
Kohlberg points out that Level one behaviour is typical of children up to the age of nine, Level two behaviour is typical of nine to twenty-year-olds and Level three behaviour is displayed by only a small proportion of individuals over the age of twenty. However, more recent writers have pointed out that the subjects of Kohlberg’s study were from very restricted group: male middle class, and that these stages do not necessarily apply to people from other groups, particularly females.

**Table 3. Kohlberg’s Levels of Moral Development**

**LEVEL 1: Pre-Conventional Morality**

- **Stage One: Punishment-Obedience Orientation**

  People operating at this level of moral development obey laws and authority out of a fear of punishment. Only a small proportion of the population operate at this level.

- **Stage two: Instrumental Relativist Orientation**

  An action is judged to be right if it is instrumental in satisfying one’s needs. Obeying rules should bring some sort of benefit in return.

**LEVEL 2: Conventional Morality**

- **Stage three: Good Boy-Nice Girl Orientation**

  The right action is one that would be carried out by someone whose behaviour is likely to please or impress others.

- **Stage four: Law and Order Orientation**

  To maintain the social order, fixed rules must be established and obeyed. It is essential to respect authority.
LEVEL 3: Postconventional Morality

- **Stage five: Social Contract Orientation**

  Rules needed to maintain the social order should be based not on blind obedience to authority but on mutual agreement. At the same time, the rights of the individual should be protected.

- **Stage six: Universal Ethical Principle Orientation**

  Moral decisions should be made in terms of self-chosen ethical principles. Once principles are chosen, they should be applied in consistent ways.

Source: Adapted from Ripple et al. 1982, p.364

Gilligan (1982) describes three stages of moral reasoning in females, starting with a selfish orientation where decisions about behaviour are dictated by the individual’s own needs and desires. The second stage is typified by concern for the well being of others, making personal sacrifices to ensure this. Women in Gilligan’s third stage endeavour to find a balance between the needs of others and her own personal needs. It would seem, also, that this theory has a significant component of cultural expectation built into it but remains useful for the purposes of this study as it is to be based in that culture.

Irrespective of the universal validity of these theories they do provide a useful means of gaining an understanding of the types of moral thinking of different people. If the descriptions of the responses at different levels are examined it becomes obvious that each of these will have an impact on the way in which opinions are developed by the individual. It is also probable that some people may operate and form opinions at a level far lower than that predicted by their chronological age. For example it could be argued that extreme fundamental Christians or Muslims in giving total allegiance to the teachings of a deity or religious book are operating at Kohlberg’s stage one. The image of the fundamental religious leader exhorting followers to behave in a specific way for no other reason than to avoid the wrath of God illustrates this point of view very well. These examples are most unlikely to be as simple as that, but it is
far less contentious to argue that opinions formed by these people will be shaped by the type of thinking that level one reasoning describes.

**Learning and Conditioning in Opinion Formation**

Opinions are influenced by people who play significant roles in an individual’s life. At the time of initial opinion formation the people having the most important role are usually the parents who may reward the display of similar opinions to their own while punishing, if only as tacit disapproval, opinions at odds with theirs. This simple conditioning may be echoed in less obvious ways in which the child observes parental words and actions and models her own behaviour on these (Milner 1981). It is believed that it is this process that may be the initiator of prejudiced attitudes to ‘others’. There may be direct orders giving a basis for prejudice, e.g. “Do not play with [Asian child’s name]”. There are also situations in which the same effect may be caused through indirect attitude statements, e.g. making it clear that it is acceptable that a friend is not allowed to play with Aboriginal children (Callan et al. 1986, p.80).

In addition to classical conditioning, as described earlier, operant conditioning can also have an effect on opinion formation. In this process behaviours are repeated to gain reward or avoid punishment, consequently attitudes are formed that help to achieve desired goals while attitude that provide a basis for fewer benefits are rejected (Callan et al. 1986, p.81). It is also suggested that operant conditioning is the basis for the attitude that white represents good while black represents bad as children experience disorientation in the dark but this is rectified by the presence of light (white). As they grow older children become aware of symbolism that supports these associations and their opinions become affected by this awareness (Williams and Moreland 1976).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter the terms that are to be used in the study have been outlined and defined. These terms and definitions are closely associated and the importance of them in the formation of an individual’s opinions has been considered through an overview of the development of temperament, personality, cognition and morality.
Much of the literature, particularly that relating to psychological aspects such as those dealt with in the second section of this chapter, applies the term attitude to something similar to the definition of opinion being used in this study. What makes the definition used in this study different from these psychology based definitions is its component of deeply held conviction that is not easily changed. None of the other terms considered have this attribute; their manifestations are readily modified, at any given time with conscious intent. It is this distinction that is vitally important for the way in which this study is to look at a gradual change in behaviour of people in response to information received.

As opinion deals with deeply held convictions the relevance of developmental psychology is very strong. While the bulk of literature dealing with opinion and attitudes spends much time and effort analysing changes to them, very little attention is given to the initial formation of that opinion. It can be argued that it is vital to have an understanding of this process if we are to gain any understanding of the way opinion is then available for modification. To this end consideration must be given to the formation of temperament, which is the earliest indication of the developing personality. Sigmund Freud’s work on personality provides a suitable point to begin the consideration of personality. Much of this work became open to question, due to the way in which Freud attributed inferior psychological and intellectual capacity to women, but its kernel is still of value and it was this that was developed by Erikson’s theory of the stages of psychological development with its psychological crises.

Closely linked with personality development are cognitive and moral developments. These two are closely related and the descriptions provided by Piaget and Kohlberg overlap in many ways. Possibly most importantly these theories describe stages that are usually attained by certain ages but can be demonstrated to be reverted to by individuals of much greater ages. In some extreme cases, it is argued, the reversion can become apparently permanent leading to very specific results in the development of opinions in those individuals.

The remaining psychological aspect considered was that of conditioning, both classical and operant which not only have significant effects on the early formation of opinion but have been linked with almost subliminally learnt opinions about social situations. These various aspects of development must be an essential
component in the generation of opinions and must be considered at each subsequent stage of investigating the ways in which opinions are generated and changed.
CHAPTER FOUR
The Development of Opinion

In the previous chapter the different ways in which a basis is created for the formation of opinion was discussed. In this chapter the ways in which this newly formed opinion is subsequently moulded and adapted will be examined. The factors that work either together or individually to change opinion are widely varied. Some are closely associated with those factors that are instrumental in forming initial opinion while others work through the wider aspects of society to impinge on the opinion development of the individual.

Those factors that are more closely associated with the phenomena considered in the previous chapter will be dealt with first as there is a continuum that flows from the earliest formation of opinion through to its ultimate highly developed state. By analysing factors in that development (in the same, or similar, sequence to which they occur) an overview of the whole process can be gained, identifying the significance of each factor in relation to the whole. Those factors that occur earlier in the life of the individual are ones that will inevitably have a significant role to play in the development of opinion and are likely to be the ones that are most difficult to overcome. However, if these are overcome, the changes in opinion that result from that change have the potential to be far reaching as initial formative factors are likely to be deep seated and when these are released the whole foundation of the individual’s opinion changes. The eventual effect on opinion in this case will be profound.

If a thorough understanding, of how the early factors in opinion development are generated, were to be gained, the degree to which subsequent factors will affect that individual could be predicted. It is for this reason that this section of the study will concentrate on the sequence of opinion-developing factors in addition to the factors themselves.
Prejudice

The term prejudice is one that encompasses several potential meanings. To some, prejudice has the same meaning as one of many ‘isms’ that describe an unfounded dislike of a group of people or political standpoint. Levinson (1950) identifies the same problem with the term prejudice and suggests that “

The term ‘ethnocentrism’ is preferable because its traditional meaning comes closer to that used here. …the term had the general meaning of provincialism or cultural narrowness; it meant a tendency in the individual to be ‘ethnically centered,’ to be rigid in his acceptance of the culturally ‘alike’ and in his rejection of the ‘unlike’ (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, p.102).

Unfortunately, for the purposes of this study, this is at least equally exclusive of other factors that should be encompassed by the term. A more useful definition is that used by Zaller (1992); ‘predisposition’. This term describes a link with the factors that are involved with the initial formation of opinion. These factors are

… at least in part a distillation of a person’s lifetime experiences, including childhood socialisation and direct involvement with … issues, such as earning a living, paying taxes, racial discrimination and so forth. Predispositions also partly depend on social and economic location and, probably at least as strongly, on inherited or acquired personality factors and tastes (Zaller 1992, p.23).

However, even this definition is too restrictive as it concentrates wholly on the political sphere of opinion. Many prejudices or predispositions are concerned with issues other than the political but may in turn have a bearing on the development or modification of opinion. An illustration of this could be a child’s liking for orange juice which is initially formed by the child’s initial experience and confirmed and strengthened by subsequent experiences. This liking for orange juice is likely to be further encouraged by the individuals with the greatest influence over the child; her parents. The prejudice that this situation is likely to generate is one that the individual is likely to be guided by in the evaluation of a product that has orange juice as a significant ingredient, prior to having any direct experience of the product. This same prejudice is as likely, however, to come into effect in the political arena
that includes the debate concerning the importation of orange juice concentrate, from other producing countries, to the detriment of Australian citrus farmers.

This orange juice example is made up of three aspects of the person’s lifetime experiences referred to by Zaller (1992, p.23): childhood socialisation (the acceptance of parental attitudes), salient incidents (the enjoyment of drinking orange juice) and repeated exposure.

The discussion turns now to a more detailed examination of the three aspects of personal experience that lead to the formation of prejudice and subsequently of opinion.

*Childhood Socialisation*

The early socialisation of the individual child is one that includes the earliest development of predisposition to a particular opinion. The easiest means of illustrating this is possibly by considering the development of political opinion in the child.

Connell (1971 pp.24-5) suggests that the earliest understanding of politics that virtually all children gain is that of the names of socio-political positions such as ‘the Queen, the President (of the United States of America) and the Prime Minister. To begin to make sense of these positions the child must have some simple understanding of government, in that government is seen as an entity that makes rules that are powerful enough to affect the way in which her immediate family, that is, her world, operates. With this understanding the child is able, then, to associate the various types of power she is familiar with as exercised in the home, the school and the local government, and then to allocate them or similar power roles to the socio-political positions.

Connell calls these rules and the practical applications of governmental decisions, as understood by the child, ‘task pools’. The sources of understanding about these task pools are quite diverse. The child is likely to see the works of the local government being implemented around her home. Things such as park development, school building and road maintenance are likely to be highly relevant to the child who at this relatively early age is very likely to be curious about what is going on around
her. There is very likely to be family discussion about major political figures such as the Queen, President or Prime Minister, characters the child is likely to associate with those from the stories, which children are traditionally told, of Kings, Princesses and other powerful people. Children also observe adults with no particular position of authority carrying out activities such as voluntary work or intervention in every day social situations, indicating to her that there is a spectrum of power roles encompassing a wide range of community members. The way in which children react to these observations is not that of direct attribution, rather “[t]hey work them over, detach them from their original contexts, and assimilate them to a general conception of what government is about” (Connell, pp.27-8).

As children grow older their understanding of political processes becomes more sophisticated, some of which is in response to formal teaching in school curriculum and political discussion in the home. However, the essential concept of a hierarchy, which has been seriously claimed to be an essential component of the human psychological make up (Michels 1968, also see Dahl & Lindblom 1963; Schumpeter 1950 and Verba 1961), appears to be one that is developed through thought alone (Connell, p.42). While this gives the child a basic understanding of the political process there will typically be many details missing. These details are likely to be filled in over an extended period of time, depending on life experiences where direct encountering of the political sphere affecting the individual likely will be the most important stimulus towards understanding in this area.

Jennings & Niemi (1968) are among many who have studied the correlation between children’s’ initial political affiliations and those of their parents. What is clearly shown is that there is a very strong correlation between these views. What is not so clear is exactly why this should be. There appear to be three main ways in which this correlation is formed. First, there is a simple correspondence in which a child merely echoes her parents own views. Second, is the grounding of judgement in the parents’ preferences, wherein children may appear to make their own choices but are in fact basing their beliefs on information gained from their parents as ultimate authority figures for these children -- a process that would appear to be based on the principle that “[h]e who believes upon authority, entertains the opinion simply because it is entertained by a person who appears to him likely to think correctly on
the subject” (Friedrich 1963, p.218). Third, there is family loyalty, wherein the child will affiliate in a particular way because the rest of her family does -- a means of learning affiliation that applies mainly to older children and which may be a provisional orientation to be reviewed later when voting age is reached.

It has been argued that this correspondence is based on “a fundamental psychological process, identification” (Greenstein 1960, p74). In this context identification is a specific Freudian conception that refers to a situation where a child takes on the total pattern of the parent’s behaviour and opinions (Bronfenbenner 1960, p. 27). It is specific to the relationship between children and parents of the same gender. Connell (1971) analysed the responses of a large number of children to questions about their political affiliations. From this he concluded that identification had no significant part to play in forming these affiliations. Rather, he found, the most supported basis for the child’s affiliation was family loyalty. This loyalty is expressed as a form of family solidarity, possibly to avoid family conflict.

On first analysis of this formation of affiliation it may be concluded that the process of arriving at it is irrational. However, on further consideration it will become clear that children arrive at this point after going through a process of political choice, albeit one that is restricted by the source of information on which it is based, namely that emanating from the parents.

Initial opinions or prejudices regarding factors beyond the home, such as race, religion, the environment and others, are likely to be formed in much the same way as political affiliation. The level of commitment to these initial opinions may be less enduring due to the less organised partisan nature of some of these, a view supported by a number of studies (see Bird, Monachesi & Burdick, 1952; Frenkel-Brunswik & Havel, 1953).

So far, the discussion on childhood socialisation has concentrated on the child’s perspective alone. There is also a body of research that suggests that child-rearing styles also have a significant role to play. Adorno et. al. (1950) argue that emotionally cold, status-oriented parents who stress obedience, discipline and physical punishment are likely to have highly prejudiced and authoritarian children. The reason posited for this is that harsh child rearing practices lead to children
having low tolerances to frustration and high levels of repressed hostility. These are seen to be grounding for later triggers for the development of prejudiced ethnic attitudes as well as other prejudiced views.

**Salient Incidents**

It is not difficult to see how traumatic experiences are very likely to contribute to a negative prejudice or predisposition towards a particular situation or ‘opinion object’. Psychological literature is rich in experiences detailing the development of phobias that have originated in only a single, particularly traumatic experience. Sargant (1957) described the case of a navy pilot whose aircraft crashed onto the deck of a carrier. While the pilot’s injuries were relatively minor he was psychologically unable to go near another aircraft without extreme, uncontrollable fear. While such extreme cases are easy to understand they are relatively rare and seldom have a place in the consideration of opinion formation. However, they do give a pointer to the importance of what can be called ‘salient incidents’, related incidents that strengthen a feeling towards a situation or object to the point that it becomes a prejudice or predisposition.

Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) maintain that an opinion can be formed by as few as five to ten salient incidents. There are two important aspects of this that must be considered. Firstly, an incident of the extremity described earlier will be sufficient in itself to form an opinion that will be highly resilient to change over time and contrary experience. Secondly, the incidents do not have to be traumatic or, even, negative. Positive opinions can be formed in this way as readily as negative ones.

While, personally traumatic incidents typically lead to enduring opinions, socially traumatic incidents can also create powerful opinions in individuals not directly involved in or even witnessing the incident. An example of this is type of incident is what came to be known as “The Port Arthur Massacre” which occurred in 1997 at a tourist facility in Tasmania in which more than thirty innocent people were shot dead by a lone and apparently deranged gunman. Attitudes to gun control in people across the nation have been significantly affected by this one incident (Lyall & Elicott 1997, p.6).
Sorrentino and Vidmar’s (1974) study into opinions generated by a political kidnapping in Canada showed that these had moderated in comparison to those held immediately after the incident. The opinions on gun control generated by the Port Arthur incident might similarly be expected to moderate with the passing of time. This in fact appears to have been borne out less than eighteen months after the incident, by which time three State Police Ministers had argued for the dilution of the ensuing gun restrictions. Oskamp (1991 p.158-9), in summarising this phenomenon, observed that “even the effects of dramatic or traumatic incidents are often counterbalanced by the cumulative effect of other events.”

**Repeated Exposure**

In the formation of prejudice or predisposition, repeated exposure to an object, person or idea is an important contributor. Zajonc (1968a & 1980) conducted thorough research which demonstrated that repeated exposure to a stimulus object was very effective in producing an opinion regarding it. What was made clear was that simple exposure with no further reinforcement or tension was sufficient to develop and strengthen opinion and that this process will occur even if the individuals involved were not aware that the exposure was occurring. The process is one that is strongest during the first few exposures. However, in spite of this, the research showed that the process continued, albeit to a lesser extent, to occur over a long period of time while the repeated exposures were maintained.

This phenomenon is utilised in advertising, where it is common practice to saturate the chosen media with the name of a product, particularly in the early stages of an advertising campaign. It has been shown that a similar effect can be achieved in political advertising (Grush 1980; Schaffner, Wandersman & Stang 1981) where the results of elections show a significant correlation to the degree of the candidates’ name exposure beforehand.

The familiar adage that ‘any publicity is good publicity’ does not hold up under this situation, in that several research studies (Perlman & Oskamp 1971; Grush 1976) have shown that ‘the repeated exposure stimulus’ to opinion is only effective if the subject of the exposure is positive or at least neutral. The studies also suggest that if the initial exposures generated a negative response in the individual, repeated
exposure could be expected to serve to form a stronger negative opinion towards that object.

An important area where repeated exposure has a significant impact on the development of prejudice is in inter-racial contact within a society. Stephan (1985) has shown that repeated exposure to groups of individuals from different ethnic groups can have either negative or positive effects on the opinions of those involved. Whether the result will be positive or negative will ordinarily depend on a number of crucial factors. To be positive, the exposure must be ongoing, voluntary and cooperative.

**Stereotypes**

In laying the groundwork for his seminal work on public opinion, Lippman discusses the individual’s response to an unfamiliar scene, suggesting that much of what is ‘observed’ is in fact the result of preconceived ideas and expectations:

> For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture (Lippman, 1960, p.81).

The point being made is that the society or culture in which the individual grows up provides certain stereotypes or an expectation of certain behaviour patterns from identifiable groups from within or outside that society. In reading the letters to the editor of local newspapers it is common to find letters expressing concern about the behaviour of groups of adolescent males congregating in public places. The behaviours described are usually similar to those that may be witnessed every day during the lunch break at any high school and considered to be innocuous. So why is it that there is this extreme divergence in the perception of this behaviour? It would seem that this is no recent phenomenon; young characters in Shakespeare’s plays are described in terms that would not seem out of place in modern discourse:

> Care keeps his watch in every old man’s eye,  
> And where care lodges, sleep will never lie;  
> But where unbruised youth with unstuff’d brain
Here Friar Lawrence is berating Romeo for his lack of seriousness concerning important issues. Later in the same play Capulet becomes most irate with his daughter, Juliet, because she will not do his bidding, using a range of insults to illustrate his attitude to this young person:

Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage!
You tallow-face!...

My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest
That God had lent us this only child;
But now I see this one is one too much,
And that we have a curse in having her ...

...to have a wretched puling fool,
A whining Mammet, in her fortune’s tender (Shakespeare 1595, Act III, sc. V).

While these opinions are expressed in relation to individual youths, much of the play is concerned with the difficulties of dealing with the unfettered behaviour of wandering groups of young people causing trouble on the streets of Verona.

That these attitudes date back over hundreds of years is not, in itself, enough to explain how or why they have endured. Shakespeare, himself, could be considered to be a part of the reason for this as these attitudes are passed on through discourse of various types. The two main types of discourse that are relevant to this issue are word-of-mouth between associates, and discourse in the media. In late Sixteenth Century London one of the most important components of the media was the theatre. The attitudes expressed by Shakespeare’s characters would have been accepted by members of his audience who may have felt let down by the efforts of young people in their care or employ, and taken on as their own. Indeed, one of the greatest exasperations of the time was the fact that apprentices were too easily distracted by the call of the theatres on the South bank of the Thames, such distractions frequently taking them from their jobs as plays were performed during weekday afternoons. This process will, inevitably, have continued over the years, as is shown by the
often-repeated exasperation with the younger generation in literature and films over
the last sixty years. This process took one further step with the production of films
such as “The Wild One” in the late 1950s, and “The Blackboard Jungle” and “To Sir
With Love” in the 1960s. These films used the aggression and anti-social behaviour
of young people as their central theme. The process came full circle with the film
“West Side Story”, an updated version of Romeo and Juliet set in the lower socio-
economic suburbs of New York. These discourses have served to reinforce in many
the belief that young people represent a threat and that the majority of them are
aggressive and lawless.

To compound this situation the news media tend to concentrate on events that are the
results of law breaking, while mainly ignoring events that demonstrate the positive
aspects of society. The images generated in the entertainment media are thus
supported and exaggerated by what is seen in the ‘fact disseminating’ media leading
to a powerful picture of the threat posed by young people. The power of this image
is so great that it is able to override the evidence of the individual’s own experience
of the positive behaviours displayed by most of the young people with whom they
come into contact. In discussing this phenomenon Windschuttle (1988) spent
considerable effort to describe the process in which the news media purport to report
objectively:

When we compare news reporting in a number of subject areas with informed
opinion originating outside the media there is often very little connection. …
The press portrayal of trade unions and strikes, with its emphasis on how much
harm strikers do the public, bears little relation to academic analyses of
industrial relations which recognise the role and the power of management in
any dispute and which have found that press accounts of the costs of disputes
are often exaggerated. Similarly, criminological research has frequently shown
that media portrayals of crime waves, especially by juveniles or other minority
groups, bear little relation to reality (pp.262-63).

Windschuttle goes on to discuss this kind of reporting that leads to a version of news
which “embodies the qualities of myth” (Windschuttle 1988, p.278). This version of
myth, in this sense, is
a story, factually based or fictional, a literary theme or character type that appeals to the consciousness of a social group by embodying its ideals for itself or by giving expression to deep, commonly felt emotions. To describe a story or other cultural expression as mythical is to say that it performs distinctive functions for a particular social group (Windschuttle 1988, p.279).

For some time there was debate as to whether stereotypes existed as individual phenomena or exclusively as cultural phenomena. More recently, other workers in this field have shown that both of these types of phenomena do exist (Asch, 1952), and the examples outlined above are illustrative of each. Manifestations of both types of stereotype are important to the development of opinion in both the individual and a wider ‘public’.

Although it is accepted that stereotypes exist as both individual and cultural phenomena there is an important link between them. As an individual phenomenon, a stereotype can be seen to be the result of the individual cognitive-motivational process and fulfils the need for a stereotype to begin somewhere:

Yet, once a stereotype has emerged within a culture, it takes on a life of its own and influences social behaviour in ways beyond that of the actions of any individual. At this point, stereotypes depend not so much on direct perception (and misperception) of the social environment as on the existing manifestations of those stereotypes in the behaviour and language of the society (Macrae, Stangor & Hewstone (eds.) 1996, p.25).

Having established that stereotypes do exist in various locations within society, it is necessary to bring these phenomena into the sphere of opinion. There are many stereotypes that have almost entered the realm of myth, such as the archetypal response to members of an ‘other’ race as ‘all looking alike’ or a newcomer to the city after being used to a rural lifestyle seeing city people as being indifferent to others. Even if these are acknowledged as stereotypes, they still have the potential to colour the development of opinions that involve them. Lippman (1960, p.55) describes a staged and violent interruption to a meeting of a psychologists’ congress immediately after which the congress participants were asked to describe the events as they had perceived them. Out of forty reports of the principal facts of the incident, only one was more than 80% correct and ten could only be described as
false. Lippman contends that the reason for this inaccuracy of reporting lies in the stereotypes that witnesses held in relation to the character types involved in the incident. When the characters entered the room the witnesses saw them, allocated them into stereotypes based on their appearance, and attributed actions to them based on the content of those stereotypical definitions. In other words what they believed they saw was what their culture had defined for them, rather than what had actually happened.

In the above example the witnesses were directed by their opinions, opinions that were developed (to some extent) by stereotypes that had been assimilated along with the rest of the culture, that being a part of society demands. It is easy to see that the existence of stereotypes will frequently lead to distortions in the basis for opinions, in that these opinions will be founded upon false premises. It can be argued, however, that the use of these stereotypes is important in allowing the individual to concentrate on what is pressing at the time in as much as the stereotypes serve to deal with the more commonplace factors within an occurrence. Lippman (1960) sees this as having certain ‘efficiency benefits’ for the individual:

There is economy in this. For the attempt to see all things freshly and in detail, rather than as types and generalities, is exhausting, and among busy affairs practically out of the question (p.59).

As an illustration of the efficacy of this economy, consider a teacher in a high school who, rather than having to define afresh the nature of a cohort of students each time they are to be considered, can make use of a stereotype of (say) “Year Nines”. Other teachers to whom she relates would recognise the reference and would be able readily to identify the relevant characteristics being discussed without need for elaboration.

The above example, however, implies additionally an important characteristic of stereotypes: although most of the preceding discussion had been considering stereotypes that embodied negative attribution and errors in fact, these are not the only kinds of stereotypes. Stereotypes can carry positive and neutral attribution as well. In a sense, we might say that the popular understanding of ‘stereotypes’ as being essentially or exclusively negative is victim of having been itself stereotyped.
In any event, it is clear that the nature of stereotypes and the process of stereotypification (or ‘the stereotyping of ... ‘) deserves to be considered more comprehensively if their validity and utility in the discussion is to be advanced.

**The Nature of Stereotypes.**

A stereotype is an accepted, simplified cultural description or image of a specific group of people or objects.

Stereotypers are “mental cookie cutters” - they force a simple pattern upon a complex mass and assign a limited number of characteristics to all members of a group. While we commonly use the term as it is applied to human beings, it is quite possible to stereotype objects as well (Nachbar & Lause 1992).

People may be stereotyped in various ways. For example: “All environmental activists claim social security benefits and don’t wash”, or “Year Eleven students are beginning to show mature human characteristics”. Similar stereotyping may apply to objects, as is illustrated by the popular stereotype of some years ago which held that an item manufactured overseas was inevitably of better quality than an Australian made equivalent. This particular stereotype evidently took on such power in the public mind that a major fast food outlet saw value in advertising on television that its cheap, give-away drinking glass was “fully imported”, as if to imply that this naturally imparted some intrinsic and desirable quality that an Australian made glass could not.

For a stereotype to have social utility, it must be held in common by a significant proportion of the members of a group. Stereotypes are an important element in the ways in which a culture defines the characteristics of the members of another group, or the characteristics of an object. Even within that significant proportion of the group, there will inevitably be individuals who hold varying views associated with a stereotype, but these will not be strong enough to threaten the utility of the stereotype (as a stereotype) and the differences can generally be tolerated within the boundaries of the stereotype.

Included in any complete delineation of the nature of stereotypes must be the concept of “countertypes”. A countertype is an intentional creation of a particular
kind of stereotype that serves to counter an existing stereotype. If it becomes socially or culturally desirable for a group that has a particularly negative stereotype ascribed to it to become more readily integrated into the dominant culture, the creation of a countertype can be very effective, particularly if this is effected through the channels of popular culture such as TV and film. Possibly the best example of this comes from the United States of America in the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that one of the vital planks of the American constitution, as declared by Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg (“We are dedicated to the principle that all men are created equal”), was being consistently contravened in respect of one group of Americans, was brought to the nation’s attention. Martin Luther King Jr., at the Lincoln memorial in Washington DC, spoke of his dream “that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.” The need for a change in public consciousness and attribution in relation to the nation’s black citizens became so important in the national discourse that it became necessary to overcome somehow the effects of the various powerfully held and deeply entrenched stereotypes of African Americans. This was partially achieved by the introduction of strong, dynamic and positive black characters into films such as *Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Shaft* and television shows such as *The Cosby Show* and *Different Strokes*.

It must be remembered, however, that ‘countertypes’, however well-intentioned, are ‘stereotypes’ nonetheless, and that they therefore have the same shortcomings. They are still “mental cookie cutters” forcing an over simplified pattern onto a group of people and, as such, are vulnerable to the same resentments from the subject group as are ordinary stereotypes. This is born out by the way in which

> [m]any African Americans came to resent the ‘Sidney Poitier’ stereotype of the black male which was an ubiquitous countertype in movies of the late 1960s and early 1970s ... it seemed to imply that blacks are now slaves to another image promoted by middle-class white society - a different stereotype to be sure, but a stereotype none the less (Nachbar & Lause 1992).

Countertypes most usually fail to re-present a stereotypical picture of a group of people. Rather, they tend actually to reinforce it by implying that, in spite of this example we are now seeing, we believe that it is merely a veneer that covers all the
characteristics we know are there just waiting to break out at the earliest opportunity wherein the subject group will inevitably revert to their true selves. The countertype, by the very fact that it has come into existence at all, has confirmed what it came into existence to deny.

The concept of stereotype is one that holds a very important position in the development of opinion. Lippman (1960) devotes a whole chapter to it in his seminal work *Public Opinion* in which he appropriated the term -- which had originally meant a printing plate or block for the production of facsimiles -- and applied it figuratively to the way in which groups of people view others. In operationalising and formalising his borrowed term, he identified three essential aspects that all figurative stereotypes held:

♦ To be of any value, as a ready definition, stereotypes must be simple and capable of being described in no more than two or three sentences.

♦ The very nature of stereotypes means that they must be inaccurate. While it is true that some, such as countertypes, are less wrong than others, this can not alter the basic fact is that they are still wrong. Along with this variety in accuracy, there is a concomitant range of potential for harm. As a stereotype is an overly simple generalisation applied to all members of a group, it is logically impossible for them to be accurate.

♦ Stereotypes are invariably acquired, they are the mechanism by which cultural groups acquire ‘knowledge’ of other groups without having the need for experience of the members of that group. Even in cases where that experience has been gained, the stereotype will be retained because it has been effectively internalised from the individual’s culture and because it continues to exist as a part of that individual’s cultural make-up.

As the culture that dominates each individual is responsible for the transmission and maintenance of stereotypes, it easy to see how they are resistant to change. The reproducers of culture -- the media, families, the churches and the education system -- are persistent users of stereotypes and all contribute to the way in which they are not only maintained, but are strengthened.
Having come to an understanding of just what stereotypes are, it becomes possible to examine what role they play in the development of opinion. Lippman (1960) describes the significance of stereotypes as their character, “and the gullibility with which we use them” (p.60). This gullibility is reflected in the degree to which individuals use and accept stereotypes as facts. At one end of the spectrum is the individual who assumes that the world is structured to a pattern to which he holds the key. This individual will form opinions of his world that fit into that pattern.

The opposing position to this is one in which the individual assumes the world to be made up of individuals who only partly conform to the stereotypes. He will tend to be aware that he is using stereotypes, to hold little confidence in them, and, consequently, to be prepared to modify them. Most individuals will occupy a position somewhere between these two extremes. Wherever this position is -- even though it may well change with differing times and situations -- will have a vital effect on the way in which the opinions of that individual develop.

**The Development of Prejudice and Stereotypes in the Young Child**

As with all aspects of opinion development, the common thread in the origin and early development of prejudice and stereotypes is the significance of the environment of the young child. In most cases this environment is the family, yet in a sizeable minority there is a significant contribution from institutions. It is a very small number of children that remain in institutions during their infant months but there are many more that spend significant periods of time in institutions that provide child care while parents are working or taking part in other activities. While this would appear to give the family an especially important role in the development of prejudice and stereotypes it must be remembered that the family is a representative part of the wider society: “... the family is a basic ‘building block’ of all societies” (Jagtenberg & D’Alton 1989, p.93), and as such the prejudices and stereotypes they foster can be expected to mirror those of that society.

In the following paragraphs concerning the early childhood development of prejudice and stereotypes, the two will be treated together as the processes leading to stereotypes and prejudices are simultaneous and similar. However, it is important that a distinction is made between the process of adopting a prejudice and that of
developing one, as it is possible for a child’s prejudices to emanate from either of these. “A child who adopts prejudice is taking over attitudes and stereotypes from his family or cultural environment” (Allport 1958, p.282). For this to occur it is necessary for the child’s immediate family members, but particularly the parents, to clearly express their own prejudices to such an extent that the child sees them as being a part of the truth of social life.

It may be argued that the very young child can also develop prejudices \textit{ab initio}, that is, from the point of having no prior prejudice concerning a particular situation, object, person or group of people. Although Allport (1958) uses the term prejudice in an exclusively negative context which is inconsistent with the more encompassing way in which the term is being used in the present work, the conclusions he reaches are relevant to this work and will be used -- with the implicit prefix “[negative]” applied to his term “prejudice”. Harris, Gough and Martin (1950) conducted a study into the family background of children displaying [negative] prejudice towards minority groups. One of the most significant results of this study was that those children that held the [negative] prejudices had mothers who believed that:

- Obedience is the most important thing a child can learn.
- A child should never be permitted to set his will against that of his parents.
- A child should never keep a secret from his parents.
- “I prefer a quiet child to one who is noisy.”
  (In the case of temper tantrums) “Teach the child that two can play that game, by getting angry yourself.” (Allport 1958, p.283)

Allport goes on to deduce from these findings that children are more likely to hold [negative] prejudices if their home environment is one of suppression, discipline and required obedience. It is not feasible to draw a direct association between these factors and [negative] prejudice concerning minority groups. There has to be a synthesis occurring within the child to arrive at the particular prejudice. The result of living in an environment that has these attributes teaches the child that human relationships are dominated by power and coercion, the effect of which teaching leads to the development of an hierarchical view of society where equality has little place. In addition, the child’s experiences have shown that:
he must not have temper tantrums, he must not disobey, he must not play with his sex organs. He must fight such evil in himself. Through the simple act of projection the child comes to fear evil impulses in others. They have dark designs; their impulses threaten the child; they are not to be trusted (Allport 1958, p.284).

As the child grows up in this situation she will see that those people that are important to the family conform to the behaviours that her parents instil in her. To be different would be wrong, would be to display these ‘evil’ behaviours. From this she learns that to be different is to be ‘evil’ and therefore to be reviled. Having learnt this lesson it is easy to see why this child would develop negative prejudices.

The very young child learns very quickly that what is experienced regularly is to be comfortable with, even if these experiences would normally be considered undesirable. A child who is frequently left alone for long periods of time will come to accept that loneliness as normal and therefore be comfortable with it as long as it occurs in familiar surroundings. However, if the child were to be left alone in a strange place it is most likely the child would be very disturbed by that. In an experiment on young children living in an institution, it was shown that a group of children placed in an unfamiliar room furnished with many toys that could be expected to keep them happily amused showed signs of great distress. The experiment was repeated several times until the children became confident of their surroundings and played contentedly (Arsenian 1943). The distress was caused only by being left in unfamiliar surroundings; when the surroundings eventually qualified as familiar there was no longer any distress caused. This shows there is a deep-seated mistrust of what is strange. It could be argued that the opinion that “what is familiar is trustworthy” has developed from experience; if a child feels secure, the environment must be one that holds no perceptible dangers. The mistrust of the strange develops from this very early opinion through the lack of the security generated by familiarity.

Mistrust of the strange migrates from the environment to other experiences as the child grows older. Fear of people not known to the child is well documented, they sometimes show anxiety when strangers approach. They do so especially if the stranger moves abruptly or makes a ‘grab’ for the child. They may show
special fear if the stranger wears eyeglasses, or has skin of an unfamiliar color, 
or even if his expressive movements are different from what the child is 
accustomed to (Allport 1958, p.286).

These early responses show the beginnings of the basis for the development of future 
opinions. The child develops a deeply held feeling that things, situations or people 
that are unfamiliar are to be mistrusted. It can be argued that many opinions held by 
people have their basis in this mistrust of the strange.

The familiarity of an autocratic hierarchical structure of governance can be very 
comforting, as it is something that has been in existence for thousands of years. If a 
suggestion is made with strong arguments that many people (including that 
individual) are severely disadvantaged by that structure and that an alternative would 
be preferable, it is very common for the individual to dismiss the suggestion as 
dangerous and to be fought against. The long held opinion that unfamiliar ideas are 
dangerous is the basis of the opinion about this suggestion. This has not been 
reached through careful analysis of the suggestion, rather it is reached through a 
reaction caused by the mistrust of the strange.

However, if this were universally true it would be impossible for any social change 
to occur. The fact that change does occur implies that there must be a mechanism of 
prioritising the reasons for the development of opinion. There must be other causes 
for opinion development that provide a stronger basis on which opinion is built. In 
his discussion of the fear of the strange, Allport (1958, p.286) retells the story of a 
young family who employed an African American maid. This woman was highly 
thought of and loved by the children. Some ten years after she had left the family’s 
employ, the family were reminiscing and the children were extremely surprised to 
learn of her colour; they either had not ever noticed, or (more likely) they had 
learned to disregard this obvious trait. This suggests that the experience of living 
with the woman had shown to them that there was in reality no danger in her 
difference and it had therefore ceased to be an issue in their perceptions. Allport 
concludes from this instructive case that it is therefore reasonable to “doubt that 
instinctive fear of the strange has any necessary bearing upon the organisation of 
permanent attitudes” (1958, p.287).
It is possible that these early learnt fears may have a continued bearing on opinion development, in conjunction, that is, with the combination of subsequent experience, including the way in which the child is treated by parents and other significant adults, and the level of moral development that has been reached. In this particular case (that is, in a social milieu that saw African Americans as genetically inferior), it would require the children to display a high level of moral development in order for them to maintain their high regard and positive memories of their maid. The level of moral development required would equate at least to Stage Five, and probably Stage Six, of Kohlberg’s levels of moral development. The fact that these higher stages are not reached by all individuals in all situations serves to explain how negative opinions based on inaccurate prejudice and stereotypes are so often maintained.

What this does show, however, is that learnt responses in early childhood that could be termed instinctive can be modified or adapted on the basis of what is learnt from subsequent experience. The results of these initial adaptations are in turn available to be further modified at a later time if and when the individual attains a higher level of moral development and can reinterpret experiences accordingly. Any such progressive adaptations can be expected to affect the development of that individual’s emerging opinions.

The Role of Groups on Opinion Development

In the development of Western Society there has been a transfer of the socialising or cultural education responsibility from the wider kinship group to the nuclear family (Giddens 1986, p.115). However, during the Twentieth Century, and particularly since the Second World War, there has been a transfer of much of that responsibility to the school. The structure of schools introduces the child not only to the opinion-developing factors that are associated with the school itself, but also to those associated with large groups of other children who bring their own prejudices and stereotypes to school with them.

If one accepts that the school plays a major role in the maintenance of society and its dominant culture (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), it is reasonable to expect that much of what happens in the classroom will have a significant effect on the development of opinions of the students in them. Younger school children tend to have positive
views of governments and individuals such Prime Minister, President or Queen (Easton & Dennis 1965; Hess 1963; Hess & Torney 1967). In teaching children about social structure there is always a component of indoctrination as the teaching is associated with activities such as singing the national anthem and the legitimisation of the power structure of the school and wider society:

The highly favorable attitudes ... which young children develop toward government and their idealization of the President and other leaders (even down to the local policeman) are undoubtedly largely due to schoolroom teaching (Oskamp 1991, p.164).

The ways in which opinion development is affected by what happens in schools is not restricted to these more overt indoctrination-type aspects of the curriculum. The texts used in many aspects of education are heavily value laden and are often presented to the children in such a manner as to cause them to identify with the characters and situations portrayed. These vicarious experiences would tend to develop opinions in a particular direction that reflects the expectations of society and the dominant culture. Where that dominant culture is contrary to the culture of the child, very often the result is that the child subconsciously rejects the education, leading in turn to limited academic success. An extreme illustration of the way in which this works comes from apartheid-divided South Africa where Du Preez (1983), in surveying text books used in South African schools, found that assumptions such as white superiority and rightful ownership of the land by Afrikaners were common throughout books in all areas. In the Australian context, the cultural and opinion divergence between the nation’s school system and Aboriginal children could well be a contributory factor in the statistical lack of academic success among that group of students.

In addition, the potential of school to influence opinion development extends well beyond the impacts of the formal education processes, since schools are such significant and broadly socialising institutions. While it may well have potential applicability in many domains of opinion formation, it is certainly now widely acknowledged that schools have a major role to play in the formation and development of opinions concerning race:
The effect of schools and the educational system on racial prejudice is likely to be complex and to depend on factors such as the racial composition of the school, the quality of race relations, the nature of opportunities for interracial contact, and peer group and teacher norms (current author’s emphasis) (Duckitt 1992).

While much of the research in this area has concentrated on racial stereotypes and prejudice it is likely that a similar process is occurring in relation to other areas of opinion development. A very simple demonstration of this would be the case of a child, brought up by a single parent with little interest in sport, becoming a highly motivated participant in sport as a result of the attitudes of peers, teachers and school policy in relation to physical education. What is important here is that there is no negative implication of the role of the school and the resulting opinion is probably little more than interesting to the observer. However, this example provides an illustration of how schools can operate on a range of levels to facilitate the development of the opinions of young people entrusted for long periods to their care.

The experience of schooling provides the child with a varied exposure to a wide range of groups of people. In most schools these groups would represent all types of influence from conservative, society-compliant, through to highly anti-social or even criminal. As most children have these experiences, it follows that the opinion-developing potential of these groups is tempered by other factors, since otherwise all children would end up with similar or common opinions and attitudes. These tempering factors must be provided by the child’s most significant groups -- usually the family and associated groups that fit into the social world dictated by the family.

**Social Identity Theory**

This preference for the ways of the individual’s most significant groups can be interpreted as being the development of social identity. Social Identity theorists describe social identity as consisting “of those aspects of an individual’s self image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself belonging” (Tajfel & Turner 1986, p.16). The theory maintains that individuals prefer to see themselves positively. Given that part of the essential self is defined by group memberships, there is a corresponding preference to see the group in a positive light. This positive perception of ‘ingroups’ is extended to a relatively negative perception
of ‘outgroups’ as this serves to reinforce the positive view of the individual’s groups. The essence of Social Identity theory is that to maintain the positive identity of the group, members will actively search out positive manifestations of the group’s appearance. Again this can be seen as an effort to maintain a superior self-image relative to the ‘outgroups’, the members of which they prefer to view negatively in order to reinforce the positive perception of themselves as an ‘ingroup’.

Repeatedly, research into the development of opinions, attitudes and prejudices targets ethnic groupings as a study sample. This is not unreasonable, as the relationships between ethnic groups have become a major concern in many countries that have had significant immigrations due to conflicts, both military and economic. While the findings are specific to opinions related to ethnicity, one might expect that the findings of this research could be applied to the development of opinions about other groupings.

To a child, many ethnic differences manifest themselves in easily identifiable ways; difference in skin colour, the wearing of specific items of clothing, etc. It is also easy to see how other ‘outgroups’ could be identified through social pressure from parents or other respected groups such as teachers or religious leaders. To illustrate this, consider the child of a middle class family that holds academic success as valuable and that this is to be achieved through diligent effort both at school and when doing homework. Other children in the class will display very different priorities in relation to academic success. The behaviour of these children will inevitably identify them as being members of an ‘outgroup’ that has many differences. There will be other children whose behaviour will suggest that although their opinions are not concurrent they have some similarities. Brown (1995, p.179) maintains that by pointing out similarities or differences of outgroups to children, the response to those groups can be modified. When the similarities are identified the child is far more likely to develop positive opinions about that group and, conversely, when the differences are highlighted, negative attitudes are likely to develop.

What this shows is that not only must ‘ingroups’ be perceived more positively, but also that opinions generally held by that group are more likely to influence the development of the opinions of the child. Those identified as ‘outgroups’ are likely
to be rejected because their perceived difference is seen as undesirable and, consequently, their opinions are unlikely to contribute to opinion development.

**Opinion Development and the Media**

In less than half a century the role of the media in the development of opinion in the child has changed from virtually none to very important. Just how great that importance is, is difficult to assess, but it may well be less than many people would initially surmise. The reason for this is that when considering the impact of the media, and particularly the electronic media, it is easy to confuse the undoubted impact it has on opinion change with its impact on opinion development. By the time the child is able to make use of television in an active way, many of the basic opinions have already started to develop. The power of the media to change opinion is dealt with in subsequent chapters of this study.

In terms of opinion development, television does play a significant role in reinforcing an individual’s developing opinions. Milner (1983) maintains that television is a transmitter of racial and other prejudice and that there are a number of ways in which this occurs:

- Through the omission of members of ‘outgroups’ (Bagley, Verma, Mallick & Young 1979), implying lack of worth and depriving members of those ‘outgroups’ identification figures

- Through the presentation of outgroups as stereotypes emphasising differences (Bagley et al. 1979)

- The use of outgroup members in roles displaying extreme negative behaviours, lack of intelligence or low social status (Foster-Carter 1984, p.1).

- By presenting outgroup members as “symbols or embodiments of a problem” (Foster-Carter, 1984, p.1).

- Because bad news is good copy. Crimes and conflict involving outgroups are concentrated upon (Milner, 1983).
The symbolism used in program content (but more so in advertising) often has colour prejudice implicit in it. Television also tends to promote high social status as desirable, while depicting lower socio-economic groups as less desirable, thus reinforcing opinion development in these areas.

There is research evidence to suggest that there is a correlation between the type of television program watched and opinions (Zuckerman, Singer & Singer 1980) but that “it is possible that such correlations might at least partially reflect individuals’ tendencies to select material that supports pre-existing attitudes” (Duckitt 1992, p.136). Despite this possibility, it is nevertheless generally acknowledged that the media has a great potential to affect opinion (Bagley et al. 1979, Milner 1983).

**Summary**

In the previous chapter the ways in which opinion is initially established was outlined. Building from that, the present chapter has explored the factors involved in the development of those embryonic opinions. An important contributor to this process of opinion development is prejudice, a concept defined as a predisposition to act essentially without reflection or judgement. The majority of opinion-related research conducted over recent decades has tended to define prejudice exclusively in term of racial prejudice. This is understandable in that the last thirty years have seen momentous change not only in racial attitudes but also in political change that has been dependant on a growing acceptance of the equality of racial groups other than those originating in Europe. However, it is important to recognise that prejudice does not exist only in the political or racial spheres, or that it implies necessarily a negatively directed sentiment. Prejudice can exist in relation to any aspect of life, and can have either positive or negative valency. What is especially important, is that it can be identified and dealt with for what it is.

There are numerous potential origins for the development of prejudices, starting with childhood socialisation, moving on through important incidents which leave a very strong image in the memory of the individual, to repeated exposure to a person, object or idea which is very likely to produce a prejudged opinion about it.

Stereotypes are a very important component in the development of opinions as much of what becomes opinion is based on them. Stereotypes do have an important role to
play as they reduce the information processing workload involved in coming up with a response to any given situation. As long as there is an awareness that a stereotype is involved it is possible for the individual to revisit the generated attitude when there is more time to carefully analyse the situation. Very often this does not happen, but the stereotype will have provided a workable platform for a member of a particular group to operate in an acceptable way. What is important is that there is an awareness of the operation of stereotypes so as to allow for a correction of attitude to be made if that is necessary.

There is a very wide range of stereotypes and the characteristics of these must be considered in examining their role in opinion development. Having gained an understanding of the nature and character of prejudice and stereotypes it becomes important then to apply this understanding to the social and psychological development of the young child, as this is when many important opinions begin to form. These early-forming opinions are shaped by the child’s emerging understanding of the way in which the world around the child operates. Once the basic opinions have formed they are affected by factors impinging from all quarters and levels of experience in the child’s environment. Even membership of various formal and informal groupings will add to the factors that work to develop opinion.

While the immediate experiences of the child will dictate the initial development of opinion, these opinions will endure into adulthood, albeit undergoing adaptation along the way on the basis of new experiences and growth in the individual’s reflective and evaluative capabilities and/or maturation in moral development.

At this point it is valuable, particularly in relation to the use of the term ‘attitude’ in this summary statement, to revisit the definition of opinion that is being used in this study. Opinion is the underlying conviction of an individual that has been generated in response to his/her fundamental life experiences. This may be overridden by temporary salience given to a different perspective from time to time, which in turn may come to be included as a component of the individual’s fundamental life experiences, so creating a partial change in the underlying conviction. The range of contributory factors capable of influencing the initial development of opinion and which have been detailed in the this and the previous chapters are what combine together to produce this definition.
While much emphasis has been given to the ways in which these factors affect the child, the process of opinion development does not end with childhood. The same processes will continue throughout life as the individual encounters new experiences that have little relationship to those that have gone before. What is generated in these situations can be new opinions or, what will be the focus of following chapters, opinion change.
CHAPTER FIVE
Opinion Change

Introduction

The ways in which opinions are formed and developed have been examined in the previous chapters. While there are many similarities between the ways in which opinions are developed and the ways in which they are changed it is important to understand that two processes are essentially different. Moreover, the process of opinion change is one that operates on both the individual and a wider ‘public’ at the same time and in the same way.

The processes by which an individual’s opinions are generated, developed and changed is continuous and lacks the kinds of ordered ‘stages’ that characterise an individual’s physical, moral and psychological development. Initial formation of an opinion, and its subsequent development and change, can occur at any point in an individual’s life. One consequence of this is that there will likely be a certain degree of ‘cross fertilisation’ of the individual’s opinion with that of public opinion, and vice versa.

This chapter will deal, firstly, with those factors that generate opinion change in ways similar to those in which opinion is developed. Included among these are the ways in which the individual relates to society. From this area of the relationship between the individual and society this analysis will move to the perspective of the effects of society as it relates to the individual.

Cultural features within society are gaining in their potential to affect the individual as the importance of communication, both on a local and worldwide basis, is becoming more and more significant. This has important implications for the ways in which opinion can be changed.

The Content of Opinion

Before proceeding to explore the ways and means of opinion change, it is opportune to revisit the definition of opinion as it is being used in this study, specifically the
weight given to its deep-seated and slow-changing nature and the way that this can be affected by more rapid-changing perspectives that may be generated by particular events from time to time. To bear these aspects in mind throughout this section is vital if an accurate image is to be created of how opinion is actually changed.

To this point, opinion has been discussed in an extremely abstract manner, as if it did not depend on its own content. Opinions about a subject must have some contestable attribute, that is, an attribute that can not be defined as fact. Lippman (1960) calls this “each man’s impression of the invisible world” (p.125). In referring to the invisible world, Lippman is making the point that the things of which opinions are made are not provable in any definitive way. If at some point these things become provable and the individual is aware of and accepts such proof, then this opinion could legitimately be termed knowledge.

The concern of this study is the nature of public opinion. While an individual may hold opinions on many issues, the only ones that will endure are those that relate to the nature of the society the individual inhabits. Those that do not must be concerned with personal issues that will either become knowledge or cease to be of relevance to that individual. The inevitable conclusion of this is that the opinions of the individual must contribute to the entity known as public opinion. To describe this another way, public opinion must be made up of a combination of opinions held by an extremely large number of people. In this vein, Zaller (1992, p.6) is emphatic that “[e]very opinion is a marriage of information and predisposition: information to form a mental picture of the given issue, and predisposition to motivate some conclusion about it.”

There is no way that the individual can have first hand knowledge of all the issues and events which affect the complex post-industrial society of his day. Even though we may believe that society was far less complex over seventy years ago, Walter Lippman was still acutely aware of the fact that individuals were almost totally reliant on unknown others to provide this knowledge:

> Each of us lives and works on a small part of the earth’s surface, moves in a small circle, and of these acquaintances knows only a few intimately. Of any public event that has wide effects we see at best only a phase and an aspect . . .
Inevitably our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things, than we can directly observe. They have, therefore, to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine (Lippman 1960, p.59).

There are two vital ideas employed in the preceding paragraphs: information and others. The content of opinion beyond the individual’s personal experience is dependent on the availability of information. To acquire the necessary information the individual has to rely on Lippman’s “others” for its provision. These “others” are, in the main, people whose occupation is specifically directed to the finding and presenting of information, or those who are directly involved in the creation of this information: politicians, government officials, activists, policy developers and academics or experts. This group of individuals can be considered to be an elite within a communications industry that is becoming increasingly important, if not vital, to the way in which our society has and will continue to develop.

In discussing the way in which the individual depends on an information flow on which to base opinions, Zaller (1992) speaks of elite discourse in an attempt to identify the primary source of the raw materials of opinion formation and change. The advent of new information sourced from this elite discourse has the potential to make changes to the attitudes of the individual. This potential for change is far greater to the surface expression of attitude that is the result of giving temporary salience to a differing perspective than it is to any immediate change to opinion. If this temporary salience endures, however, its permanence will then have an impact on the deep-seated and strongly held opinion.

It is this aspect of opinion that provides a contrast to the way in which public opinion is often expressed. There are a number of organisations, colloquially termed "pollsters", that have the role of ascertaining the content of public opinion. To achieve this, randomly chosen individuals are asked questions relating to current affairs. In answering these questions, the individual, who is unlikely to be deeply concerned with the issues at that time (see Bennett, 1989; Smith, 1989 and Carpini and Keeter, 1992), is most likely to use information that has temporary salience, as it is this salience that has most immediate relevance to the issue in question. After all,
the respondent will inevitably try to appear knowledgeable rather than admit she has no opinion on the topic.

In relation to the present study, this phenomenon is very important since, if the question of how public opinion affects the behaviour of the individual is to be answered, it is important to know just what the public opinion is. The results of the opinion assessor’s investigations can only be of limited value. What becomes more important is the way in which elite discourse affects ‘attitude’ as expressed and, from that, how it is likely to affect the vital deeply held convictions of individuals. To assess this it is necessary to look closely at how elite discourse communicates with the community and how it is received.

**Cognitive Theories of Attitude Change**

There are numerous theories dealing with attitude or opinion change. All of these are concerned with the surface opinions, or ‘attitudes’, that can be readily changed through temporary salience. Indeed, these theories are specifically concerned with the ways in which new ideas gain salience within the individual. While there are many theories relating to opinion change, the majority are essentially just variations on existing themes. The main body of these can be given the overall title of ‘consistency theories’.

Consistency theories emphasise the importance of people’s beliefs and ideas and the fact that people try to maintain a consistency between them and their relationship to their behaviours. In relation to opinion change, these theories see an awareness of an inconsistency between the individual’s perception of self and the opinions held as creating an uncomfortable situation that must be avoided. When this uncomfortable situation arises as a result of the receipt of new information that is inconsistent with an existing viewpoint, there will necessarily be a change in attitude.

An important aspect of consistency theories is their view that sees the individual operating in a thoughtful and rational manner. That is, attitudes are adjusted in response to the acquisition of new information. This would appear to be a very logical process. However, the logic that these theories describe has been very usefully referred to as “psycho-logic” (Abelson & Rosenberg 1958). This type of logic allows an individual to arrive at the conclusion ‘My enemy’s enemy is my
friend’; a deduction that pure logic would exclude! This psycho-logic also allows for an individual to maintain consistency of viewpoint through the application of the denial of the truth of new information that is contradictory to existing attitudes. Psycho-logic also allows for the process of extended research in the hope of finding information that reinforces existing attitudes that have been brought into question by new information.

**Heider’s Balance Theory**

Fritz Heider (1946) introduced the concept of consistency in a short paper which he developed into his major publication of some twelve years later (Heider 1958). His theory is concerned with the ways in which people perceive their social, physical and philosophical environment. The theory is based on three elements: the perceiver, another person, and an object or idea. Between any two of these elements there can be two kinds of relationship: liking or unit. The liking relationship is self explanatory, while the unit relationship is one that is perceived to have an ownership relationship or association such as belonging to a group. There are three elements with either a positive or negative relationship between each pair of elements. This allows for eight possible relationship patterns between the elements. The ways in which these relationships appear dictate whether the pattern is balanced or unbalanced.

A balanced pattern is one that represents relationships in harmony, leading to a reinforcement of the attitude to which it refers as there is no cognitive stress in the perceiver’s viewpoint. An unbalanced system is one which creates cognitive stress through inconsistencies in the viewpoint of the relationship between the object or idea and the other person. The relationship patterns which represent the viewpoints dictate whether they are balanced or unbalanced. A balanced pattern is one that has an odd number of positive relationships, whereas a pattern would be unbalanced if there were an even number of positive relationships.

To illustrate this, consider the attitude holder ‘A’ who considers the attitude of another person ‘P’ to an idea ‘I’. ‘A’ likes or respects ‘P’ and likes ‘I’. If ‘P’ likes ‘I’ there are three positive relationships and the pattern is balanced. However, if ‘P’ does not like ‘I’ there is an even number (2) of positive relationships and the pattern
is unbalanced. Heider (1958) argues that in this latter situation, with its lack of balance, cognitive discomfort will lead to ‘A’ moving towards changing her attitude: probably about ‘I’ but possibly about ‘P’. The change in attitude towards ‘P’ will occur if ‘A’s attitude to ‘I’ is very strong, that is, more closely akin to an opinion. For example, ‘A’ is fundamentally opposed to domestic violence and is friendly with and respectful of ‘P’. ‘A’ discovers that ‘P’ is domestically violent and justifies his position. ‘A’s attitude to ‘I’ is far more likely to endure at the expense of that to ‘P’ than the reverse.

There is one pattern, where the number of positive relationships is not even, that does not quite fit into the pattern. When all three relationships are negative there is not an odd number of positive relationships (A dislikes I, P dislikes I, A dislikes P). On first consideration this appears balanced yet Heider maintains that this situation is unstable, so it is considered to be unbalanced. Heider does not make it clear why this should be so but it is likely to be to the effect of ‘If A does not like I and P does not like I, then, perhaps A should like I.’ To express it another way: ‘Maybe I should be the friend of my enemy’s enemy.’

While Heider’s theory has been important, in that it has stimulated the development of other cognitive consistency approaches to explaining attitude change, it is rather limited. The greatest limitation is its simplicity, having no provision for any degree of liking or even the extent of any balance one of the patterns may have (Oskamp 1991, p.232). The questions of liking or agreeing with can only be answered in the affirmative or negative. In real life things tend not to be so clear cut. This simplicity goes beyond the mere degree of response of the three point model which ignores systems that may have more than three elements, where the liking may be significant in both directions rather than just the one allowed for.

Significant modifications of Heider’s theory have been made by Cartwright and Harare (1956), and Feather (1967). These modifications include an extension to allow for any number of elements, the allowance of non-reciprocated relationships and neutral relationships, the means to consider the degree of balance, the introduction of consideration of persuasive communication and its consequences. Weist (1965) worked more closely with the detail of Heider’s theory, extending it to
consider the three relationships between ‘P’, ‘A’ and ‘I’ on a seven-point scale and so producing a ‘tetrahedron’ model rather than a triangular model.

Research that has been stimulated by the theories of Heider and those who followed has not been highly conclusive. The research has suggested that while the principle of concentrating on cognitive preferences is valid, there are other preferences that are just as strong or even stronger than that for consistency. Both the degree of positivity of a personal relationship, that is, between ‘P’ and ‘A’ and agreement as opposed to disagreement of opinion are likely to be more important to the likelihood of stimulating attitude change than preference of a mere balanced pattern of response (Zajonc 1968b; Sears & Whitney 1973; Caccioppo & Petty 1981).

As referred to previously there is a lack of prediction in Heider’s original theory that leads to there being no way of predicting how balance will be achieved in an unbalanced pattern, if at all. (See earlier discussion illustrated by the “Should I be a friend of my enemy's enemy.” example)

Rosenberg and Abelson (1960) provided a mechanism for predicting how imbalance would be resolved through a classification process. They suggested that the easiest ways of restoring balance would be used first and most frequently. Rosenberg (1960) went on to suggest that consistency between the cognitive and emotional components of an attitude are very important. If these are not consistent a homeostatic process will operate to bring them back into equilibrium. This has been shown to be achieved through a change in the cognitive component to accommodate the emotional component or vice versa (see Carlson 1956).

Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) developed a consistency theory of attitude change that uses a somewhat different approach to achieve the end of explaining and predicting that change. A high degree of quantification is utilised in the application of their theory. The most important aspect of this quantification is the ability to use it to predict both the direction and amount of any attitude change. The application of quantification allows for an analysis of the degree of congruity, or similarity, of the source of a message, the object of the message and the message itself. This process has given the theory its name: Congruity Theory. As with other consistency theories, congruity theory has a number of shortcomings: it is limited to the analysis
of one instance of persuasive communication and the source must be relevant to the topic. In spite of this, research has shown that “congruity theory has performed quite well in its narrow goal of predicting attitude change in response to a persuasive communication from a relevant source” (Oskamp 1981, p.235).

Since the 1960s there has been a marked decrease in the interest in consistency theories of attitude change. They all have, in common, shortcomings based on the fact that they are, inevitably, constructed around a model that can be used to describe specific human behaviour. The difficulty is that a model that is simple enough to be of use can not begin to allow for all the possible responses of individuals to a given stimulus. In spite of this, the general ideas that underpin the various versions of the theory have identified many areas which have been valuable in not only gaining an understanding of attitude change but also guiding those who work in the field of individuals’ attitudes. Examples of these include work with gauging confidence of jurors’ verdicts (Fischoff 1979) and the development of techniques used in advertising, political campaigning and charity fund raising (Cialdini 1988).

**Festinger’s Dissonance Theory**

Allied to other consistency theories is dissonance theory, originally conceived by Leon Festinger (1957) and subsequently modified by a number of social psychologists. The theory is based around the individual’s collected understandings of her environment. These understandings are referred to as ‘cognitive elements’. Any two of these elements can be consonant (compatible) with each other or dissonant (incompatible or irrelevant). A dissonant relationship between cognitive elements occurs when what follows from one element is contradictory to what follows from the other. The notion of ‘what follows from’ is based on the individual’s expectations which are, in turn, predicted by her experience of viewing her environment.

The principles of the theory, as laid out by Festinger are:

1. **Dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance ... [and to] avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.**
2. The magnitude of the dissonance (or consonance) increases as the importance or value of the elements increases.

3. The strength of the pressure to reduce dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance (Oskamp 1991, p.239).

Unlike other consistency theories dissonance theory can be applied to a wide range of situations, (congruity theory only concerns communications that include evaluative assertions being made). The way in which dissonance theory is built is important in that it is concerned with broad conceptual terms rather than dealing with specific predictions. While predictions are the eventual reason for the existence of the theories, these can not be made until a wide range of details and assumptions about the situation are recorded. To reach the point where a prediction can be made it is necessary to identify the dissonant elemental relationships which exist as well as the possible and impossible means of overcoming that existing dissonance. The theory emphasises that attitude change often results from a person’s behaviour rather than causing the behaviour; an assumption basic to most other consistency theories.

Dissonance, according to the theory, is stimulated when the individual has to make a decision between objects or courses of action. On choosing from the alternatives, dissonance is the result of the consideration of negative features of the chosen alternative and the positive features of the rejected one. The level of dissonance increases if the decision is important, the rejected option is almost as attractive as the chosen one, or when the options have little similarity. If the options have little similarity the choice is between an option that will have to be given up when the alternative is chosen. Making this type of decision will create a dissonance that has to be dealt with in order to regain a life that has consonance, that is, psychologically comfortable. Festinger (1964) suggests that to achieve this consonance the individual justifies the decision by finding ways of reducing the perceived attractiveness of the rejected option or increasing the perceived similarity of the options, where this is possible.

While dissonance theory is of significance as a cognitive approach to the understanding of attitude change, it is of particular importance to this study as there is an implication within it that predicts that the individual will actively seek out
information that will minimise the dissonance caused by new ideas. The significance of this is dealt with in a following section of this chapter which discusses the means by which information is received.

While the theory holds that dissonance-reducing information will be sought, and dissonance-increasing information avoided, in practice it is very difficult for the individual to achieve this. This is particularly true of information that will produce dissonance, as mass media are pervasive to the extent that it is very difficult to avoid exposure to them and there is no way that the individual has any control of the content of that exposure. The reduction of the resulting dissonance has been shown (McGuire 1985) to be achieved by techniques such as: intentional misunderstanding, discrediting the information or its source (a currently common technique of this kind is the rejection through classification of information as “politically correct”, an older version is labelling the source as “communist”), by actively seeking contradictory consonant information or by changing the relevant attitude.

It is significant that the theory deals with reducing dissonance but at the same time the individual may also seek out dissonance creating information to confirm her own position through experiencing the dissonance caused through contrary experience. Seeking dissonance-creating information can also be used to reinforce an understanding of a contrary position to assist in building an argument of justification for the attitude already held or merely to exercise an open minded approach and a willingness to hear differing points of view. The important thing is to be aware that when the theory makes a statement in relation to behaviour causing a change in attitude it does not necessarily follow that the detail of that statement is exclusive in its occurrence or the way in which it works.

Dissonance theory is, probably, the most useful of the consistency theories because it is applicable to a wide range of situations, unlike others which only work in very restricted circumstances. However, there is a shortcoming in that clear predictions are difficult to make because one situation can create differing levels of dissonances in different individuals with different cognition, and individuals can reduce dissonance in many different ways. While researchers such as McPherson (1983) have been able to eliminate these differences in controlled experiments, there are still
Cognitive Response Theories

There is a wide body of current research being conducted into various cognitive response theories. One assumption that these rest on is that the receipt of a persuasive message causes the individual to attempt to fit it to knowledge, beliefs and attitudes already held. This process generates a number of thoughts that do not relate directly to the content of the message. The important aspect of the theory concerns these additional thoughts and the way in which the balance of these have the capacity to change attitude:

That is, the cognitive responses *mediate* between characteristics of the message or the recipient and the effect of the message, and they are considered to be crucial in determining what effects the message will have (Oskamp 1982, p.255).

The cognitive responses to the message are the step between receipt of the message and creating the attitudinal response to it. Because of the perception of this step as an active one embarked upon by the individual, these theories must be considered to be dealing with self persuasion: “a person’s own thoughts are a more powerful determinant of persuasion than is information that originates externally” (Petty & Caccioppo 1981, p.251).

This group of theories explain how an individual thinks about the persuasive message and the issues it concerns. They do not explain why the individual generates a favourable or unfavourable response to them. There is very likely to be a close link between the two but there is a lack of theoretical investigation into this aspect of attitude change.

A Workable Model of Attitude Change

In each of the cognitive theories discussed the common thread is that each of them has limitations. While these limitations vary in their extent, each of them is sufficient to render the theory unusable as a model to work with when examining attitude and opinion change in the wider political world. It is very likely that the
shortcomings originate from the fact that each theory is grounded in the realm of psychology while the changes it attempts to understand occur in a much wider realm that has most of its determining factors based in the social realm. A consequence of this is that the theories do not consider the social situations that lead to the individual’s acquisition of new information on which to base attitudes and opinions. However, these theories do provide some supporting evidence for some aspects of the model of public opinion change to be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Zaller (1992) maintains that to enable a comprehensive analysis of how attitudes are changed attention must be directed towards: “how citizens learn about matters that are for the most part beyond their immediate experience, and how they convert the information they acquire into [attitudes]” (p.40). To do this goes beyond the capabilities of the cognitive theories and provides the basis for a description of how attitude occurs in mass society. A model based on these two basic understandings, while not necessarily providing a totally accurate description of how these changes occur, would have the potential to provide a reasonable account of what probably occurs. Zaller (1992) has developed one such model of public opinion change that provides an important structure that can be used to examine the ways in which public opinion, (attitude) change occurs in Australia and so contributes to the change in the underlying deeply held convictions (opinion) of large groups of Australian people.

As a departure from the very theoretical approach that has been used so far to examine opinion change, an important part of the area that is now being approached is the means of attempting to expose exactly what is contained within this thing referred to as opinion. To achieve this it is necessary to consider questioning individuals about their opinions and particularly what their answers may actually mean. Consequently, this must now become a part of the process of examining opinion and is included in the model.

Before giving a detailed description of the model it is necessary to define a number of terms used as essential components of it:

- **Consideration.** This refers to any reason that might stimulate an individual to make a decision about a political issue one way or the other. This makes considerations a combination of belief about an object and an assessment of that belief. An example of a consideration may be: “John Howard’s stand to
implement his ten point plan to overcome the implications for Indigenous land ownership, as laid down in the Australian High Court’s Wik decision, discriminates against a disadvantaged group” as it could well encourage an individual to view Mr Howard’s role of Prime Minister in such a way as to express a negative response to a survey of attitudes to his performance.

• **Persuasive messages.** These are arguments, which provide a reason for adopting an attitude. The message becomes a consideration if it is accepted by the individual. An example of a persuasive message would be an supporter of Aboriginal land rights saying, “The Prime Minister’s ten point response to the Wik judgement, of the High Court, is a plan to entrench the privilege of a minority of Australians at the expense of the country’s most disadvantaged minority.”

• **Cueing messages.** Cueing messages are made up of contextual information which indicates from which political stand point the persuasive message emanates. Cueing messages are important in that they provide the individual with additional information about the origin of the message which enables the association of the content of the message with its ideological or partisan origins. Converse (1964) suggests that this permits the individual to respond in a critical manner to persuasive messages. To illustrate this, the receiver of the message described in the previous paragraph would attribute credence to it based on her own ideological position in relation to Aboriginal rights.

An interesting example of the importance of cueing messages is given by Zaller (1992). In response to opinion polling of pro- and anti-national aggression respondents (hawks and doves) it was shown that:

politically unaware hawks and doves were unable to make a partisan response to a question about aid to the Contra guerrillas in Nicaragua because they apparently lacked contextual information about who the Contras were. These same hawks and doves could, however, respond in partisan fashion to a question about combating communism in Central America because communism was a cue they understood (p.42).
Zaller’s model of public opinion change is structured around four axioms which apply to the ways in which individuals respond to the political information that is transmitted to them through a range of information sources. These axioms are claimed to do no more than to provide an approximation of how attitude must change in the real world. While this may appear to be a somewhat underwhelming claim for the model, the application of it has been shown to “have some highly novel and empirically correct implications” (Zaller 1992, p.42).

**The Model**

Zaller’s model is made up of four axioms which are first stated and then discussed in some detail. The axioms and their basic descriptions are taken direct from Zaller’s (1992, pp.42-49) work:

A1. RECEPTION AXIOM. The greater a person’s level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend (in a word, to receive) political messages concerning that issue.

A2. RESISTANCE AXIOM. People tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predispositions, but they do so only to the extent that they possess the contextual information necessary to perceive a relationship between the message and their predispositions.

A3. ACCESSIBILITY AXIOM. The more recently a consideration has been called to mind or thought about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration or related considerations from memory and bring them to the top of the head for use.

A4. RESPONSE AXIOM. Individuals answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them.

**Reception Axiom**

The reception axiom is based on an acceptance that there are two types of involvement in the political life of society: affective (that is, an individual’s interest in politics, because of their concern for the direct effects of political decisions), and cognitive or intellectual. It is intellectual engagement with wider philosophical political issues that is necessary to the purpose of this model to show how the
individual acquires information to build into attitudes. Hence the importance of
cognitive engagement, inasmuch as it is only an individually adopted intellectual
approach to the information being received, that can lead to the subsequent
modification to attitude.

In support of this assertion there is empirical evidence that shows that a cognitive
engagement with politics correlates well with stability of attitude responses.
Conversely, while affective political engagement does not correlate well with stable
attitude responses, it does correlate well with commitment to the political process
(Feldman 1989).

Rather than the terms ‘cognitive’ or ‘intellectual’ engagement, it is more appropriate
to use the more commonplace ‘political awareness’, which carries much the same
meaning but in the language of public opinion is more readily understood. For an
individual to be politically aware it is necessary to engage fully with the intellectual
implications of the politics under consideration.

This definition of political awareness is intentionally one that is general and of a
continuous nature. It does not expect that the individual will have specific
knowledge and understanding of any particular political issue at any given time. In
measuring an individual’ general political awareness it is assumed that those who
have a general political knowledge habitually engage in consideration of most
political messages about a wide range of issues.

In using this definition of political awareness in the model of attitude change it must
be pointed out that there is an assumption that the source of information or political
messages is elite discourse. It is accepted that this will inevitably be incomplete as
the politically aware individual will also receive messages from other sources, such
as personal exchanges with friends and acquaintances. However, to make the model
workable it is necessary to ignore these, at this point, as it would be virtually
impossible to account for these directly. There is a validity in this approach in that it
can be argued that the content of the majority of messages from other sources will
originate in elite discourse at some earlier point in time.
Resistance Axiom

As outlined above the individual’s level of political awareness will dictate the probability of the receipt of cueing messages. These cueing messages carry information concerning the relationship between the message itself and the predispositions of the individual. This information is the key to resistance. The implication of this is that the level of the individual’s political awareness is proportional to the likelihood of resisting persuasive communications that are inconsistent with existing political predispositions. Conversely, an individual with low levels of political awareness is less likely to be aware of the implications of a persuasive message and is likely to accept these messages even though they are inconsistent with their political predispositions.

This statement implies that individuals make decisions about political issues without partaking in any deliberation, reasoning or thought about the issue. Rather the decision is made via an acceptance of a persuasive message based on a mechanical response to external cues concerning the partisan origins of the message. Further, individuals with low levels of political awareness and consequent low levels of political information will tend to accept any idea they come across while applying no critical analysis to it.

This implication is almost frightening in its apparent cynicism of the level of thought applied to enormous amounts of information that the individual is exposed to. However, the empirical evidence emanating from a large body of research into political persuasion suggests that it is accurate. Converse (1964) maintains that few people actually go to the length of using reason in considering the ways in which political ideas relate to each other. Rather, they rely on contextual information gleaned from elite discourse to gain an understanding of how different ideas belong together and so constrain each other. It is important to remember that while Converse talks about people generally the contextual information that he maintains is so important must include leaders and political groupings that oppose or support an idea.

One of the most significant aspects of Converse’s analysis is that awareness of contextual information is dependent on the level of political awareness. Only an
individual with a relatively high level of political awareness is likely to respond to communications in a manner that is constrained by their values.

Psychological research concerning opinion change tends to support the notion that individuals are unlikely to apply significant thought or reason before accepting persuasive communications. McGuire (1969) reviewed much of this research, concluding that the source of a message is one of the prime factors involved in leading to the acceptance or rejection of the message:

> The given message is judged as fairer, more factual, more thoroughly documented, its conclusion following more validly from its premises and more grammatical, when it is ascribed to a high- as opposed to a low-credibility source (p.198).

While the studies examined by McGuire are not necessarily concerned with specifically political sources it is reasonable to assume that the findings would apply to this type of source (see, Mueller, 1973; Price, 1989).

In contrast to the evidence that supports this somewhat determinist view of the way in which individuals respond to persuasive messages, more recent research also shows that under a range of circumstances people will actually ignore their predispositions concerning the credibility of the source. Rhine and Severance (1970) found that if the topic of the message was of particular personal interest (the raising of tuition fees in this case) to college students, no attention was paid at all to the credibility of the source. It was found that the credibility of the source only became significant in consideration of issues that did not impinge directly on the individual, for example, issues such as preserving interstate old growth forest. The significance of the contrast between affective and cognitive engagement in the political process is confirmed by these findings.

Chaiken (1980) and Petty and Caccioppo (1986) conducted experiments to investigate this phenomenon in more detail. Different groups were exposed to a range of arguments on a given topic. The arguments, or persuasive messages, varied for each group in strength of argument and degree of personal involvement presented by the issue. Subjects with low levels of personal involvement were found to pay some attention to the argument but are highly affected by the credibility of the
source. Those subjects who would be personally affected to a great extent by the issue were found to pay no attention to the credibility of the source but were highly affected by the content of the arguments presented. It was also possible to show that the reactions of the personally affected group are a direct result of them having applied a great deal of thought to the arguments being presented.

This more recent research appears to suggest that individuals are very likely to consider arguments presented in significant detail. However, it must be remembered that, like so much psychological research, the subjects were drawn from groups the researchers had ready access to, that is, they are most likely to be psychology students. These samples can not be considered to be representative of society in general. In addition to enabling the experiments to have easily identifiable types of argument, the strength of argument and the level of impact on individuals are far more extreme than would be found in normal political discourse. Political arguments are invariably presented in as strong a manner as possible; the weak arguments used in the experiments would not see the light of day in the real world of politics. In political discourse high levels of energy are expended in attempting to convince individuals that issues have significant implications for them. The 1998 Australian Federal election campaign showed quite clearly how difficult this is to achieve with powerful messages concerning the personal benefits of tax cuts and impacts of new taxes - all of which led to a vote that indicated that the electorate was not sure! The result of the election appears to suggest that most voters simply moved back to their basic voting pattern as shown over the last two decades with the ‘two-party, preferred vote’ showing little preference for one party over the other.

What all this means is that there is empirical evidence supporting the assumption that individuals respond to persuasive messages in a way that reflects their values and predispositions, rather than the content of the message. This can only happen, of course, if the individual has a degree of political awareness and can decipher the clues to its ideological origin.

In maintaining that political awareness is important in determining one's resistance to persuasion, a vital component of the whole process is that there is a degree of obscurity in the way in which the message is associated with predisposition. If it is painfully obvious that an argument is associated with a particular political stand
point, for example Pauline Hanson’s One Nation policy of cutting funding for Aboriginal matters is boldly stated. However, it could also be stated in terms of directing funding to all people in need. An opponent of One Nation would be able readily to identify the first version and express opposition, but unless she had at least some political awareness it would be more difficult to identify the ideological background to the second version. It is only in the situation where the message’s contextual information is obscure that political awareness plays the part of directing opposition to it. Without that awareness it is quite likely that support could be given to the notion.

This may appear to contradict the axiom that political awareness is associated with resistance to persuasion. In the above example, for instance, political awareness was not required to resist the call for the cutting of funding for Aborigines. However, in the vast majority of political discourse, and its associated persuasive messaging, obscurity of the ideological source of the message is endemic. It is likely that the naivety of One Nation’s discourse led to a committed following from those who readily agreed but could not convince the less committed because the source and its credibility where not hidden in the normal political obscurity. In other words, only a little political awareness was required to resist their arguments. In the normal structure of politics, obscurity is extremely common.

Accessibility Axiom

This axiom deals with the significance of recent considerations; the more recent the consideration the easier it is for the individual to refer back to it and apply it to new persuasive messages. The reverse is also true in that if a specific consideration has not been made for a long period of time it is not readily available for use in new considerations. It is also likely that if the period of time is long enough the consideration will become totally inaccessible or forgotten.

If the notion of an idea or concept has been used recently in any way, it is very likely to be available for reuse. Reviews of the empirical evidence (mainly from the area of cognitive psychology) dealing with this phenomenon have been made by Higgins and King (1981) and Wyer and Srull (1989).
This axiom must be used with a degree of circumspection as it is easy to see that recent considerations will be readily available for new considerations which are clearly related. In the earlier example of One Nation’s position about funding for Aboriginal programs being given consideration and accepted, then if this was then quickly followed by a statement calling for a detailed financial audit of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the earlier consideration would be brought to mind to make a decision on the second. However, this relationship becomes a little more difficult to identify when the links are not so clear, for example, if the second message concerned the cost to the Federal Government of recently arrived migrants. A possible relationship may exist in that both messages deal with groups of “others” within Australia which many One Nation supporters appear to consider as important. The point is that there is no way that relationships can be proved and the user of the model will be “implicitly relying on common understanding to determine when considerations are related to one another” (Zaller 1992, p.49).

Response Axiom

In researching public opinion it will always be necessary to question individuals about what they believe. Unfortunately, the answers given to these questions are not necessarily an accurate reflection of their true attitudes and opinions. This is not a result to any intention to mislead by those answering the questions of researchers, rather:

they answer the question on the basis of whatever considerations are accessible “at the top of the head”. In some cases, only a single consideration may be readily accessible, in which case individuals answer on the basis of that consideration; in other cases, two or more considerations may come quickly to mind, in which case people answer by averaging across accessible considerations (Zaller 1992, p.49).

Of course, these immediately salient considerations do not represent the full range of the individual’s attitudes and opinions. It would be unreasonable to expect them to do so.
An important consequence of the acceptance of this axiom is that it allows the user of the model to accept the validity of contradictory responses from an individual responding to questions on issues that are not directly related but which have an underlying connection. The responses may be based on very different considerations that are brought to mind by the different questions. For example, considerations based on ideological concerns, self interest or intuitive feelings may well lead to contradictory responses. It is important for the model to accommodate rather than reject these contradictions as there is a growing body of empirical evidence indicating that this kind of interpersonal heterogeneity is common (see Rivers, 1988; Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock, 1991).

This axiom could well be dismissed as being too simple. Psychological research has led to the development of models of how individuals process information to reach decisions that are far more complex. One of these proposed by Tourangeau and Rasinsiki (1988) has four stages:

The individual:

♦ interprets the question to identify the issue

♦ Attempts to identify salient considerations

♦ Synthesises thoughts into a cogent position

♦ Compares the position with the available options in the question. (The chosen answer can be affected by the features of the questionnaire so the questionnaire can affect what is eventually reported as public opinion.)

This model is relatively simple but, even so, it is likely to be too complex to use for the purposes of the proposed model of opinion change. The axiom still has legitimacy, however. Tourangeau and Rasinsiki (1988), for example, suggest, in describing their model, that there is only one vital stage: the identification of salient considerations from the memory. Consider the One Nation supporter who is questioned about ATSIC funding; he readily identifies the issue, accesses considerations relating to privileged funding for Aborigines and conspiracy theories concerning ‘others’, orders these thoughts and identifies the relevant response. The
only significant step in this process is the recollection of considerations, which conforms to the very simple axiom. Complex models, and even the extremely complex ones such as the forty three step version proposed by Wyer and Srull (1989), have a place in providing guidance in further theoretical research, “but, in the end, it is necessary to make radical simplifications if the purpose is to engage in the rigorous analysis of typical public opinion data.” (Zaller 1992, p.50).

What the model will provide is a means of identifying what is defined in this study as an individual’s attitude. The significance of this is that an attitude is an accurate reflection of how the individual is feeling about an issue at that point in time. This attitude has the potential to slowly change the deeply held opinion, if the attitude endures for a sufficient length of time. Zaller (1992) suggests that this four axiom model describes the attitudes of people as being the outcome of receiving new information, deciding whether or not to accept it and then providing a sample of the attitude at the moment of answering a question.

This process is known as the “Receive-Accept-Sample” or RAS model. This model will be used, in analysing how Australian society has reached the point it now occupies, in subsequent chapters.

**Attitude Importance**

While the RAS model relies totally on political awareness in the resistance of persuasive messages, Krosnick (1988) has demonstrated that there is also a significant role for the importance of the issue to the individual. Krosnick's research shows quite conclusively that attitudes to issues that are important to the individual are less likely to change as a response to high levels of persuasive messages than are attitudes to unimportant issues.

It could be argued that this finding actually supports the principles of the RAS model, inasmuch as an individual who does not have a generally high level of political awareness is more likely to have an awareness of the political issues that are important to him or her. This serves to illustrate very well that it is highly probable that no individual has such a degree of general political awareness that all possible issues will have been considered. The result of this is that an opinion researcher is very unlikely to come across a subject who has well considered attitudes that would
provide answers that reflect the real opinion on all of the issues that might be contained in the research.

**Attitude Instability**

Some of the results from a study by National Election Studies (cited in Zaller 1992) at the University of Michigan show that it is quite likely that individuals will make statements of their attitudes which are totally contradictory (Zaller & Feldman 1993). An example cited was of a teacher who made very strong statements in support of increasing government spending on education and other social equity areas. When asked the same questions on government spending four weeks later the responses indicated an equally strong demand for a reduction in government spending as there was a economic situation in the country that needed radical action to resolve. There was no reference to the stated concern for social issues in the second interview. This would appear to pose very important questions regarding the methodology of collecting data on public opinion or, more pertinently, about our assumption that there is such a thing as an identifiable public or even individual opinion.

The RAS model described above provides an answer for how this can occur. The usual assumption is that individuals have a number of attitudes and opinions that are consistent across their range, as is predicted by cognitive theories of attitude change arguing the importance of psychological consistency and dissonance. Contrary to this, evidence suggests that individuals have a range of considerations, which may be contradictory, relating to each issue. Those considerations that are most salient at the time the attitude is to be enunciated are the ones which will dictate the shape of the stated attitude. With attitudes being brought to the attention of the individual there is no internal conflict because the attitude is a reasoned response to the considerations that came to mind at the time.

The RAS model suggests that the extent of this phenomenon is dictated by the level of political awareness of the individual. An individual with a highly active political awareness is likely to hold a range of considerations that are the result of detailed political thought and will, therefore, be likely to be homogenous. Such an individual
“may thus develop the crystallised attitudes that most opinion researchers take to be the norm” (Zaller 1992, p.55).

Conversely, the RAS model indicates that the majority of individuals, on the majority of issues, would be unlikely to express consistent attitudes due to their lower degree of political awareness. The responses they give will be based on the considerations that are most salient at the time. This suggests that what is vitally important in analysing public opinion are the factors that generate salience in individuals. The majority of information that individuals have access to is provided by elite discourse. It is clear, therefore, that if an understanding of how Australian public opinion has been generated is to be gained, it is essential that a study of the individuals and organisations that provide this elite discourse be made. An analysis of this nature will be provided later in this study.

In a democracy, such as Australia, it would be relatively uncontroversial to assume that there is a balance of argument presented to the population, on any given issue, by elite discourse. The reality is likely to be somewhat different, with the ABC being the only segment of the media having a mandated requirement actually to provide balanced reporting. The remainder of the media have owners who exercise varying degrees of control over what is presented. Many of the views presented emanate from a different standpoint from that of the majority of the population, that is, people who do not own or have a degree of control over companies that own the means of communicating information.

For the sake of argument, the assumption that there is a balance of argument presented to the individual will be accepted. This implies that the individual will receive persuasive arguments on both sides of issues and that consequently “they are likely to form considerations that induce them to favour and to oppose the same issues” (Zaller 1992, p.59). Hochschild (1981) conducted lengthy interviews to ascertain individuals' attitudes to equality, with results indicating that there is considerable degree of identifiable ambivalence regarding certain issues. Of particular interest was his comparison of individuals’ responses to direct questions with the content of discussion about an issue. Hochschild states:
People do not make simple statements, they shade, modulate, deny, retract, or just grind to a halt in frustration. These manifestations of uncertainty are just as meaningful and interesting as the definitive statements of a belief system (p.38).

It is clear that there is a significant degree of demonstrable attitude instability, particularly in individuals who have a low level of political awareness. With this being the case it would seem reasonable to deduce from this that those individuals with lower levels of awareness would be more susceptible to long term, deep seated opinion change. Curiously, this is not the case as information flows are stable over longer periods of time. It is the short term, fluctuations in information balance that change the salience that leads to ambivalence in the individual and the identifiable attitude changes described in opinion polls. Over longer periods of time information balance is maintained with only a slow movement towards change (see Zaller 1992, p.69). This slow movement towards change is likely to be a response to long term changes in the social condition of the country. For example, it took several years for elite discourse to make the changes which describe the change in attitude towards the financial and economic excesses of the 1980s in corporate Australia. This process started with criticism of the so-called and much-reported “bottom of the harbour schemes” for tax avoidance and finished with the demonising of such players as Australia’s now notorious Alan Bond and Christopher Skase.

While attitude instability is both easily identified and explained, it is similarly easy to demonstrate that it has little relevance to opinion change. What is important about this phenomenon is that it focuses the attention onto the process that does have an impact on opinion change. Opinion change is significantly affected by the tenor of the long term balance and content of elite discourse. This indicates the direction that this study will have to take if it is to uncover the underlying state of Australian public opinion and the factors that have led to its reaching that state.

Before taking this direction of examining the components of elite discourse it is important to examine the ways in which the messages contained in elite discourse actually affect the rate of attitude and opinion change. The following sections of this chapter provide an examination of some of these processes.
Mainstream and Polarization Effects

The results of referenda in Australia provide a very useful illustration of what can be termed the mainstream and polarisation effects in elite discourse. These effects occur in two totally different situations.

It is often repeated in political debate that a referendum in Australia has virtually no chance of being successful unless the motion is supported by both sides of politics. The 1967 referendum which proposed that Aborigines should be granted citizenship of Australia is famous for the simple fact that it was successful. It is argued that this success was a result of there being wide ranging support from all sides of politics. In fact, there was very little stated opposition. Typical of the majority of referenda, though, was that of the 1984 referendum in which the proposal was to increase the term for Federal Parliaments to four years. This was proposed and supported by the newly elected Labor Government but opposed by the Coalition opposition who campaigned strongly against it. The result was that the referendum was defeated. It is interesting that after less than three years in government the Coalition is now considering the same proposal, with the initial response from the Labor Opposition that it should be opposed!

The Mainstream Effect

Axiom 1 of the attitude change model suggests that the greater an individual’s political awareness the greater the likelihood that she will be receptive to persuasive messages, concerning a proposal, that have support from a great majority of elite discourse. If it can be assumed that certain sections of elite discourse represent the predispositions of this individual and those sections support the proposal, even though they are also supported by those sections that would give rise to partisan resistance, there can be no basis for the resistance axiom to have any effect. The logical extension of this is that the greater a person’s political awareness, the greater the number of persuasive messages she would receive that would not be resisted, and therefore, the greater the level of support of this mainstream proposal.

To this point the discussion has only considered the level of political awareness of an individual as though this attribute existed independently of any other attribute. What has been ignored is that political awareness is inevitably related to the level of
education. Key (1961) maintains that formal education is a significant factor in that the extent to which a society’s traditional values influence an individual, McClosky and Brill (1983) are a little more encompassing in maintaining that education leads to greater social learning ideals of civil liberty. More importantly Mueller (1973) noted that the correlation between the level of education and support for the Vietnam war was strong in the early years and weak in the later years. Elite discourse supported the war at first and came to be deeply divided about it later.

In general, it is widely supposed that political awareness tends to reinforce resistance to persuasive messages of elite discourse. This discussion of the mainstream effect appears to contradict this supposition. Awareness itself is not the operating factor, rather the sensitivity to persuasive messages is increased by that awareness. In the majority of situations the messages will be contradictory, leading to a degree of resistance. However, in the cases where the mainstream effect operates, that contradiction of messages does not exist. As such, the RAS model predicts that the sensitivities are not likely to be offended, thereby leading to ready acceptance of the message.

The Polarisation Effect

In the world of politics it is far more common to encounter issues that engender heated disagreement. The RAS model leads to a very different prediction for subsequent public opinion.

In the debate concerning the sale of the publicly owned Australian telecommunications company, Telstra, (in 1998) there was support from the Coalition and opposition from Labor. As the long term trend of support for these two political groupings shows, where there is a very similar level of support for each it can be assumed the levels of elite discourse will correspond to the levels of support for each side of politics. It can also be assumed there will be a similar level of partisan persuasive messaging from each side. In addition, each side would be sponsoring cueing messages, aligning their argument with their ideological values.

Looking at the debate from the perspective of the “yes” camp there will be a certain number of Coalition supporters having a high level of political awareness. This group will very likely accept cueing messages allowing them to recognise the
ideological position of the messages they receive, allowing them to reject the messages emanating from the Labor side of the debate. Of course, these cueing messages will not impede the reception of messages from the Coalition side. Supporters of the Coalition who are less politically aware will receive a smaller number of persuasive messages, and due to their lower reception of and accessibility in memory of cueing messages are likely to be far less selective of the messages that they actually accept.

The result of this process will be that there will be a proportion of politically aware Coalition supporters with a wide range of considerations that are favourable to the sale of Telstra. The remainder of Coalition supporters who are less politically aware will have a smaller number of considerations, many of which will not favour the Coalition's position regarding the sale. Of course the same effect will be evident on the Labor side of the debate with the eventual aggregate attitude reflecting the degree of support for each side of the political divide.

As with most political debates there are individuals on both sides who have some sympathy for the position of their opponents. In this instance those on the Labor side who are in this situation may well be among those highly influenced by the economic rational direction taken by the Hawke and Keating Governments under the advice of senior public servants who were predominantly recruited from institutions with neo-classical economic traditions (Pusey, 1991). On the Coalition side there are a number of small ‘l’ liberals (see Patience 1982 p.74) who recognise the potential for compromising the social commitment of a publicly owned telecommunication provider.

Empirical evidence to support the existence of the polarisation effect made its most significant early appearance in *The American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960) in which the polarisation effects of political awareness on partisan issues was first noted. Chong, McClosky and Zaller (1984) and Gamson and Modigliani (1966) examined public responses to a wide range of issues in which there was little agreement in elite discourse. In every case, where there was an increase in political awareness there was a more acute polarisation of attitudes of the two sides.
Two-sided Information Flow Effects.

In applying the RAS model to the way in which elite discourse changes attitudes, concentration has been directed to uncontested discourse and that which is divided along partisan lines. In the main these situations tend to reinforce attitudes already held by individuals and, if they were the only type of message being received, public opinion would not change substantially. There has to be another process which leads to some degree of contestation and change in attitude on the part of elite discourse which in turn is reflected in that of the wider population. Zaller (1992) identifies this process as a two-sided information flow that consists “of both a dominant message pushing much of public opinion in one direction, and a less intense, countervalent message that partly counteracts the effects of the dominant message” (p.183). These dominant and countervalent messages affect different sections of society in different ways. The extent to which this happens is dependent upon the level of political awareness and ideological position of individuals working in conjunction with the relative intensities of the messages.

While the results of mainstream and polarisation effects manifest over a relatively short period of time, the results of two-sided information flows become apparent after far more time has elapsed, perhaps years in many cases. This presents an enormous problem in attempting to ascertain whether the effect actually exists, since by the time a change in attitudes becomes apparent the factors that led to the change have already occurred and many of them may well have disappeared. Zaller (1992) maintains that the only issue that has the attributes that are able to confirm the existence of this effect and which have been recorded to a useable level is that of attitudes to the Vietnam war in the United States of America. The reasons he gives for the attractiveness of responses to this issue are:

- Rapid change in elite positions on the issues. Liberal opinion leaders overwhelmingly supported the war in 1964, but mainly opposed it in 1970. Conservative elites, by contrast, continued to support the war throughout the period of American involvement.

- Changes in the intensity of the dominant message. President Johnson made far more strenuous efforts to promote public support for the war after the increased
commitment of U.S. ground troops in 1965 than he had a year earlier, when he was in the midst of an election campaign.

Changes in the intensity of the countervalent message. The antiwar message was virtually non-existent in 1964 and was still hardly more than a whisper in 1966. By 1970 however, it was probably as intense, and perhaps more intense, than the prowar message.


Elite discourse during the period 1964 to 1970 went through an interesting change. In the early years news articles in magazines and stories in newspapers were very strongly in favour of pursuing the war in Vietnam. In 1964 there were approximately twice as many pro war items as there were anti war stories. In the subsequent years there was a steady increase in the number of anti war items, while for the first two years there was a sharp increase in pro war stories, there being four times as many pro as anti war items in 1966. After 1966 the number of pro war stories reduced at an accelerating rate until 1969 when the numbers were even. One year later there were twice as many anti war items as there were pro war stories. Hallin (1984) analysed the pro war and anti war statements contained in television news for this period. He found that “spokesmen for administration policy were heavily predominant during the early period, whereas after Tet there was relative parity between the administration and its critics” (Hallin 1984, p.9). The Tet offensive occurred in early 1968.

This pattern can not be analysed as either displaying mainstream or polarised information flows, except in 1969 when the discourse displayed a classic polarised information flow.

To come to an understanding of the ways in which these various levels of persuasive messaging affected attitudes it is useful to consider two loose groups most easily identifiable as hawks and doves. The hawks are those more inclined to support a military solution to international issues, while the doves are those more inclined to oppose the use of military force.
In the period from 1964 to 1966, politically aware doves were able to resist the very strong persuasive messages supporting the war partly because there was a low level of countervailing messaging occurring. These messages had the general effect of neutralising the pro war argument. In addition, in the case of the highly aware doves, it had the effect of encouraging these individuals to confound the national tendency by becoming even less supportive of the war.

This effect was highly identifiable because, while the pro war messages were increasing in intensity, so was the anti war discourse. Very early in this period, an application of the RAS model would lead to the prediction that only the highly politically aware doves would change their opinion from support to opposition, as there is only a low level of anti war discourse. As this begins to occur it is likely that some of these individuals are among the providers of elite discourse leading to an increase in anti war messages. As this level increases those doves with lower levels of awareness will begin to be affected by it. This process will continue until, eventually, the level of pro and anti war messaging will be at the same level. This will not necessarily lead to the polarisation effect, because just prior to this point the anti war messaging will begin to have an effect on those hawks with very low levels of political awareness who will change their allegiance to the anti war camp, thereby creating a pendulum effect. In the case of the Vietnam War this pendulum effect in conjunction with the power of the imagery being produced in Vietnam and shown on American television almost daily virtually turned the issue into one displaying mainstream effect. The only thing to stop this happening was the level of official support for the war that continued long after the majority feeling of the population was turning against it (see McWethy 1972, p.112).

Zaller (1992 p.202) shows how attitudes to the war changed between 1964 and 1970, basing his figures on data from the 1964, 1966, 1968 and 1970 CPS surveys. The attitudes of individuals identified as doves show a significant decline in support for the war from 1968 through to 1970, when support was around forty percent. Over the same time the attitudes of hawks to the war declined only slowly with a final level around sixty percent. While there is no data to support an assumption that the levels of support continued to decline, the fact that President Nixon took the United States out of the war in January 1973 (Koutsoukis 1992, p.356) would suggest that
that was the case as Nixon had worked hard for four years to bolster the position of administration in continuing the war. Nixon provides support for this possibility himself in his 1980 book *The Real War* he laments that

The public had been so misinformed and misled by unwise government actions and the shallow, inflammatory treatment of events by the media that morale within the United States collapsed just when the North [Vietnam] was overwhelmingly defeated on the battlefield (p.119).

**Summary**

In this chapter the notion of just what public opinion is and how it is changed has been examined. To enable this to happen a discussion of attitude and its relationship to what is commonly referred to as public opinion was entered. It was pointed out that attitudes that may be expressed by the individual are only partly dependent on her more stable and deep seated opinions, rather they are often the result of recently received persuasive messages that gain some salience at that time and are used as a basis for the expression of that attitude.

A wide range of cognitive theories of attitude change was examined. Most of these relied on the principle that an individual adopts attitudes that are consistent with existing predispositions. This may occur as result of psychological discomfort that is generated when new information is received that contradicts existing predispositions. The individual will inevitably take action in regard to the attitude that leads to a situation where this discomfort is eliminated. This may be achieved through adapting the attitudes associated with the contradicted predisposition or by locating information that enables the rejection of the new information, thus eliminating the discomfort caused.

All of the cognitive theories of attitude change were shown to have shortcomings that render them relatively inefficient in coming to an understanding of how individuals react to persuasive messages in the more tangible world of political debate rather than in that of theory. The political arena is the vital area of research in relation to attitude change as this area is the only one in which public opinion actually occurs. Attitudes that are not concerned with the way in which the society that the individual inhabits must be concerned with personal matters which over a
short period of time must transfer into the realm of knowledge or become unimportant to that individual.

To find a workable process of understanding the ways in which attitudes change, the RAS (Receive-Accept-Sample) model of attitude change was examined in detail and offered as the means to provide a framework to be used in analysing the ways in which the deep seated public opinion of Australian society was reached. To confirm the validity of the RAS model various configurations of persuasive messaging were examined in relation to the RAS model. These configurations represent all possible permutations of viewpoints that can be presented by elite discourse. Elite discourse is the term used to define the originating points of the information that individuals receive to base their attitudes and opinions on. This examination shows that the RAS model is effective in dealing with elite discourse and has the ability to predict the way in which public opinion will develop in response to it.

Having formulated a model that is demonstrated to be efficient in the analysis of elite discourse and the attitudinal response to it the next step is to apply the model to Australian society. In the next chapter the make up of Australian promulgators of elite discourse will be examined with the intention of using this information to enable an understanding of the way in which Australian social culture has developed. This understanding will be vital in understanding the way in which public opinion guides the ways in which individuals make decisions about how they interact with the wider society.
CHAPTER SIX
Elite Discourse and the Media

Introduction

In the previous chapter it was shown how an individual’s attitudes and opinions come to change. The common thread in all the different approaches to explaining this phenomenon was the dependence on the provision of information from various sources. The vast majority of these sources combine to produce the range of communications that Zaller (1992) has dubbed ‘elite discourse’. The most common manifestation of elite discourse is based in the section of the mass media which deals with news and current affairs with individuals involved in the production of this elite discourse not being confined to employment within that industry. This group also includes those who actually generate the issues that are discussed in the media: the politicians, activists, commentators and leaders of community groups and organisations such as trade unions and churches.

To enable the study of the current status of public opinion within Australia it is clearly necessary to identify the individuals, and their socio-political grounding, who have been the main contributors to elite discourse in Australia since it developed into a society that could be recognised as a nation. To gain an understanding of how Australia’s public opinion has developed to the point it has now reached, an analysis will be made of the nature of the reporting of events by and the ownership and ideological background of the country’s media.

Who owns Australia’s Media?

The importance of some parts of the media industry and their potential for the holding of power is recognised by Australia’s Federal Government in that there are legal restrictions to the proportion of the media that can be owned by one individual or organisation. The sections of the media that are regulated in this way are newspapers television and radio. Book publishing is not regulated in any way, while the film industry is only regulated in a de facto manner through financial and taxation subsidies that are only available to Australian companies.
The desire of certain individuals to own large proportions of Australia’s media is not a recent phenomenon. The current media ownership scene has its origins in the Melbourne of the 1920s and the desire for power and influence held by the main players. A history, from 1921 to 1982 of the players and events that have shaped the current media landscape since the commencement of this commercial struggle shortly after the First World War is provided in Appendix 2. The details of this history provide the background for the discussion of media ownership that follows.

In 1983 the newly elected leader, Robert (Bob) Hawke, led the Australian Labor Party to an electoral victory that would have wide-ranging implications for media ownership. As the majority of the Australian media had historically been hostile to the Australian Labor Party, the Government was not particularly interested in applying regulations which would have protected many of the media companies in the years that followed. At this time, media empires had become large enough to wield great power; a power that was actively pursued by various individuals leading to what has become known as the great media carve up. The significant starting point of this process was Rupert Murdoch’s acquisition of Herald and Weekly Times Ltd. “The Hawke Labour Government watched expectantly, eager to see the outcome of its plan to enfeeble perceived enemies and strengthen mates (Brady 1989, p.1).

While there is a common reference to the media carve up as occurring in the late 1980s, the reality is it is still going on at a more leisurely pace with Conrad Black, only now, in the late 1990s, making changes to his controlling holding in Fairfax. Along the way enormous fortunes have been made and lost with some of the losers still in jail while others are in self-imposed exile attempting to avoid the legal consequences of the financial excesses entered into to acquire a part of the Australian media. The perceived prize was not merely control of business empires but also power within the nation. Of the many that entered the race, there are only a few prize-winners and these do wield great power, arguably having the ability to affect the implementation of public policy and even legislation.

The extent of the concern about the power held by media proprietors is reflected in the fact that a select committee of the House of Representatives convened to inquire into the print media. One of the items for investigation was editorial independence,
including the role of proprietors. It was never a secret that Rupert Murdoch used his  
*The Australian* to mount a campaign against Gough Whitlam in 1975 (Ward 1995,  
p.142) leading to strike action by the journalists who objected to being manipulated  
in this way (Chadwick 1989, p.xxxvi). Curiously, a majority of the Select  
Committee “considered that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the  
current high level of concentration in the Australian print media has resulted in  
biased reporting, news suppression or lack of diversity” (House of Representatives  
Select Committee on the Print Media, 1992, p.290). The most likely source of this  
negative evidence could be expected to have emanated from the editor in Chief of  
*The Australian*, Paul Kelly. Kelly told the committee that “he had never received as  
much as a hint of a directive to adopt a particular stance from the paper’s owner”  
(Ward 1995, p.142). Ward goes on to suggest that:

> Sceptics would argue that he rarely has to hint, and the intervention of owners  
in shaping the editorial stance of their news outlets is normally subtle rather than  
direct and blunt (Ward 1995, p. 142).

Indeed the evidence given to the select committee suggests that the experience of  
1975 and the quoted example of the removal of a magazine editor by Kerry Packer  
has led to the belief that this kind of direct intervention by proprietors is likely to  
attract bad publicity for them (House of Representatives Select Committee on the  
Print Media, 1992, p.245). This negative perception is seen as likely to both affect  
the credibility of the proprietor and the profitability of the company. Both of these  
outcomes would be seen as situations to be avoided if at all possible as they  
represent the antithesis of the objectives of these proprietors.

The power of the media to affect public policy is clearly demonstrated by the  
publication of a photograph of a boy alleged to be twelve years old being assisted to  
inject heroin close to a needle exchange vehicle. The immediate result of this was  
the suspension of that needle exchange facility (*The West Australian*, 1 Feb 1999,  
p.32). This in spite of statements from the Health Minister maintaining support for  
the needle exchange program. As there was an election due in the near future it is  
clear that the minister was acting in line with the perceived need to appear to be  
taking positive action against the proliferation of illicit drugs in society. What  
actually occurred was that the issue as presented by the newspaper led to policy
being enacted that did not have any positive effect on the problem but had the benefit of addressing the uninformed, hard line arguments of a very vocal minority that had the potential to cost the Government votes.

Media owners stand to benefit from the wielding of power in this way, not by holding demonstrable political power but by increasing revenue through the generation of a highly emotional issue and being able to claim that policy (or better still, legislation) had been changed as a result of the publicity. In the terms of public opinion, the elite discourse relating to this situation can be expected to lead the public opinion of those individuals who have a relatively low political awareness of the harm minimisation aspects of the policies dealing with illicit drugs. The photograph represents a highly credible source of information, while the text accompanying it locating the needle exchange facility close to the scene combines to create a discourse that establishes a causal relationship between the two. The combination of the relatively low awareness concerning the relevant issues and the credibility of the source are highly likely to develop an attitude that will be strongly expressed leading to pressure to change policy or legislation in response.

**The Socio-Political Background of Elite Discourse**

Ownership of elite discourse overtly bestows the power to increase revenue by the shaping of public opinion. In itself this is not likely to be contentious as within the capitalist system it is accepted that the holders of capital will act intentionally to increase revenue and profitability. However, there is a more subtle way in which the power of media ownership exerts control over the development and change of public opinion. It is one that goes well beyond the subtle ways in which a proprietor’s acknowledged views are likely to be reflected in the manner in which the news is reported (Ward 1995, p.142) but is very difficult to identify as a tangible occurrence. The culture, ideology and philosophy of those that hold power tend to be accepted across all levels of society through the process of hegemony. In western capitalist society most power is held by the owners of capital, resulting in the culture of that group becoming dominant and the one that is seen as the ideal to be aspired to.

Media proprietors make up a very small group of people and despite their influence do not provide the vast bulk of elite discourse. This discourse is generated by
individuals employed at various levels within the media industry and in those spheres to which the media has access to acquire further material required to produce their output. One of the results of the process of hegemony is that, except in very few extreme cases, the individuals involved in elite discourse will have adopted the dominant culture of the society and the way that they go about their work will reflect this. The result of this is that elite discourse will have a very strong tendency to support the social status quo in which the distribution of power, wealth and privilege is heavily weighted towards an elite from which much of elite discourse emanates.

In an attempt to explain this process of social and cultural reproduction the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1971) developed his concept of ideological hegemony, which has since become referred to simply as ‘hegemony’. His concern was with “how the ruling class maintains its dominance by achieving a popular consensus mediated through the various institutions of civil society, including the schools, the mass media, the law, religion and popular culture (Codd, 1984, p.11). Gramsci’s theoretical approach to this phenomenon is complex but vitally important to understanding how elite discourse is shaped and consequently affects public opinion. A very useful description of the concept of ideological hegemony was devised by Carl Boggs (1976, p.39):

By hegemony Gramsci meant the permeation throughout civil society - including a whole range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools, the churches and family - of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc. that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an ‘organising principle’, or world-view (or combination of such world-views), that is diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialization into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the broad masses, it becomes part of ‘common sense’; as all ruling elites seek to perpetuate their power, wealth and status, they necessarily attempt to popularize their own philosophy, culture morality, etc. And render them unchallengeable, part of the natural order if things.

This view of the way in which dominant culture becomes accepted as normal is vital to the understanding of how public opinion is developed in Australia and will be frequently revisited in examining the various issues that have shaped Australian
culture. The significance of this process to Australia can be argued to be especially great due to the various ways in which the cultures of newly arrived and pre-existing Australians have for various reasons been pre-defined as ‘wrong’.

Common Sense

At this point it is probably useful to divert slightly and follow Gramsci’s thoughts on hegemony and how it relates to what we call ‘common sense’. Common sense is a concept that does not appear to any significant degree in the literature concerned with public opinion although it must either be a vital contributor to or consequence of it. A very likely reason for this apparently strange situation is that common sense is so inextricably bound up in opinion, both public and individual. The individual will cite common sense as a significant reason for holding a particular attitude or opinion which in turn is likely to be perceived as the result of common sense. To try to follow this further would simply end in a tortuous path, probably leading to our starting point, but what is important is to attempt to identify something of the nature of common sense itself.

Analytical philosophy has attempted to provide a means of moving further along this path. Pring (1976, p76) defines common sense as ‘that range of beliefs which people share and hold in an unquestioning sort of way, and which provide a basic view of the world, of their position within the world, and of how they ought to act’. While this perspective may appear to be highly reasonable it makes no consideration of where these beliefs came from. On occasion, from the analytic point of view, common sense is seen as being associated with muddled thinking and the tyranny of custom which may call them into doubt, creating a requirement that philosophy can fulfil by reducing them to the Socratic questions of ‘What do you mean?’ and ‘How do you know?’ (see Codd 1985, pp8-9).

However, this same approach to philosophy leads to the acceptance of the importance of the application of common sense thought in practice as it:

may legitimately object to being superseded when specialized thinking makes an unjustified claim to deal more effectively with a subject: unjustified, because specialized verdicts have to be modified, as a rule, to be useful in the general field of experience, and it is the task of commonsense to do this, and to judge
what weight to assign to the various kinds of relevant specialized knowledge. Because commonsense thought is concerned with experience lying outside the specialized area, it is justified not only in modifying but even on occasion overruling expert knowledge. Thus the politician overrules the general, the businessman the architect, or the teacher the psychologist (Perry 1965, p.128). What is glaringly absent from this point of view is the possibility of common sense thinking being distorted by the context and situation of the issue under consideration, that is, it brings with it a subjectivity that may well lead to distorted conclusions. This illustrates very well the shortcomings of traditional philosophical approaches to understanding common sense. They are grounded in the belief that the pursuit of theory must be divorced from practical affairs. Bernstein (1976) describes this position thus:

Thinkers who are at variance on almost every other issue take the defense of this ideal as virtually synonymous with a defense of the free, self-corrective, open inquiry which is subject only to the critical norms of intersubjective discourse (p.173).

As common sense operates exclusively in the realm of practice, traditional philosophy attempts to distance itself from it in an attempt to maintain its independence from the demands of the real world in which people live experiencing the reality of practice. Philosophers aligned with the critical theory view of the world, however, are committed to consideration of the relationship between theory and practice.

The philosophy expounded by Gramsci in his consideration of common sense is firmly grounded in the critical theory tradition. He maintains that common sense knowledge is shaped by the process of the hegemony of the power holding elite: “Thus common-sense knowledge structures mass consciousness in ways that mask and mystify the existing power relations and social arrangements” (Codd 1984, p.12). To illustrate the implications of this the recent waterfront dispute between the stevedoring company Patricks, the Federal Government and the Maritime Union of Australia provides an excellent example. The initial act was a decision made by management, encouraged by a government with a particular philosophical path to follow, that fewer workers with lower rates of pay and conditions should perform the
work of the company. This decision was based exclusively on a complex set of economic and industrial factors viewed from the point of view of capital interests only. The union workforce were blamed for this radical action by an appeal to the common sense belief that high wages and ‘union bully boy tactics’ led to a productivity that was below a minimal level. The reasoning of this argument appeals to common sense and gains wide popular assent, drawing attention away from its two most important, and persistent, features. The first of these is that this kind of reasoning is always inconsistent with the historical context of the dispute, the second is that the reasoning is always explained by members of the dominant class (Patrick’s Chief Executive, Mr Corrigan, and the Minister for Workplace Relations) using the experiences, world view and interests of the subordinate groups. The rhetoric featured a heavy reliance on terms such as ‘the national interest’, ‘the inequities of the privileged waterfront worker compared with other workers’, ‘the harsh realities of widespread unemployment’, and ‘the undemocratic nature of compulsory unionism’ (see Codd 1984,p.12).

In this instance the hegemony was successful to the extent that it defined the meaning and limits of these pronouncements. These often-repeated statements were generally accepted in public opinion, the failure of Patricks and the Government to dismiss their workforce with the support of public opinion was caused by their overtly aggressive tactic. Most people, apparently including the workers and their union, generally accepted the basic assertion that began the dispute. To this extent the process of hegemony of common sense continued unchecked, even in this highly contested arena. This is in spite of the existence of powerful evidence to show that the work rates demanded were not achievable due to factors beyond any party’s control (Gouch 1998)

**Late Twentieth Century Elite Discourse**

There were two significantly relevant occurrences in Australia at the end of the third quarter of the Twentieth Century: one domestic and one international. In 1972 the first ALP Government for twenty-three years was elected. At the same time the nations that made up the Organisation of Oil Exporting Nations (OPEC) came to the realisation that the western world was purchasing their oil for a price that was far too low. Their response was to increase the price to a commercially reasonable level
with the effect of throwing economies that depended on unjustifiably low energy prices into confusion, causing serious inflation and its associated problems.

The election of the Whitlam administration was not just a change in government, it represented the manifestation of a social change that had swept the western world over the previous fifteen years. During the Second World War the federal government had been strengthened, by gaining control over income tax, at the expense of the states (Lawrence, Eshuys & Guest 1986, p.360). The implication of this was that it was the Federal Government that set the direction for the nation. The first ten years after the war was a period of rebuilding and very fast growth. Towards the end of this period the comfortable economic situation combined with a split within the ALP led to the prolonged conservative government led by Robert Menzies and subsequently like minded members of his ministry. At this time, a very powerful social reaction began to emerge, to what appeared to be a complacent conservative social environment, particularly among those who had been born during or after the war. In Australia the difficulties within the ALP meant that the demand for socially liberal change was ignored for an artificially extended period.

When The Whitlam Government (Labor) gained power there was, what to many appeared to be, an unseemly rush to enact change. While this change was apparently supported by the majority of Australians, as is suggested by the fact that the Government was re-elected after some sixteen months, it caused alarm among those who perceived that these changes could adversely affect them. Those most likely to see the changes as a danger are those who had been benefiting most from the strong economic growth of the post war period and those who were aligned with the extreme anti-communist rhetoric of the cold war. These two groups of people are most likely to include a very large proportion of those who provide elite discourse. This is reflected in the fact that one of the possible triggers to the Governor General, John Kerr, eventually dismissing the Government was his concern about the strong campaign being run in the press, particularly Murdoch’s papers, to sack the Government. Gough Whitlam made the comment:

"There have been those long months of conditioning by the political, the business and media interests who have never been prepared to accept the legitimacy of an Australian Labor Government. Now we are seeing a fresh phase in this
exercise. Now we have the headlines WILL SIR JOHN KERR ACT? And FRASER SAYS KERR MUST SACK PM. Where will this intimidation stop?
(Quoted by Chadwick 1989, p.xxxvi)

The economic fall out from the oil prices increases on 1973 and 1974 was also used by these same people, identified by Gough Whitlam, to destabilise the Government. All over the world governments were having difficulties dealing with high inflation and its attendant unemployment. While Australia was no exception the remedies that were being put in place by 1975 were likely to have been effective (Horne 1976, p.59). Unfortunately these were in line with the Keynesian principles which had been in vogue since they were used to begin the turnaround in the wake of the depression of the 1930s. It was unfortunate because this economic crisis was seen as an opportunity, by the owners of capital, to return to the laissez faire approach to economics which was considered to be of greater advantage to their capital holding. Again this was a worldwide phenomenon that gained such strength that its proponents have been given their own name: The New Right

*The New Right*

In reality the "New" right is not a recent phenomenon. It has its origins in the waxing and waning of the power of organised labour in America, since the end of the first World War and the corresponding responses from the major purchasers of that labour; the large corporations, which had grown in number to be in excess of six hundred at that time. In spite of this the ideas that have been adopted by this group appear to represent a development of common-sense opinion of a large proportion of the country's population. An understanding of how this has come to pass is essential to gaining a wider knowledge of the aims of the New Right.

When The United States entered World War I in 1917 one of the first things that happened was the foundation of a national propaganda mechanism with the express intention of uniting what was a divided nation by engendering fear and hatred of the enemy. The American corporations were impressed by the display of power over large numbers of people that propaganda displayed. With this in mind "American industry sought 'to mould public attitudes.' 'Every conceivable medium through which the public might be reached' was used" (Carey 1987, p.5).
The initial attempt at moulding public perception of business was made by Samuel Insull, the head of a utilities empire who took over the whole of the hierarchy of the national propaganda service in Illinois. With the expertise of this organisation Insull set about promoting the perception of private utilities while down playing the purpose of public ownership or regulation. This strategy was extremely effective in creating the desired perceptions, but could not prevent the demise of Insull's empire. The collapse prompted a Federal inquiry that exposed the enormous propaganda machinery and its effectiveness, but significantly took no action to control any similar organisations that may appear, probably as a result of the very effectiveness of the propaganda.

Other propaganda workers offered their skills to business with the intention of overcoming the problems being caused by democracy. Democracy and industrial corporations are concerned with the wielding of power; democracy is concerned with spreading power over as wide a range of people as possible, whereas corporations are concerned with concentrating power and control in the hands of a very limited number of corporate executives. Quite clearly the two are incompatible and when one gains ascendancy the other suffers. It was with this understanding that the propaganda units of corporations were put into action. It was not enough simply to show that corporations should be allowed to hold power and control, so as to enable them to maintain profitability, as the trade off was democracy, something that was fundamental to the whole ethos of the society of the time. What had to be created was a perception that democracy was being maintained, or even broadened, while at the same time power was being transferred to the corporations.

This became an important objective for the corporations directly after World War I as the propaganda that had been used by the Wilson Government was idealistic, as a result of which "people tend[ed] to expect changes towards the democratic, egalitarian society they ha[d], according to wartime rhetoric, been fighting for "(Carey 1987, p.6). There was a very strong expectation that the lot of the ordinary worker would be improved and the gains the labour movement had made during the war would be consolidated. This, of course, was contrary to the objectives of the corporations with the result that in 1919 there were more strikes than ever before. In the steel industry, where working conditions were unthinkable by present day...
standards, including an eighty-four hour working week for many, the labour movement's action was lost, in spite of considerable public support. The companies employed propaganda to accuse unionists of being radicals, Bolsheviks and of demanding the iniquitous closed shop, none of which were actually true. To achieve this perception steel companies bought large quantities of newspaper space to rally patriotic Americans against the anarchists working for a communist revolution who were leading the workers' struggles.

This propaganda was so successful that the industrial climate was balanced strongly in favour of the corporations for the following ten years until the onset of the Great Depression. This again brought the image of the corporations into disrepute and again the power of propaganda was enlisted. The efficacy of propaganda was not sufficient to completely turn attitudes towards business in the light of the continuing depression but over the period significant progress was made and set the scene for the renewed struggles following World War II. This led to a public opinion climate that enabled anti-union legislation to be enacted in 1947. This process has continued to the present, with a major propaganda campaign following from any political occurrence that has led to improvements in the democratic and social rights of working people. This process was visible in its early stages when the newly elected President Clinton experienced major problems in having legislation passed, in both Congress and the Senate, that would enable him to fulfil his election promises - the very things he was democratically elected to do!

Much of this propaganda has emanated from organisations that have been specifically set up to mould public opinion in favour of the needs of business, and their effectiveness may be witnessed by the rise of extreme right wing politics in many capitalist Western Countries and the regimes they support in the third world. Margaret Thatcher's celebrated comment that 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families' illustrates very clearly the minimalist approach that governments are expected to have in relation to the workings of the free market system that is so beneficial to the multi-national corporations. This approach demands an economic system that excludes, as far as possible, the involvement of government in any area which may impinge on the workings of the market, that is, terms of trade, regulation of working conditions for employees, regulation of impact
of business on the environment and the provision of services that could be provided by the private sector. Overall this represents a laissez faire, approach to economics which leaves governments with responsibility for maintaining local and international security: police and armed forces.

The New Right proper has its origins in the collaboration of American economists and political philosophers such as Hayek and Friedman (Marginson 1993, p35). However, it has transferred very effectively to the United Kingdom where the Conservative Thatcher Government tried very hard to impose the economic approach described above with the enforced sale of public utilities and companies. These went to the extremes of ensuring commercial benefit to commerce by undervaluation of stock:

> Telecom's real value was grossly understated. It became a bargain that was hard to resist. The shares were issued at 50p but quickly rose to 95p. In fact, on the day the issue closed the British taxpayer had lost £2.7 billion. Naturally, ninety percent of employees took up their preferential share-entitlement but the initial three million shareholders quickly fell to 1,750,000 … Employees now own less than five percent of the total shares while eighty-seven percent are owned by only 3,600 shareholders, mainly large companies and institutions (Taft 1987, p.33).

It is clear that the New Right policies of the Thatcher Government were very much in line with the objectives that the American corporations' propaganda machines had been working towards for most of this Century. The fact that President Reagan and Margaret Thatcher had much mutual admiration is not without significance and similarly free market supportive decisions were being taken in America at that time (Green 1987, p.71).

At the time of the ascendancy of the New Right in Northern hemisphere capitalist democracies, Australia was coming to the end of a long period (with a short interlude in the 1970s) of conservative government that clearly showed that liberal conservatism did not have the answers to the financial problems caused by OPEC’s oil price increases. This and the fall of conservative governments around the country led to an explosion of interest in the rhetoric of the New Right with organisations
being founded to further its aims, it is not difficult to predict where the principles would be learnt:

"… the most significant manifestations of the New Right have been in the United States, and that the cultural dominance of America in the Western world means that an Australian New Right is most likely to take its inspiration from there (Altman 1987, p.21).

John Button (1987) suggests that while a political party is in power it is so constrained by the necessities of the day that it is unable to delve too deeply into the ideological extremes of its political hinterland, but when in opposition ideological phantasies can flow free. This was the position of the Liberal party in the early 1980s. With no glowing history to grasp (it was, after all, the failings of the Fraser government that led to their role as opposition) there was a need for policies that would provide an alternative to the Labor Government which had stolen much of the Liberal Party's traditional platform. The Labor Government, in spite of its name, had become another conservative political entity, albeit one that would be derided as "wet" by the mainstream conservative parties of the day. The answer came from recent experience in England and America where half a century's propaganda had provided the environment for governments devoted to furthering the needs of commerce with a belief that if the private sector is highly profitable the rest of the economy will follow behind and make similar gains. This belief is based on the economic principles espoused by Adam Smith (Green 1987, pp.25-28), although Smith had concerns about the behaviour of self interested traders that appear to have been conveniently forgotten by the New Right. It was at this time that terms such as 'privatisation', 'deregulation', 'freedom of choice' and 'the market' came into common political usage. That some of the mainstays of New Right policy were taken up by the Labor Government should not be surprising when so many Economic Rationalist (see below for links between economic rationalism and the New Right) are represented amongst the Commonwealth Senior Executive Service, which provided support and advice to ministers, is considered (Pusey, 1991).

The purpose of the adherents of the New Right is to bring about social change. The objective is to significantly transform the way we understand society and the way it relates to government. To be able to do this it is necessary to organise the
development of policy and to create the right environment to have that policy implemented. The Liberal party had too many members who did not entirely agree with the aims of the New Right (cf. the wets and dries debate of the middle and late 1980s), and there were many exponents of New Right economics who were not directly involved in political parties. For these reasons a number of organisations were set up to provide research that would support the aims of the New Right and disseminate propaganda about their work. The organisations that have been set up or adapted to fulfil this role are collectively known as 'think tanks', of which there are over a dozen although active membership of them appears to be fairly limited:

the same names appear in the executive or council lists of bodies associated with it [the New Right]. They are often captains of industry, academics dependent on them or ex-conservative politicians who have retired or lost office. Many appear to be directly connected with the mining industry (Moore & Carpenter 1987, p.145).

A significant proportion of the names that appear also have close links with the Liberal Party.

Some of the names of these 'think tanks' have become commonplace and their commentaries are even used without comment in the news media when discussing economic topics. The Institute of Public Affairs has the longest history but has modified its role in recent times, it publishes the *IPA Review* with a circulation of 22,500 covering the issues of government spending, union power and the politics of the mass media as does the pamphlet, *Facts* with a circulation of 58,000. In addition the IPA sponsors lecture tours by American And British New Right figures. It is not uncommon to see the IPA cited unquestioningly in the news media. In a major editorial in the Northern Territory News concerning the control of National Parks, Frank Alcorta (1991) disparaged the Territory Environment Centre and its link to the Australian Conservation Foundation, associating them with communist and other left wing organisations using statements from the IPA to give credence to his claims, but at no time explaining what the IPA actually is. The IPA’s concerns about the environmental movement surfaced again in the West Australian some eight years later in an article entitled “Red radicals find fertile ground in green causes” (Nathan & Warby 1999). It is noted at the end of the article that Mike Nathan is the
executive director of the IPA and Michael Warby is the editor if the IPA Review, again no comment as to the nature of the IPA is made. The same newspaper consistently points out that the Evatt Foundation is a Labor Party research organisation. Even the name 'Institute of Public Affairs' has the feeling of an official government title lending an air of the infallibility of authority.

The National Institute of Labour Studies is another official sounding organisation that is often quoted in the media. The objective of the NILS is the total deregulation of the labour market including the abolition of all safeguards for workers. In the same vein is the well known (but not known about) HR Nichols Society the stated aim of which is the destruction of the Arbitration Commission. However, some observers consider the "longer-term objective of the Society and its allies is the abolition of the trade union movement, and a return to a version of nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism" (Moore & Carpenter 1987, p155).

What all New Right think tanks and organisations have in common is a wish to implement an economic regime that has as small a role as possible for governments except in the provision of national and international security. These small governments would impose minimal regulations in relation to workers rights and controls governing environmental preservation. Any policy that will further the profitability and power of industrial and commercial corporations are encouraged with the contention that all members of society will benefit from the flow-on from this success.

At the same time as this call for governments to exit the service provision arena there is an expressed requirement for the residual centralised bureaucracy to increase the amount of control they wield. The reasoning behind this is that the controls that the bureaucracies hold are ones that encourage the development of a social climate that is supportive of their economic aims:

What they [the New Right] are about is producing an amalgam of neo-conservatism (ie., emphasising discipline, deference, hierarchy and the authority of so-called traditional values) and neo-liberalism (which emphasizes individual freedom within an unfettered market economy). (Smyth 1993, p.4)
The power of the New Right propaganda lies in its claim of social factors which hold up all that has been considered to be right and fitting in Western society: the rights of the individual, freedom of choice, the right to be unencumbered by governmental charges, the absence of the need to take responsibility for that which is beyond individual control and so on.

It would be easy to expect that the weight of propaganda that has been brought to bear on Western society would be enough to totally convince its members of the value of the ideas being advanced. However, there is sufficient dissent from this point of view in most European nations and those countries that share a later European colonial heritage to provide a viable alternative ideology. This dissent has its origins in support for Marxist political organisations that have maintained a small but significant presence in the political systems of these countries and an allegiance to the aims of the socio-political revolutions of nations such as France. The contrary views expressed by these groups form an alternative to the propaganda of the New Right that in turn forms a basis for an argued opposition to the principles of corporate power and minimalist government involvement in the provision of social services. It is from this point of view that this critique is produced.

Postmodernism and the New Right

Postmodernism is gaining increasing credence as a description of the developing world social condition and as such is attracting much attention from academics and those who, rightly or wrongly, see in it a means of furthering their own cause. As a result of this there are many views of postmodernism all of which hold a rightful place in the debate. As a by-product of the postmodernist debate, certain groups have been able to make use of the varying descriptions and to attach their own aims to the postmodern. This is particularly true of one of the earlier descriptions of postmodernism which has ended up as a description of a late capitalism that operates on a world wide stage and appears to have little concern for the rights and aspirations of the individual. A description of this version of postmodernism appears in the second chapter of this study. There are clear links between the claims and objectives of the New Right and the claims being made for this version of the postmodern. Many of the results of applying the rhetoric of the New Right create situations that
appear very much like those described by this version of the postmodern and as a result this description becomes available as a justification for the actions.

There follows a brief discussion of rationality and the existence of multiple rationalities, which taken in the context of a wider understanding of the postmodern are shown to be no longer important, while New Right rhetoric is heavily dependent on one dominant rationality. The purpose is to illustrate how the New Right have been able to subvert current social investigation to further the objectives of its proponents. It is not within the scope of this paper to make a detailed analysis of the full breadth of postmodernism, rather to allude to a restricted understanding that has been used to justify the continuation of principles from an earlier age.

**Rationality**

It is evident that there is a very clear link between the picture painted of postmodernism and the dominant paradigm of economics that has directed the development of Western capitalism over the last ten to fifteen years, that is, the economic rationalism of New Right rhetoric. The insistence that Governments and social planners should leave the economic arena to allow the "market" to operate without hindrance, from which state it will generate the wealth necessary to both reduce the need for welfare expenditure, by creating economic growth that will generate full employment and by creating sufficient wealth to cater for the remaining needs. The basic tenet of economic rationalism is “...founded upon a ... view of the human being, as an isolated and rational creature determined solely upon its own well being” (Manne 1992, p.4), which has obvious parallels in postmodern theory.

Because economic rationalism has been in the Australian public eye consistently over recent years it appears to exist in its own right. Sofia (1993, p.17-18) argues that rationality has underpinned our understanding of knowledge and that certain types of rationality have become dominant with the result that others come to be seen as irrational. How can this be, when to be rational is to conform to common sensical perspectives of the world? Sofia maintains that the answer to this lies in the way in which the hegemony of a rationality that becomes dominant elevates that rationality and subjugates all others. She goes on to argue that the rationality that has become dominant in Western capitalist culture is one of a particular male
perspective which has the added interest in maintaining the hegemony as there is no other reason for its continued dominance.

Once it can be shown that it is possible for there to be more than one rationalism it becomes viable to accept that there may be more than one 'true' way of understanding the world and further that those understandings, or knowledges, of the world that emanate from the irrational perspectives may have a greater value because they include an understanding of the ways in which domination and subjugation operate, as these are an important part of their world. The Western dominant paradigm of rationality is not able to have this knowledge because an important aspect of it is its self imposed objectivity, that has been described as "the god trick of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively" (Haraway 1988,p.578).

Once it is seen as possible to have more than one rational knowledge and that these alternative rational views have been subjugated by a dominant rationality, essential critical questions are posed about the validity of its own rationality, for:

...if canonical reasoning and unsituated objectivity [the bases of Western dominant rationality] are related to projects of domination, does not that imply the presence within 'rationality' of a non-rational desire to dominate? (Sofia 1993, p.23)

This poses serious questions for the acceptance of rationality as a tenet of any theory of knowledge, history or society, particularly when that rationality is one that is dominant. It is possible to show that ideologies of the New Right are based on dominant rationalist principles that not only cloud their starting points in the subjugation of a significant proportion of the people they purport to represent but also go on to subjugate even more with the implications of the tendencies that are seen as important aspects of them. This phenomenon can be argued to have a place in some descriptions of the postmodern condition while others argue that the postmodern is heralded by an end of rationality as a dominant paradigm. Whichever view is taken it must be accepted that rationality as a principle is still being maintained as a justification for a particular course of political action; to be aware of another nature of rationality allows for an alternative view which can be effectively used to analyse policy without the encumbrance of being committed to rationality as a necessary component of social development.

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Privatisation

An essential element of the philosophy of the New Right, of rationalism and of postmodernism is the need for governments to relinquish responsibility for any service that could be provided by the private sector. Traditionally Australian governments and most of the people they represent have seen it as appropriate to provide certain services to the community. Services ranging from water supply and sewerage to an international airline have been provided, with the means of financing them being almost as varied. Some services, including social services such as welfare and education, have been financed almost entirely from the governments' budgets. Others, such as the telephone service, have operated on a commercial basis and have returned money to the Government in the form of a levy on profits, rather like the dividend shareholders receive from profitable companies. All these, the New Right would have provided by private corporations or, if this is not possible drastically reduced in size.

Governments have historically provided what, at the time, have been seen to be services essential to the country. Public health concerns gave rise to publicly owned water supply and sewerage systems while general health concerns prompted the provision of, at least, a basic health care system, payed for out of taxation. At different points in history there have been different priorities and the economic climate of those times have enabled governments to establish state owned services. Ball (1990, p.77) describes this process thus:

> In times of economic growth, high employment and full use of productive capacity, taxation from the profits of capital enables the state to develop welfare services and satisfy demand for increases in the standard of living of workers.

However, it is not simply a capacity to improve the standard of living; there are political considerations made when establishing what amounts to a state monopoly. If we take the telephone service in Australia as an example, it could easily be argued that a private organisation could have developed the system. The political view would be that although this would be preferable there would be no guarantee that the service would be made available to the whole nation as it is clear that to extend a service outside the most densely populated areas of the South Eastern corner of the
country would be highly unprofitable. In the first instance a social view is taken that the service should be universally available and where this is uneconomic it should be subsidised from government revenue. Once the system is established the economics would change allowing the revenue of the telephone system to subsidise the uneconomic but socially desirable sectors.

The rhetoric of the New Right and associated economic rationalists maintains that publicly owned services distort the market and prevent it from operating at its most efficient level. The reason given for this is that market forces depend on competition to create the maximum efficiency that is required for profitability. In the first instance the call has been for the privatisation or 'selling-off' of profitable sections of public services. For example there has been a recent call for Australia Post's profitable letter delivery service to be opened up for competition with the curious demand that new competitors have access to Australia Post's capital intensive sorting equipment. Rather than a desire for market forces in the postal service this appears to be an envious wish for a part of the action without the necessity of capital investment, particularly if the loss of this profit to Australia Post could mean the inability to continue other socially (and commercially) desirable services that are subsidised by it.

This is a manifestation of a process that began in the mid-1970s when the economic base of various countries began to change dramatically with a major decline in economic growth, high inflation and increasing unemployment. The effects of these factors was to reduce taxation revenue due to reduced profit which in turn led to pressure to reduce business taxation to improve profitability, resulting in a further reduction of state revenue. There was also pressure for the state to take over responsibility for costs involved in reproduction: training, infrastructure, establishment of new manufacturing plant, research and development costs. The results of these moves were far reaching:

Reductions in expenditure and investment by both state and capital led to further increases in unemployment. And there was pressure from capital for access to profitable areas of state-provision - privatisation expanding the logic of commodity circulation (Ball 1990, p.78).
This pragmatic approach has now come into disrepute with the New Right; not without good cause when the lack of success these policies have met with are considered. What this approach should be replaced with, the New Right argues, is deregulation of all markets allowing any player to enter and compete in any sector. The New Right "urges the government to deregulate the product and labour markets, eliminate government-imposed barriers and cut taxation" (Green 1987, p. 198).

The "product and labour markets" include the provision of education and public education and these are squarely in the sights for deregulation and privatisation. In this discussion there have been descriptions of privatisation that have had different characteristics. This is a problem with the general discussion where the term "privatisation" has been used as a general term when in fact there are a number of phenomena that it is used to describe (Kenway, Bigum and Fitzclarence 1992, pp.7-8). To illustrate this, education can be used as an example. There are a number of ways in which privatisation may be, and in some cases is being, applied to education. To clarify the different modes of privatisation the following is drawn from Kenway, Bigum and Fitzclarence (1992, p.8):


1. **Denationalisation and load shedding** which involves 'the sale of public assets and the transfer of existing state functions to the private sector (p.33). In education this involves the sale of land, buildings and plant which have been used for educational purposes…

2. The privatisation of production which includes; 'the subsidisation of private sector arrangements that undermine public sector provision’ (p.33), contracting out and voucher distribution. In education this refers to financial support for private educational providers and this can include anything from subsidised 'in-service' for private school teachers, to research grants to staff at private universities…

3. **Liberalisation/deregulation** involves the relaxation of 'statutory monopolies, licensing arrangements or other regulatory mechanisms which
prevent private sector firms entering markets exclusively provided by the public sector' (p.33)…

4. *The privatisation of finances*, in which the 'service continues to be produced by the public sector but is not funded (fully) by taxation (p.33). Any user pays schemes fit into this category but particularly those goods and services which were previously provided free of charge.

*The Effects of Privatisation*

The intended effects of privatisation of publicly owned services are: increased efficiency through the needs of responding to competition in the market, improved performance of the service, a liberalisation of the general market leading to greater overall efficiency and a reduction of the tax burden necessary to cover the cost of providing the service. The New Right have repeatedly stated these claims as though they were established fact through the mouthpiece of their propaganda organisations, the benignly named 'think tanks', for so long that they are close to becoming accepted 'common-sense'. Although there are few people who would argue that some of these could not occur, in some instances, there is still a strong body of thought that maintains that the actual effects are likely to be more far reaching and have significant negative aspects to them.

Privatisation, in education, may be applied in any of the ways detailed above:

- Denationalisation is either the transfer of ownership of schools as going concerns to private institutions, or simply the closing of schools leaving the private sector to fill the gap that is left. The section of the 'education market' that is covered by the new provider is highly likely to be different from the one that made use of the school prior to privatisation and the original school population must either adapt to the new expectations or travel to a school of similar type that would be located in a different community with different needs. In either case there would be disadvantages for the children concerned, in the first case the privatised school would be likely to represent a very different community. In the second case travel could present a major problem for both the child and the parents while still not receiving an education tailored to the needs of a member of the child's community.
The privatisation of production would create similar problems as schools would have to compete for student numbers in a voucher system leading to a generalising of the community aspirations considered in the school policy. This is particularly so when implemented in conjunction with an intention to close or denationalise schools that do not maintain sufficient student numbers. This factor also covers privatisation of services to schools which could lead to a reduction of quality due to the need to have a profit component included in the cost structure, which would not be funded to accommodate it.

Deregulation creates opportunities for the less than ethical to set up in competition with little regard for professional standards and expectations that current regulations aim to maintain. There are examples of this kind of operator actually making their way into the present system leaving students and parents devastated. "It was such deregulation which allowed for the establishment of … private English Language Intensive Courses for overseas students in Australia which proved to be a disaster for many overseas parents [and] students…” (Kenway, Bigum & Fitzclarence 1992, p.8).

The privatisation of finance has now been formalised in legislation in Western Australia schools through legally binding school fees with the possible consequence of children from lower income families being excluded from courses that have a additional user-pays component. Frequently these courses include the more heavily subscribed subjects such as photography.

Although the rhetoric of privatisation is one that claims improvements in the standard of education provision there is little to support the argument while there is substantial evidence and argument that benefits will be to those who are looking for the transfer of costs from society to the individual.

Residualisation

One of the hidden, but significant, effects of privatisation is a phenomenon that has been described as "residualisation". As a result of the persistent propaganda in favour of privatisation there has been a growing public perception that publicly operated services are not deserving of support. When universal support for a publicly
provided service declines there is a further diminution of the perceived value the service has. When this occurs it becomes increasingly difficult to provide a service that can compete effectively with the higher status privately funded alternatives. Moves being made, as a result of New Right pressure, by governments are encouraging the transfer of funding from the public to the private sector and as a result causing the residualisation of public education, at the school level. Residualisation occurs when the perceived quality of the service drops to a level significantly below the perceived quality of its private counterpart. In turn this leads to a reduction in support for public funding from the taxes of those who do not use the service, causing greater pressure to further reduce funding to it, and so a vicious circle of service reduction is entered.

It is useful to use education as an example in looking at the residualisation process. For some considerable time there has been a degree of residualism in public education in Australia but the public perception of its quality has not been sufficiently low to trigger the vicious circle effect (Preston 1984). However, the recent and demonstrably-spurious literacy crisis being fostered by federal Minister David Kemp (see Masters & Forster 1997a and Masters & Foster 1997b and discussion in Chapter Nine), is likely to move the perception closer to the critical point.

Mr Kemp’s campaign and pressure from New Right propaganda is ensuring that the movement towards the full residualisation effect is gaining pace. The result of this will be a service that:

... is not supported by the whole community, even those who use it may not support it

It is only seen as having relevance or value to those individuals actually using it

The wealthy resent 'their' taxes supporting it, and may demand tax rebates or other more direct public financial support for private sector alternatives (Preston 1984).

As this process proceeds the only people continuing to use the service will be the ones for which there is no alternative: the socially, ethnically, geographically or physically disadvantaged. The implication for the service will be that it will not be
able to maintain sufficient funding to allow it to provide the quality of service that is considered necessary, with the result that the downward spiral of residualisation will continue reproducing the social disadvantage in those already disadvantaged groups.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to identify those involved in the presentation of elite discourse and to examine their socio-political background. Much attention has been paid to media proprietors as they have demonstrated by their own actions, and the evidence of government research, that the positions they hold have a significant impact on the nature of elite discourse. Of course, there are many other players in the presentation of elite discourse but it is easy to see how those who depend on the communication industry for their livelihood would tend not to rebel against the hegemony of their employers’ and superiors’ culture and philosophy.

While those employed in the media represent the majority of elite discourse there are many others who are brought in to make comment on, explain or take part in the issues that are dealt with by the discourse. As a part of the hegemonic process it is very likely that these will possess a legitimacy granted by holding values similar to those of the dominant culture. In instances where this is not the case, what they have to say is likely to be presented in such a way as to question its validity or its credibility as a source of a persuasive argument. The implication of this is that the greater proportion of elite discourse will reflect the culture of what Gramsci (1971) refers to as the ruling class, while making it appear to be common sense.

There is an identifiable allegiance between media owners, and the providers of elite discourse they employ, and the New Right. To gain an understanding of the political and social objectives of these elite discourse providers, it is important to gain a knowledge of the philosophical and ideological position of the New Right. This position, as a social phenomenon, was considered from the perspective of Critical Theory to provide the analysis of its implications, particularly those relating to privatisation.

The news and current affairs sector of the mass media are not the only sources of elite discourse. As has been implied by Gramsci’s argument and supported by others such as Horkheimer and Adorno (1973), the entertainment sectors of the media also
provide a smaller but still important component of elite discourse. The following chapter will examine the role of this sector of the media.
CHAPTER SEVEN
Artistic Contribution to Elite Discourse

The previous chapter examined the background to the most obvious section of elite discourse. It would be very easy to believe that in the terms of public opinion it is only the news and current affairs area of the media that have any significant potential to affect it. While Zaller (1992) concurs and considers only these directly involved individuals within elite discourse, Horkheimer and Adorno (1982) suggest that the total breadth of the media, and particularly the entertainment media, play a vital role in the development and change of attitudes and opinions. In addition to this they argue that this process is by no means a neutral one that provides information that an individual goes on to process and reach a totally independent conclusion in the form of an attitude. On the contrary, they maintain that the nature of the media, or elite discourse, and particularly its entertainment sector, leads to the formation of attitudes that are in sympathy with the dominant culture of society. This is one which reinforces the social structure with its concentration of power and influence in the hands of a privileged minority.

To gain an accurate picture of the factors that have worked together to provide the raw material of Australia’s current public opinion, this chapter will examine the role of the entertainment sections of the media in its generation. It will be argued that the entertainment industry plays an important role in both the generation and change of public opinion.

The Culture Industry

Those who see the world as having entered a cultural period dubbed the postmodern are inclined to refer to the postmodern condition. One of the most important manifestations of the postmodern condition is that of architecture. A prevalent version of postmodern architecture embraces diversity, “where design incorporates forms from different schools and periods into one ‘form’” (Hinkson 1991, p.4). This type of architecture may create a block of luxury apartments with an overall shape that has the appearance of a medieval fairy story castle with internal art deco fittings and decor, while the lifts and security systems may be overtly ‘hi-tec’. In common
with a large number of these postmodern buildings the main entrance is likely to be
difficult to identify as access is frequently designed to be from the dedicated car
park. This reduction of importance of the entrance to buildings reflects a
concentration on the unified space within the building. This unified space is a
reflection of the way in which postmodern culture is one which “integrates on a
world scale” (Hinkson 1991, p.4). This integration into the world can be seen as the
building being a part of the ‘global village’; a village that has been made possible by
communications technology. The result can be one of splendour but it also tends to
be out of step with its own environment.

Horkheimer and Adorno (1982) give an alternative view of the organisation of
postmodern society. Their description provides an interesting and illuminating
alternative to that of adherents of the postmodern:

The huge gleaming towers that shoot up everywhere are outward signs of the
ingenious planning of international concerns, toward which the unleashed
entrepreneurial system (whose monuments are a mass of gloomy houses and
business premises in grimy, spiritless cities) was already hastening. Even now
the older houses just outside the concrete city centers look like slums, and the
new bungalows on the outskirts are at one with the flimsy structures of world
fairs in their praise of technical progress and their built in demand to be
discarded after a short while like empty food cans (p.120).

Two views of the same cultural process; one very much from the point of view of the
dominant culture to be reflected in elite discourse, the other from the perspective of
the critical theorists whose desire is to examine social structures and identify the
beneficiaries and, more importantly, those who are disadvantaged by them. These
perspectives have been included as an introduction to the ways in which culture, in
all its forms, has the capacity to act in a hegemonic way. To explain this further it is
worth revisiting the brief discussion of logical positivism that was included in the
second chapter of this paper.

**Enlightenment Rationality**

Logical positivism has its roots in the Enlightenment, which from its beginnings had
the aim of freeing humanity from fear of the unknown and thus establishing its
superiority over nature. Horkheimer and Adorno (1982, p.3) describe the Enlightenment thus:

In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world: the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy.

Francis Bacon, who was described by Voltaire (1879, p118) as the “father of experimental philosophy”, decried the philosophers that went before him as being unprepared to question the beliefs and customs of their culture with the result that little progress was made in the search for an understanding of the ways in which the world works. He maintained that printing, artillery and the compass had been “stumbled upon and lighted upon by chance” (Bacon 1825, p.254), whereas if old superstition were to be ignored people could make many more technological advances by the application of enlightened reason.

In the years since Bacon made his observations, the attitudes he expressed and championed have come to epitomise the overbearing culture of Western capitalism with its dependence on technology and the elevation of the scientific principles that have maintained the development of that technology. The most vital component of this culture is knowledge, which in turn is repeatedly allocated the alternative meaning of power. More recently, within the postmodern, this may have changed somewhat to ‘information is power’. The significance remains the same as the information technology that the postmodern depends upon so heavily has enabled knowledge and information to be virtually interchangeable. There are no boundaries for knowledge and technology as they depend entirely on a principle that rejects any role for culture, tradition or human values:

Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles: neither in the enslavement of men nor in compliance with the world’s rulers. ... Technology is the essence of this knowledge. It does not work by concepts and images, by the fortunate insight, but refers to method, the exploitation of others’ work and capital (Horkheimer & Adorno 1982, p.4).
Horkheimer and Adorno go on to suggest that what is expected from knowledge is the means to understand how to use nature in order to have domination over it, and more importantly over other people. This is very much in line with Adam Smith’s (1994) contention that each person within society is a self interested individual who acts only to his or her own advantage.

One of the most significant features of all cultures is the use of myths of various kinds. In Western Judeo-Christianity the culture has adopted, and in many cases adapted, pre-Biblical myths and the stories of the Bible itself to illustrate how members of society should behave to one another and to the world at large. Australian Aborigines have parallel dream time myths while the mythical characters of the Indian Sub-continent are of a different kind. The existence of similar mythical ancestral beings is repeated throughout the world. The logic of the Enlightenment is arguably correct in maintaining that the principle of myth is anthropomorphism with the projection onto, apparently, natural beings of the wide range of human characteristics. Where this view becomes problematic is the point at which it takes another step and maintains that “the many mythic figures can all be brought to a common denominator, and reduced to the human subject” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1982, pp.6-7), and so should be rejected in their entirety as they are lacking in logic and rationality.

Yet neither the Enlightenment nor the rationalists and empiricists that sprang from it have been able, or even prepared to, disown the ultimate myth or empirically unprovable belief common to all cultures. The basic structures of religion and the omnipotent being or beings have not been seriously challenged by the rationalists; rather they have been recruited to further the Enlightenment cause. The teachings of the extremely powerful Protestant Christian churches of Northern Europe enlisted God to support their activities in imposing their worldly empires on large tracts of the globe ignoring and destroying the myths of the aboriginal peoples that fell under their subjugation. To a lesser extent the Catholic based imperial powers have followed a similar path, which in some cases was even more barbaric, for example, the long standing acceptance of the Conquistadors’ behaviour in South America illustrates the Enlightenment blind spot in applying the ultimate irrationality to aggressive conquest of another race.
An explanation of how this kind of distortion of the ideals of the Enlightenment can come about can be found in the work of Alfred Jules Ayer, the recognised leading light of the empiricists. Ayer (1948) maintains that for a sentence to have any meaning it must have a component that “some possible sense-experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood” (p.31). The implication of this is that for anything to be real it must be possible to prove its reality through some physical experience. While this does not in itself seem to be particularly contentious, Ayer’s argument applies to all aspects of reality. In looking at the ways in which human behaviour can affect the life chances of various groups it is necessary to extrapolate potential or likely outcomes from specific behaviours. As these behaviours may only be proposals, Ayer’s contention would make it impossible to consider these outcomes, as they can not be “conclusively verifiable” (p.31). In other words: because an event has not occurred, the predicted results of that event can only be metaphysical musings and can not be considered by an empiricist. To take this discussion into the realm of the philosophy of social inquiry, the implication of Ayer’s (1948) tenets of logical positivism can be argued that:

> by conferring absolute authority on the ‘given facts’, it rendered thought, and particularly critical or dialectical thought - according to which given social circumstances are to be conceptualised as forming part of a development process rather being merely accepted as given - redundant (Bennett 1977, p.40).

Just as predicting the possible results of proposed action is written off as ‘metaphysics’, any critical proposition that considers that which is critical of the existing situation in relation to ‘what ought to be’ is also disparaged as metaphysical time-wasting. When Ayer demands that any sentence must be verifiable by empirical means he is in effect stating that “thinking is unscientific” (Adorno 1974, p.124)

**A Misuse of Rationality**

In its context—that is, observations of the physical world—the work of Ayer has a great deal of value. Unfortunately, Ayer maintains the validity of his theories extends even into philosophy on which all areas of inquiry are based. Policy makers and advisers use theories such as this to follow very different objectives from those
of the original theorists. David Suzuki (1990), in his public lecture at the University of Western Australia, relates how the fact that there is no empirical evidence to show what effects will result from a huge increase in the loading of carbon in the atmosphere is being used as a reason to take no action to reduce the emission of carbon. This is in spite of the fact that virtually all the scientific opinion relating to the possible consequences predicted that they would be catastrophic. Suzuki went on to discuss a more tangible manifestation of the same application of empiricist theory. The Great Lakes of North America, which hold five percent of the world’s water, are used as a dump for industrial waste, much of which is toxic. Lake Ontario, the fifth lake in the chain, is where all the toxins accumulate from the other lakes, consequently it has a high level of chemical pollution. The fish caught in Lake Ontario have a high incidence of tumours, the birds that nest around that lake have a very low fecundity and those chicks that do hatch have a high incidence of abnormalities. The ministerial response to questions about the safety of eating fish from the lake was one that uses the distorted empiricist approach: to institute a five year research program to ascertain whether the water of Lake Ontario presents any dangers for people. In the meantime fishing could continue as normal. Again, the fact that as there was no empirical evidence to show that there is a fairly obvious reality, that reality was denied its existence. It is very frequently the case that the beneficiaries of the status quo would be the ones most affected by accepting the possibility of these mooted realities, so there is a very powerful incentive to accept this ‘lack of proof: lack of reality’ paradigm of the way in which the physical world works.

The same approach is demanded by a wide range of individuals who see their own opinions being challenged by people questioning the viability of activities that have become accepted within society. Dr Lou Lewis, President of the NSW Amateur Boxing Association, wrote to the *Australian* (5/3/98) maintaining that it was an error for the NSW Government to ban children under the age of fourteen from taking part in competitive boxing as there was no evidence that amateur boxing led to brain damage among competitors. There is well documented evidence that repeated blows to the head can cause brain damage but Dr Lewis uses the distorted empiricist argument that there is no tangible proof, implying therefore, that that particular reality can not exist. This stand is taken in preference to one that would protect
young people from the potential of permanent harm while sound unfalsifiable evidence can be researched to prove that the kind of blows received in amateur boxing do not cause brain damage.

Individuals and groups who are the beneficiaries, whether financial or cultural, argue very strongly for this distorted interpretation of the empiricist approach to understanding reality. In doing so it is common for them to describe their approach as a scientific one. A great contemporary exponent of this argument is the Honourable Wilson Tuckey, Federal Minister for Forestry. When joining the debate concerning the logging of old growth forest and its relationship to Western Australia’s Regional Forest Agreement, Tuckey repeatedly refers to the scientific expertise held within the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Yet the arguments put forward by officers of CALM use the same lack of demonstrable proof that the present regime of tree removal is unsustainable to justify its continuation. The demonstrable proof that is demanded by this approach can not exist until the lack of sustainability is confirmed by the inability of the forest to recover from the damage. Of course, by this point it is too late to take action to rectify the approach.

What is common to all these examples is that a theory or principle that has been developed in a specific context is appropriated by individuals or groups and distorted to enable them to support behaviours or policies that would be difficult to justify without the support the theory or principle appears to confer. Having devised this justification the next vital step is to present it to the concerned members of society in a manner that appears to legitimise the behaviour or policy in the least questionable way. Possibly the most effective means of achieving this in the post Enlightenment Western Capitalist society is to describe the justification as ‘scientific’. As science has been elevated to the position as the core of all the important processes that society depends upon, to be seen as scientifically arrived at confers an almost irrefutable status. To question what is scientific in principle is almost viewed as heresy to a society rooted in the Enlightenment.
High and Low Culture

The term culture is used in many ways, leading to a possible confusion when discussing the culture industry. To ensure that there is no misunderstanding of what is meant by culture it is valuable, at this point, to discuss these various uses of the term.

Very frequently, when culture is discussed in everyday conversation the subject is really what should be termed ‘high culture’. High culture is a phenomenon of developed societies that are structured in a manner that divides people into groups that have very specific roles that do not have their origins in traditions that can be traced back to pre-industrial times. In these societies these groups exist as a result of their own relationship to their industrial and economic requirements. There is always a very powerful group who either own or control the majority of the structures of economic activity. A somewhat less powerful group is that made up of those who possess knowledge or capital that makes them useful to, and consequently close to the previous group. Below these two groups is a range of groups that have varying degrees of power, all significantly less than that of the other two groups. The amount of power that is held is directly related to the amount of held knowledge that is valued by the two highest groups. A significant aspect of the power holding of these groups is that no matter how much capital may be held by individuals it has very little effect on the amount of power they can gain. At this level, what is vital is knowledge, and much of this knowledge is associated with ‘high culture’. In discussing one aspect of this association with high culture, Berger (1972, p.24) suggests that:

The Majority of the population do not visit art museums...[they] take it as axiomatic that the museums are full of holy relics which refer to a mystery which excludes them: the mystery of unaccountable wealth. Or to put it another way, they believe that original masterpieces belong to the preserve (both materially and spiritually) of the rich.

The rich to whom Berger refers are, of course, the members of the first group described above. Their preserve is not only the economic benefit of control of economic activity but also the ‘spiritual’ knowledge that this particular kind of wealth allows to become important. In leading up to the above statement, Berger
refers to the way in which these particular icons of ‘high culture’ have been converted from one state to another to legitimise their status as exclusive to the owning group:

The bogus religiosity which now surrounds original works of art, and which is ultimately dependent upon their market value, has become the substitute for what paintings lost when the camera made them reproducible. Its function is nostalgic. It is the final empty claim for the continuing values for oligarchic, undemocratic culture. If the image is no longer unique and exclusive, the art object, the thing, must be made mysteriously so (Berger 1972, p.23).

While fine art serves as a valuable example of ‘high culture’ it by no means represents the totality of it. ‘High culture’ also includes classical music, opera, a restricted range of fiction writing, some kinds of dance, most particularly ballet, and theatre (with the exception of the highly popular shows such as Andrew Lloyd-Weber’s musical, Les Miserables and Jon English’s series of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas). The exclusions referred to in this list give an insight into how inclusion among ‘high culture’ is achieved; the excluded fiction writing includes the work of virtually all modern authors apart from those who win major literary prizes, the excluded dance is modern and produced for a wide, mainly young audience and the theatrical pieces mentioned are purposely produced for a modern general audience. What is common to all the areas considered to comprise ‘high culture’ is that they all have a significant component of antiquity of origin as well as being aesthetically pleasing. In 1830 Raymond Williams (1987) considered that the central concern of culture was beauty, restricting his consideration of it to the sphere of art. In 1869 Matthew Arnold wrote of culture’s lofty nature and aspirations, of being the pursuit of the best of what has been thought, said and artistically produced, it is a quest for “our total perfection” (Arnold 1960, p.6). The use of the term aesthetic metamorphosed very quickly into this particular use in relation to culture. It was less than one hundred years earlier that Alexander Baumgarten (1750), Kant’s mentor, published his work Aesthetica which represents the birth of the modern use of the term. In this work Baumgarten used aesthetic “in a much wider sense than we are used to, to describe the whole domain of experience which lies outside the sphere of reason (Goodall 1995, p.3). In the space of one century the usage of the term aesthetic changed from embracing a wide range of emotional responses to our
environment to a restricted view of certain human works that elicit a positive emotional response. As will be discussed below, this would appear to be the reverse of what happened in relation to the use of the term culture.

Until relatively recently, high culture held an almost exclusive position in the English curriculum of schools and universities. While this has changed to some degree in recent years, it still holds a dominant position, with the introduction of modern writers and playwrights to the curriculum being strongly contested in some quarters, particularly by those groups most closely aligned with high culture. This concentration on high culture in curriculum is attributed to “the work of F.R. Leavis and his circle at Cambridge from the 1930s” (Goodall 1995, p22). Frequently this is seen as peculiar to English social and cultural conditions. However, Leavis’s work should be seen as one of the manifestations of the framework of modernism in Europe. It can be deduced from this that the perception of high culture as it developed from simply culture in the middle of the Nineteenth Century is one that has a significant presence throughout Western society.

**Non-High Culture**

The usage of the term high culture implies that there must be a broader phenomenon containing other parts that provide a base that ‘high’ relates to. There are balancing cultural activities that offer alternatives to the rather exclusive high culture. The activities could be termed ‘low culture’ as for there to be a ‘high’ there must be a ‘low’ to which it relates. To use a term such as ‘low culture’ would be insulting beyond the intention of almost all its possible users. Rather, the description most commonly used is popular, or sometimes mass, culture. Popular culture has come to refer to the many types of entertainment that commands wide audiences. Most of these entertainments have parallels in high culture; for example, cinema parallels theatre, popular music parallels classical, and so on. However, there are aspects of popular culture that have no readily identifiable comparison within the realm of high culture. As an example, consider the public following for Australian Rules football, which is certainly a part of popular culture but can not be identified with any similar part of high culture. In line with the naming of low and high culture there is a powerful valuation placed, by society, on high and low culture. The recent performance of *Giselle* by the Australian Ballet, in Perth would be allocated a
greater value than a closely contested AFL game between The West Coast Eagles and, say, North Melbourne. It could be argued that the skill levels, dedication and preparation required for these may be similar yet society considers the ballet to be have greater intrinsic merit than the football (see Hartley & Hawkes 1977, p.6).

**A Wider Culture**

It would be easy to assume that because there is dispute regarding the existence of high and popular or low culture, these two represent the entirety of culture. This is not the case as there is another aspect to culture that has a similar potential to impact on opinion. Important parts of culture are the traditions, rituals and rites of society and its institutions. These include aspects of religion, political structure and justice. Together these combine to create the fundamental building blocks of society; they define how its members understand the world in which they live and almost every thing the individual does is affected by her understanding of these basics of social life. Even if the individual does not subscribe to a religion, or care about rituals, or have any conscious dealings with the justice system, the effect that these have on the ways everyday life is conducted is significant. Max Weber (1958) paid particular attention to the ways in which religion can impact on the development of society; in this particular case it was the way in which some aspects of European Protestantism related to the development of Western capitalism. The justice system is heavily reliant on religion for the grounding of the laws on which it depends. It also makes significant use of religious teaching in weighing the merit of claims and the imposition of sanctions in response to them.

Culture has come to represent “a society’s ‘whole way of life’: its characteristic customs, the nature of its artefacts, the structure of its social marital, sexual and economic relationships” (Hartley & Hawkes, 1977, p.9). This meaning for culture is one that has also gained a wide acceptance beyond the sphere of influence of Western capitalist countries, as it is one that acknowledges the rights of other peoples to exist in other ways. One of the most important factors in the renaissance of Aborigines in Australia has been the legitimation of their culture through the work of anthropologists such as the Berndt & Berndt (1981) Elkin (1954) and Rowley (1970-71). The work of these anthropologists has been developed by individuals from Aboriginal communities such as Mandawuy Yunupingu (1984) whose work
with the pop group Yothu Yindi is only a part of his extensive efforts to legitimise his culture through educational practice and participation in the wider Australian community.

If culture has this wide range of association with the ways in which individuals in society live their lives, it can not be in any way problematic to suggest that it must be important in opinion formation. Haralambos and Head (1985, p.3) emphatically state:

> To a large degree culture determines how members of a society think and feel, it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life. Members of society usually take their culture for granted. It has become so much a part of them that they are often unaware of its existence.

It would be easy to deduce from this that culture and society could be considered to be one and the same thing. Despite the undoubted complexity of the relationship of the two, if it is possible to speak cogently about the culture of a society the two must be discrete constructs:

> There are universal social processes, just as there are universal biological processes. Such are, for example, the division of labor, subordination and super-ordination. But the precise forms that these processes take are myriad, and these forms are cultural (Klukhohn 1962, p.37).

Accepting that the two do exist, and acknowledging the way that they interact, strengthens the claim for the power of culture within society. The almost subconscious acceptance of the overarching guidelines for society that culture provides implies that much of what individuals think, feel and believe is grounded in their cultural experiences. This, surely, must have a significant impact on the development of opinions both private and public.

**Views of Popular Culture**

Popular culture, or at least significant parts of it, is a frequent target for a wide range of individuals and groups that claim that it is responsible for all manner of social ills. The validity of these claims is as varied as the claimants. They include the chilling account of a fourteen year-old boy who shot eight students with eight shots (forty
times the average accuracy of police officers), at a Kentucky school, never having used a gun before. A retired US army psychologist suggested that “[h]e just put one bullet in every target that popped up on his screen. What was he doing? He was playing a video game” (Garran, 1999). Also included are claims that popular fashion can cause anti-social behaviour: the dress code information document published by Belridge Senior High School (1997) states that the wearing of certain types of fashionable clothing is banned as it leads to the formation of gangs which indulge in disruptive behaviour. It is far more likely that the choice of clothing follows from the association with a particular group. The common thread in these criticisms is that popular culture holds some kind of threat to the very fabric of society and the culture that underpins it.

Many of the expressed concerns relate to the threat, perceived or real, to the continued existence and integrity of high culture. In the main this concern can be seen to be a part of a very powerful thrust to maintain the social and economic status quo with high culture being seen as very much the province of the privileged classes who are keen to maintain an exclusive ownership of it. The Frankfurt School Critical Theorists, Marcuse (1972) and Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) share some of these concerns for the dilution of high culture but for very different reasons. These concerns are with the ways in which popular culture is controlled, with significant implications for those who are its intended users. As these theorists are directly concerned with social change associated with mass opinion, a close examination of their observations, concerning what they term the ‘culture industry’, must be of significance to the present study.

In considering the ways in which the culture industry shapes society, it is first necessary to examine some of the ways in which developed capitalism has changed in relation to its philosophical grounding. Marcuse (1972) discusses the way in which advanced industrial culture is structured. In earlier times ideology was a part of the ‘superstructure’ of society. That is, there was an economic base which continued to develop and maintain the basic requirements of the people. At a different level there was also a political superstructure in which ideology was placed. The two levels operated, to a certain extent, independently, with the economic being allowed to continue generating the income to sustain society while ideological
changes were restricted to the political and as such easily identifiable. In advanced industrial culture ideology has migrated to the base on which society is constructed:

Ideology is in the process of production itself. In a provocative form, this proposition reveals the political aspects of the prevailing technological rationality. The productive apparatus and the goods and services which it produces ‘sell’ or impose the social system as a whole (Marcuse 1972, pp23-24).

This is particularly true of the entertainment and information industries which bring with them attitudes and habits in a prescriptive way as well as emotional and intellectual responses which ally consumers to the ideology of the producers and as such that of the dominant culture. As the availability of consumer commodities widens, individuals in increasingly more locations, both geographical and social class, are brought into the cultural fold and the powerful message for accepting the culture becomes a way of life rather than mere publicity. By being allowed into this consumerist world, which is preferable to the pre-industrial world, any desire to push for a kind of change that improves life in a spiritual rather than purely material way is negated:

Thus emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behaviour in which ideas aspirations and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to the terms of this universe (Marcuse 1972, p.24).

The point Marcuse is making is that the capitalist consumer system is one that successfully provides many of the comforts that people want and need, but in doing so it restricts the understanding of life to the circle of the production and consumption of commodities. As the basic requirements of life are adequately provided the more important human wants and needs are ignored and unexpressed. More significantly, due to the all-encompassing nature of the consumerist culture these qualitatively different needs are disallowed from entry into the culture leaving a spiritual vacuum that can not be identified. His suggestion is that much of the dissatisfaction many individuals feel for their lives is a result of being cut off from important aspects of their existence. Yet these individuals are prevented from
pursuing these needs and wants because the ideology-based culture that has been prescribed for them does not recognise the existence of these needs and wants.

This ideology is also a vital element in the technological rationalisation of the production process. The hegemony of the dominant culture is protected and strengthened by the incorporation of all classes into the consumer culture and this is further reinforced by rationalisation of the workplace. Traditionally the stark differences between the lives and life chances of the working class and those of the owners and managers of capital generated sites of contestation. With the rationalisation of production these differences become less obvious, with the workers being able to aspire to ownership of an apparently reasonable amount consumer goods. In addition the “capitalist bosses and owners are losing their identity as responsible agents; they are assuming the function of bureaucrats in a corporate machine (Marcuse 1972, p.39). This camouflages the tangible source of exploitation to the point that the existence of exploitation is questioned in the mind of the worker:

the technological veil conceals the reproduction of inequality and enslavement. With technical progress as its instrument, unfreedom - in the sense of man’s subjection to his productive apparatus - is perpetuated and intensified in the form of many liberties and comforts (Marcuse 1972, p.39).

The criteria of technological rationality do not only exist within the process of production, they also appear in the culturally defined conventions of elite discourse (see Habermas 1971b). They restrict the discussion of issues to the question of determining which technologies should be employed to manage the system. Any alternative that may consider political or social ends that are not in accord with the dominant culture, those that may involve social change, are excluded from the terms of reference by the rational technology. (cf. the earlier discussion of logical positivism and rationality.)

**Culture and Rationality’s Deceptive Combination**

Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) entitled the chapter of their book which dealt specifically with popular culture, ‘The Culture Industry: enlightenment as mass deception’. As a part of their analysis of the role of the Enlightenment in the creation and maintenance of a society that is made up of a very large number of
people who are significantly disempowered and disadvantaged by the culture that
underpins it, Horkheimer and Adorno outlined a detailed criticism of the way in
which culture has been used to support this process. These two theorists maintain
(p.120) that, rather than the creation of cultural chaos through the receding influence
of established religion and the disappearance of the remnants of precapitalism
combined with social and technological specialisation and differentiation, as
suggested by sociological theory, culture has been standardised across all sectors of
the media or ‘culture industry’.

This standardisation is the result of the response of the various sectors of the culture
industry to the fact that they are totally reliant on larger and more powerful actors in
industry and commerce for the finance they need to operate. To ensure that this vital
source of funding does not dry up, executives of the media companies can not afford
to risk producing programs that in any way could be seen to be contrary to the aims
and desires of the powerful individuals who control the investing corporations. To
accommodate the usually unexpressed but nevertheless clear demands formulae are
used in the production of all types of mass entertainment leading to a sameness that
can be discerned at every point that access is made to some form of leisure or
entertainment product. What is most concerning about this is the way in which this
adherence to the formula inevitably excludes any truly innovative contribution to
social life.

Examples given by Horkheimer and Adorno (pp.123-4) include the similarities of
the products of bitter rivals such as the motor car manufacturers. Even now, some
fifty five years after first being published, the differences between a Ford Falcon and
a Holden Commodore are far fewer in number than the similarities, this in spite of
claims made for the postmodern being the age of production for specific low volume
needs. Also included are the differences between major feature films are more and
more restricted to the techniques used to achieve similar effects, the number of big
name stars appearing or, as a last resort, the amount of money spent on promotion.
Horkheimer and Adorno go on to predict the future for the, at the time, embryonic
television industry saying “... its consequences will be quite enormous and promise
to intensify the impoverishment of aesthetic matter...” (p.124). If the ratings for
television audiences are considered, with the consistently high scores for highly
formulaic programs with a sameness that allows one to blend into another and only the appearance of one ‘big name star’ rather than another being the only real difference between them, the prediction could be argued to be uncannily accurate.

A recent example may help to illustrate the way in which the formula process works: an unusually original and slightly disturbing program, *Cracker*, was produced in the United Kingdom. While much of this did not conform to the style of the formula these deviations are noted by the industry and therefore become a part of it (p.132) and therefore acceptable. In this manner developments are consumed and fall under the control of the culture industry. In this particular case some of the deviations were too radical for this to happen and therefore to be allowed into the major market (the USA). Under the pretence of the difficulty of understanding the accents - the main character was played by the Glaswegian Robbie Coltraine - the whole series was re-produced with American actors but maintaining the script virtually intact. However, there were two important changes: the dark and almost sinister atmosphere was lightened considerably and the main character’s two undesirable traits were modified. Fitz, the ‘cracker’ or forensic psychologist in the original, had serious gambling and drinking problems. In the remake, the drinking was moderated and the gambling was completely cut. The interesting question is ‘why?’ It may be argued that by making these changes the character becomes a far more wholesome representative of authority as a respected academic working with the law enforcement agencies. To have such a highly placed person within the authority structure with such negative traits could bring authority into disrepute - something that would disadvantage most those who have most to gain by its continued respect: that is those with power. The gambling in particular presented a significant threat in the way it was represented as it was extremely destructive to Fitz, this would be too extreme a departure from the formula as one of the great sources of finance is from large corporations with interests in the gaming industry. To depict the dangers of gambling *via* the character of a highly intelligent heroic authority figure would present too much of a threat to that particular source of funding. The result of these changes is the production of almost the same program but now having the quality of Horkheimer and Adorno’s sameness, which was far less apparent in the original (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1999).
The Culture Industry’s Version of Style

In the preceding discussion concerning *Cracker*, reference was made to style. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) discuss at length the role of style within the culture industry. They maintain that the culture industry has appropriated style and changed its nature significantly. They describe style as having its roots in the precapitalist past when what has come to be known as high culture had components of pure artistic expression and individual achievement that expressed style. Their concern is the way in which the culture industry has appropriated style as a means of imposing conformity on artistic expression. Among the many examples they give is that of the jazz musician arranging Mozart’s music into the new form who not only makes changes when the classical music is too serious or difficult but also, and more importantly, when Mozart’s harmonies do not conform to the imposed style of the present. “The explicit and implicit, exoteric and esoteric catalogue of the forbidden and tolerated is so extensive that it not only defines the area of freedom but is all-powerful inside it” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1982, p128).

This style is not that which is usually brought to mind by the term as style is seen to be false when it is imposed from without. Within the culture industry every element of the subject originates from the system, which is external to the real meaning of culture, it is merely a reflection of the needs of the culture industry itself. However this version of style does not negate the genuine style of the past, rather it complements a new view of style that sees it as the aesthetic equivalent of domination. The style that epitomises the great artistic eras of Western history are interpreted as expressions of the different power structures in those societies and as such are absorbed into the ideology of the culture industry. Tension between artistic or stylistic opposites no longer exists as they have come to serve the same cause.

In these eras of great artistic achievement the art that transcends reality does so because it exposes a discrepancy within the style of the time; it is a striving for identity that is doomed to fail. The inferior achievements of quasi-style does not expose itself to the possibility of this failure but relies on its similarity to great art - what Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) call a ‘surrogate identity’:
In the culture industry this imitation finally becomes absolute. Having ceased to be anything but style, it reveals the latter’s secret: obedience to the social hierarchy (p.131).

In this obedience to the social hierarchy, style has come to represent culture but to speak of culture denies the ability of culture to perform its role. The spoken version of culture is the common denominator, it reinforces what exists rather than aspiring to something better and the culture industry provides this message for twenty-four hours every day. To the individual this message is that there is no preferable existence to the one being experienced. The individual, just as the performer who would break out from the mould of imposed style is shown that there is no life outside the roles laid out for them. “Not to conform means to be rendered powerless, economically, and therefore spiritually” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1982, p.133).

Consumers become victims of what is offered to them: what is efficiently and profitably produced becomes most popular. Those who question the quality of what is produced are despised and vilified for claiming to know better. This hue and cry is instigated by the representatives of the industry, such as the talkback radio hosts. The result is the constant reproduction of the same thing.

**Critical Theory and Public Opinion Theory**

Horkheimer and Adorno’s theoretical work on the ways in which the media affect opinions can be viewed in relation to the RAS model of attitude change outlined earlier in this study. Firstly, the reception axiom is highly active, as the media industry demands a high level of engagement from those using its products: and that is the majority of the population. Therefore these individuals are highly likely to receive the political messages encoded in the product. Secondly, as the product of the media industry is crafted to be consistent with the dominant political ideology which has come to overarch the vast majority of mainstream political directions, as is demonstrated by the similarity of policies from “all sides” of the political spectrum, the resistance axiom is satisfied. This has occurred not only in Australia but is also apparent in the USA and the United Kingdom as well as throughout the European Union and Japan. It is only when politicians from outside the mainstream become involved that real differences appear, as in Germany, recently, when the
Greens were included in a coalition leading to the introduction of some difference in proposed policies. Thirdly, there is constant accessibility as the issues are continuously presented in a wide range of media, thus satisfying the accessibility axiom.

These three axioms are the significant ones in generating and changing opinion. From this it can be seen that while the ideas promoted by the Frankfurt School through Horkheimer and Adorno may appear to be extreme and unacceptably radical they deserve some consideration as it can be shown that there is support for them from independent theories of opinion change.

The result of this ever revolving reproduction is that the culture industry in its portrayal of life is unable to provide any meaningful explanation for the disappointment and emptiness felt by so many in relation to life within the society it reflects. The heroes depicted can make no sense of their lives but risk all to protect the structures that create the meaninglessness and, fortunately, expect no thanks from them other than Warhol’s fifteen minutes of fame. To illustrate this there follows an analysis of the film, *Lethal Weapon 4*, which offers a convenient example of the output of the culture industry. The analysis is made in the light of Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of the culture industry showing how the individual’s place and subservient role in society is reinforced by what appears only to have the role of entertainment.

**Lethal Weapon 4**

This film is, as the name suggests, the fourth in a series about the unlikely exploits of two US police detective sergeants, Murtow and Riggs. Murtow, played by Danny Glover, is a conservative career officer who became Riggs’ partner in the first of the series in an attempt to bring Riggs into line. Riggs, played by Mel Gibson, early in the series had lost much in his life and felt he had little to live for and regularly took outrageous risks, endangering not only himself but also those around him, particularly Murtow. The character of Riggs is particularly interesting in relation to Horkheimer and Adorno’s theories regarding the culture industry. Riggs is an outsider who has no respect whatever for authority, his only point of contact with a respectable image is his powerful dislike of crime. In the previous episodes Riggs
and, rather unwillingly, Murtow use unconventional and illegal means to solve particularly violent crimes putting themselves at enormous risk and not escaping fairly serious injury.

_Lethal Weapon 4_ opens with an unexplained and bizarre scene in which a person in Ned Kelly like armour is firing an automatic assault rifle and a flame thrower at random buildings in a city street. Riggs eventually resolves the situation by unconventional means, which at the same time humiliate his partner Murtow. The result is extensive damage caused by an exploding petrol tanker, this being a motif of this series of films. The scene has been set of the outsider taking huge risks to not merely to detect and prevent crime but to mete out summary punishment with the death of the criminal. The scene then changes to show both Riggs and Murtow as ordinary family men (a recent role for Riggs) on a fishing trip, which is interrupted by the scene setter for the subject of the film in the form of a runaway ship. They endeavour to stop the ship and arrest the crew, again with enormous collateral damage and personal risk.

The film continues with alternating scenes of family tenderness accenting the ordinariness of the two main characters and extreme danger and risk taking in the execution of their duties as police officers. What this provides, in the terms of Horkheimer and Adorno, is a very powerful message that it is right and fitting for a working class individual, that is, a person who is not a member of the ruling elite, to take enormous risks in the pursuit of the protection of the social order that dictates that they will not be able to break out of their own inferior station in society. What is represented is a reinforcement of the ultimate version of the maintenance of the status quo. It represents a virtual demand from the owners of capital that citizens with very little ownership of society’s capital should be prepared to risk everything, including their families’ lives to protect the interests of the major beneficiaries of the capitalist system.

The theme of this film is repeated with only minor variations over and over again. The _Die Hard_ series is virtually identical in plot, as are many of the spin off copies that have also appeared. Films such as Harrison Ford’s series including _Patriot Games, Clear and Present Danger_ and even _Airforce One_ have a very similar theme with the main character being less of an outsider but being the type of person not
usually associated with heroic risk taking to preserve the status quo. In the first two of these the character is an academic, albeit with experience in the secret service, and the third the President of the USA. There are many other products of the film and television industries that use the identical formula to give the same message, that is, a “sameness” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1982, p.132) that pervades the produce of the entertainment industry with the result that that status quo is constantly legitimated through the leisure pursuits of a large section of the population.

Conclusion

The culture industry, the entertainment industry and the media, to a great extent, are one and the same. The arguments presented in this chapter suggest that they hold a vitally important position in the social processes that generate and change public opinion. While it could be very easy to dismiss popular culture as little more than a means to the pleasant passage of leisure time, the reality is that it is a very powerful agent in shaping the nature of society. It must be remembered that the entertainment industry’s impact is not restricted to the lower socio-economic groups; it is pervasive across all sectors of society. Although, the discussion in this chapter has concentrated on the ‘ordinary individual’ democracy allows ordinary individuals to assume very powerful positions and the operation of the culture industry has an important role to play in the hegemony of what has become the dominant culture even though it is the culture of a very small proportion of the population.

The arguments presented in this chapter suggest that the culture industry is a very powerful force in opinion change. However, it can not operate in a vacuum. It must have a foundation of common experience to work with. This common experience is derived from the history of a community that provides the common understandings of what it means to be a member of that community. As the history of Australia provides a vital grounding for the culture industry to relate to the following chapter will examine the history of Australia in relation to the way in which the opinions of Australians have developed.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Australian History’s Contribution
to Public Opinion

The history of Australia is one that is relatively short but presents many challenges in relation to its overall status. The early days as a small number of penal colonies can not be considered as representing anything remotely identifiable as a nation, but holds an important place in the national psyche, which must be significant in shaping overall public opinion. The national memory of Australia’s beginnings are the product of information that has been provided by an elite discourse which still has the capacity to change perceptions even after two hundred years, after all, attitudes to an individual’s convict ancestry has changed significantly over the last twenty years.

Every stage in Australia’s development as a nation has contributed, in some way, to the way in which Australians see and interpret the world in which they live. The ways in which these contributions are preserved are varied: some are recorded as history while others hold an important place in the traditions of the Australian culture. That the original settlement was a penal colony is a matter of history whereas the origin of the notion of ‘mateship’, while almost universally recognised, is almost impossible to identify. The result of this is that there are as many theories concerning its origins as there are groups and individuals arguing its relevance to Australian life. What is important is to recognise that current public opinion is not only dependant on contemporary elite discourse but also upon the attitudes and opinions that have been generated since before Federation in 1901.

Australia’s Beginnings

The Aborigines

It is very common in Australia to speak of Australia itself as having a starting point before which there was a vacuum. Of course, before European involvement with the continent in the Southern Ocean there were social and economic activities taking place and these activities have had an effect on the way in which subsequent European settlers and their descendants understand the country. There is still
considerable debate as to how long Aborigines have lived in Australia but it has become generally accepted that it was at least 60,000 years (Clarke 1992, p.1). These peoples who occupied the land for so long are usually referred to as one people. The truth is very different with around two hundred different languages (Dixon 1980, p.1) and even more dialects being spoken in different parts of the land. The social structure was based on clans within geographically based language groups. People within a language group considered themselves to be related to all the other people within that language group with people from outside being considered as foreign. In spite of the divisions created by mutually unintelligible languages there is significant evidence to suggest that there was considerable economic activity conducted not only between adjacent groups but also throughout Australia. An important example is stone used for spear points mined in North-Eastern Arnhem Land being found all over the country. As this stone was of such value for spear points it was constantly traded and re-traded along a well-established trading route (Berndt & Berndt 1981, p.17).

In spite of this evidence, that the British authorities could not have been entirely ignorant of, Australia was declared to be *terra nullius* or empty land. This was not the act of an unfeeling, land grabbing Imperial force; rather it was the action of a government that was abiding by the laws of the time. In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries the prime consideration in assessing whether land was occupied was evidence of agricultural activity. In pre-European Australia there was virtually no agriculture conducted, with the only exception to this being in a small region in what is now Northern Queensland. The alternative to agriculture was hunting and gathering. This was considered by Christians to be against God’s will due to the large requirement for land that this required and that as the population of the world grew that amount of land was no longer available to feed these people. For this reason it was only agricultural activity that was acceptable as a means of demonstrating land ownership, consequently, although it was obvious that the land was occupied the law of the time still considered it not to be owned (Clarke 1992, p.14).

When in 1788 settlers arrived on the East Coast believing that they were coming to a land owned by no one, the people already living there had a very different
understanding. Inevitably this led to conflict at the time and varying types of conflict that have gone on ever since. The nature of the early settlement of Australia is extremely important in the traditions and culture of the country which are equally important in the formation of opinions that are based on them.

**Why Australia?**

Until the middle of the Eighteenth Century the existence of a continent in the Southern Hemisphere was little more than a generally interesting fact to European imperial powers. Those travellers who landed at various points around the (mostly west) coast reported a land that appeared to have little value, in the main being dry and inhospitable. These views changed after the French attacked British held Minorca in 1756 leading to the Seven-Year war. However, France lost badly and the British finished up with an unparalleled naval superiority over the other European powers. This had two important effects: the British had a breathing space from fighting wars and they were able to give a far greater consideration to expansion of the Empire in the Pacific and specifically *Terra Australis*. At the same time the French, although defeated were not prepared to allow their interests in the Pacific to slip away and looked at *Terra Australis* in a new light as a possible base for the supplying of their ships both civil and military.

The result of these plans, each of which became suspected by the opposition, was that a race to colonise and claim Australia began. This competition was to have a significant impact on the nature of the initial settlement of New South Wales and a lasting effect on the culture and traditions of Australia. In 1770 James Cook landed on the East Coast of Australia and annexed a large part of the continent to the British Crown as New South Wales. Only two years later the French explorer St Allouran made land-fall at Turtle Bay on the West Coast of Australia and claimed the country for France. Making claims is one thing but actually being able to hold the land in the face of opposition from competing powers is another. Eventually it became, in foreign policy terms, extremely important for the British to establish a settlement in New South Wales. However, this alone would not have been sufficient to convince the domestic government that finance should be made available for a settlement. The one issue that had the potential to overcome this was the overcrowding of the prison system in England that had reached crisis point. For over two hundred years
it had been common practice to transport criminals overseas. The American War of Independence put a stop to this practice but the rate of conviction did not decrease. Very quickly the unseaworthy ships or ‘hulks’ that were used to house the convicts became extremely overcrowded creating a perceived health risk to the general population. While the strategic arguments for establishing a colony in New South Wales were paramount in the higher echelons of government, the foremost justification for it as outlined by Lord Sydney in 1786 was for the reduction of the number of prisoners held in England. Britain’s power had been compromised by the American War of Independence

and the Pitt administration’s determination to protect Britain’s possessions in the East and to make them the basis for rebuilding the strength of the empire to its pre-war pre-eminence. If an Australian settlement would assist in securing Britain in the East and at the same time deny France access to potentially useful naval stores, then that was sufficient reason to proceed with the scheme. If the plan also helped to relieve a current domestic problem then that was a bonus that rendered the proposal even more attractive. (Clarke 1992, p.32-33).

And so, in spite of many dissenting voices questioning the cost of the venture a retired naval officer, Arthur Phillip was appointed as first governor of the colony of New South Wales. The colony’s boundaries were laid down as encompassing the land from Cape York to forty-three degrees south and from the coast to one hundred and thirty degrees east, as well as all the adjacent islands in the Pacific Ocean (Clark 1969, p.10). This represented a piece of land that was some thousand kilometres wider than that annexed by Cooke in 1770. This land was clearly not needed to house the few hundred convicts of the first fleet or even the one thousand per year that British judges had been sentencing to transportation. That Britain had no valid claim to this land through prior discovery adds to the argument that the settlement was made for imperialist reasons.

Phillip’s instructions were clear:

He was … to found the settlement at Botany Bay; to proceed to the cultivation of the land, distributing the convicts for that purpose in such manner as might be best calculated for procuring supplies of grain and ground provisions; to explore the coast; to open an intercourse with the natives, and to cultivate their
It was in this confused atmosphere that the colony of New South Wales was established. The two objectives of relieving the pressure on the British penal system and establishing a presence to deter the imperial intentions of the French would quickly become secondary to the immediate problem of survival.

The early years were very hard, almost to the point of disaster, as the early attempts at agriculture failed badly. This was partly due to a harshness of the land that was not predicted. Under normal conditions success would have been possible with a great deal of hard work, but as Manning Clark (1969, p.16) pointed out “to produce food and shelter the settlement had to rely on the labour of men and women who had taken up a life of crime because of their aversion to labour”. This is a very important comment on Australia’s early history that reflects a very common perception of the earliest colonists. F.G. Clarke (1992, p.41) paints a very different picture of the difficulties faced:

Gardening and farming with the equipment and seed grains taken aboard the First Fleet at the Cape proved very unsatisfactory, and Phillip believed that the Dutch had knowingly sold poor-quality grain and stock to the expedition. Furthermore, the agricultural implements – axes, spades and shovels – sent out were the worst quality Phillip had ever seen and no plough was to be found in the colony until 1796.

This later description helps to illustrate an enduring aspect of Australian opinion that is likely to have its origins in perceptions of the calibre of the convicts transported to Australia. This opinion encompasses a general dislike of ‘bludgers’. The labelling of those not prepared to make a full effort in helping the group as a bludger of one kind or another occurs at regular intervals in Australian contemporary writings such as that of Frank Hardy, Albert Facey and Alan Marshall. In spite of the somewhat less colourful evidence, the negative stereotype has been dominant and contributed to the opinion of and attitude to individuals who do not contribute to the objectives of the dominant group.
A situation arose in the early days of settlement that may offer a possible insight into the extreme negative opinion held by many Australians towards the Aborigines. This opinion is so powerful that it seems possible that at least some of its origins lie in actual documented evidence. For two years the settlement struggled to feed itself to the extent that all of the population, convict and administrators alike suffered some degree of malnutrition. From the point of view of people used to military success this would have been an ideal opportunity for the Aborigines to attack and drive the unwelcome invaders from their land. The fact that they did not is likely to have encouraged the opinion that the Aborigines were really an inferior race. The reality was that the Aborigines were unable to mount any attack because their numbers had been decimated by the effects of smallpox, with colonist discovering in all the bays and coves close to Port Jackson, an “extraordinary calamity … the bodies of many of the wretched natives of this country” (Tench 1971, p.85).

As the Colony became established and progressively more successful, decisions concerning its administration were taken that have had a lasting effect on the collective Australian self understanding. The seeds of the infamous ‘Rum Rebellion’ were sown not only by the chronic shortage of any currency in the Colony but also by the way in which Governor Phillip’s successor, Major Grose, altered the authority structure to give the officers of the New South Wales Corps power over virtually all aspects of the Colony’s administration. Governor Phillip had been given the task of setting up the Colony at Botany Bay as a predominantly civilian settlement. The New South Wales Corps was set up in response to Phillip’s complaints to the British Government that the marines that travelled with the First Fleet refused to take on any duties other than the military protection of the realm from aggressors. As the latter were almost totally absent the marines were nothing more than a drain on sparse resources. Recruiting a force to operate some twelve thousand miles from Britain presented some difficulties with the result that “[m]any of the privates in the New South Wales Corps were recruited from the inmates of the Savoy Military Prison, and the calibre of the officers was not much better” (Clarke 1992, p.44).

When Phillip left the colony in ill health in 1792, the commanding officer of the New South Wales Corps, Major Grose became acting governor. He immediately
replaced the civilian magistrates with military officers, granted large parcels of land along with convict labourers, servants and supplies to the officers of government. Within three years the Corps had taken almost total control of the colony. Officers were among the largest land holders, controlled the wholesale markets and supplied rum in such quantities that it became the primary medium of exchange. In spite of the attempts of subsequent Governors the power and influence of the New South Wales Corps was unassailable. When William Bligh landed at Sydney Cove to take over as Governor he very quickly saw the damage that was being done by the abuse of power of the military. For two years he attempted to make change until he brought charges, of illegally importing stills into the colony and sedition, against one of the most powerful officers, John Macarthur. The trial broke up in disorder and soldiers of the Corps, with fixed bayonets, arrested Bligh at Government House. He was held for over a year before being released to return to England. The British Government, predictably, moved to punish those involved in the coup but the illegal military de facto and actual governments had held sway for almost twenty years, in which time the civilian population had been thoroughly deceived and cheated.

It is generally believed that a significant part of the typical Australian character is the dislike and distrust of authority. With the level of corruption endured by the colonists at such a significant time in the development of the new society it is easy to understand how the seed of this attitude may have been sown. Of course, these opinions of authority can only have been strengthened by the brutality of the penal system in operation, but not all those travelling to New South Wales, even in the very early days, were convicts or their keepers. From the earliest times there were many free settlers, some of whom were treated very generously, while the majority who had little capital were little better off in the New World than they were in England. Inevitably, those who travelled from privileged positions in Britain gained privileged position in the Colony with far more power than they could have hoped to gain in their homeland. These settlers and beneficiaries of association with the New South Wales Corps became known as the exclusives as their objective was to create a landed gentry excluding any settler who did not have capital and what they considered “breeding” in their background. Convicts who had earned a land grant through cooperation and good behaviour were also to be excluded. To be excluded was to be prevented from holding public office, significant land holdings and any
right to participate in the development of a kind of plantation economy that the
British saw as most appropriate for the colonies. There was a significant number of
‘emancipists’ who had a very different vision for the new colony but they had no
bargaining power and just as the majority were corruptly denied by the military these
were legitimately denied by the exclusives. This can only have contributed further
to the general mistrust and dislike for authority referred to, and accepted as fact, so
frequently in Australian social history.

As a part of this attitude to authority there was an ever strengthening desire in the
un-privileged to replace the political system that created the penal colony with an
alternative state that could provide an environment that would allow a reasonable
living for any who was prepared to work for it:

The Australian radicals of the 1840s and 1850s were so preoccupied with
political issues, so steeped in the doctrines of liberalism and constitutional
democracy, that they came to look upon the state as an instrument of popular
sovereignty (MacIntyre 1985, p.18).

The Exclusives were attempting to set up a colony of aristocratic plantation owner
types who were able to annexe Crown land merely by nominally occupying it. At
The same time the experiences of the majority were moving them in a very different
direction. To the majority

the brutality and human degradation of the convict system destroyed the
legitimacy of the old order and made new structures of government a pre-
condition for independence. And perhaps most importantly, this experience
focussed all attention on political reform (Pusey 1988, p.26).

If things did not change in the colony this could not happen as all power was in the
hands of the minority and they were not about to abandon their privilege for the very
new idea of democracy. However, things did not stay the way they were. The
catalyst for the change was the discovery of gold. As in North America the
discovery of gold had ramifications that went far beyond the making and breaking of
a number of individual fortunes.
Gold: the End of the Beginning

Small finds of gold had been made in New South Wales as early as the 1820s but this information was suppressed by the Colonial Authorities. There were two main reasons for the suppression of this news: firstly, the disastrous social effects of the American gold rushes were fresh in the minds of those in power. With such a tiny population a similar influx of people with no other thought than getting rich quick would have a devastating effect on the Colony. Secondly the issue of the legal ownership of minerals in a British Colony would inevitably lead to a widespread breakdown of the rule of law. In America the owner of land was also the owner of any minerals found on or under it. British law was structured so that no matter who owned the land any mineral found on or below the surface was the property of the Crown. In the disorganisation and emotion of a gold rush this aspect of the law would inevitably ignored and any attempt to enforce it would, very likely, lead to insurrection. With the law under constant threat from the large number of criminals in the Colony anything that may present a further threat to the rule of law had to be avoided.

Blainey (1964) suggests that the gold rush, in 1851, to Bathurst was intentionally created to render the Crown’s claim to minerals impossible to enforce. If this was the case it was a spectacularly successful ploy with the eventual compromise being the issuing of licences to prospectors on receipt of a monthly fee, to be paid in advance. As a result of the gold rush, the fledgling colony of Victoria was in the potential position of losing the vast majority of its population in an impromptu migration north to Bathurst. To counteract this, large rewards were offered for the discovery of sizeable gold deposits within the borders of the colony. The discovery of the goldfields of Ballarat and Bendigo were the result of this ploy. However, the licence system also had to be applied to them.

In the early days the Victorian gold rush had an enormous impact on the administration. In addition to the huge increase in population to administer, the majority of those whose job it was to do this could not resist the lure of the rush themselves. The pastoral industry expected disaster as a result of the loss of labour, in fact they managed very well with a reduced workforce. The sheep were sheared
and the demand for mutton and other agricultural produce from the goldfields ensured handsome profits for graziers and small farmer alike.

This period of virtual anarchy has had a lasting effect on Australian attitudes and opinions. The tradition of groups of people sticking together and helping out in adversity owes much to conditions on the goldfields, particularly those of Victoria. To compensate for the loss to the Crown of the minerals being extracted the authorities instituted the hated licence scheme. Any miner must have a licence to work a claim or face severe penalties. Corrupt and malicious law officers were able to exploit this as it was necessary for a miner to carry the licence at all times. The licence was written on paper and often miners would work waist deep in water and had to carry heavy loads of potential gold bearing rock long distances for washing. This gave the police many opportunities to demand production of the licence when it was obvious this was not possible. Those unable to produce their licence were taken to the resident commissioners who would impose a fine, very often on a legitimate licence holder. The extent of direct corruption that went on in this process is unclear but it seems very likely that at the very least career benefits were likely to be gained by behaving in this way. The miners formed groups who would look out for one another in solidarity against the authorities and the natural dangers presented by the mining process.

This solidarity grew into a movement that began to take on a political aspect with the Ballarat Reform League demanding

annual parliaments, payment for members of parliament, abolition of property franchise and its replacement by manhood suffrage, and finally the removal of the property qualification for membership of the Victorian Legislative Council

(Clarke 1992, p.122).

When the local grievance of the acquittal of a murder charge on the licensee of the Eureka Hotel was combined with the gathering momentum of the political movement one of Australia’ most important cultural traditions was born. The recollection of and appropriation of the events of what came to be known as the Eureka Stockade have become an important part of what it means to be Australian. Most of the references to the Eureka Stockade used by various groups and
individuals to reinforce their claims to the Australian tradition have little concurrence with what actually happened on December the first 1854. This no longer matters, as it has become a powerful icon for the meaning of being Australian.

The reality of the Australian character was illustrated by what did happen at Eureka Stockade. Clarke (1992, p.123) describes this trait as a footnote to his description of the events:

The Eureka Stockade did, however, bring to light one interesting facet of the developing national character, in that the affair was from start to finish dominated by the miners from overseas. It showed clearly that Australian-born colonists would not fight for their political beliefs, and the large exodus of men from the stockade before the events of Sunday morning indicates a propensity to sympathise with the demands for a ‘fair go’ from the authorities, but also a healthy regard for their own skins. Time and time again it would be found that when the forces of conservatism and reaction acted forcibly to defend positions of privilege, vociferous advocates of freedom and a ‘fair go’ for all faded quietly away.

The trait of dislike and mistrust of authority is one that features repeatedly in descriptions of the Australian character. However, this account of the behaviour of the Australian contingent at the Eureka Stockade shows how inaccurate this description actually is. The true Australian trait of railing against authority, even for laudable ends, but pulling back at the last moment and accepting the political messaging of the establishment is repeated time and again through subsequent history. This trait provides an explanation for some of the conclusions reached, in the following chapter, about the way in which public opinion has developed in Australia that would otherwise appear at odds with accepted dominant perceptions of the Australian character.

*From Golden Anarchy to Responsible Government*

Paradoxically, the gold rushes, while causing enormous problems for effective administration of the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria, also generated a situation in which it became possible to demand that responsible government should
no longer be denied by Britain. This situation was the result of the financial viability and increased population that the finding of gold had been responsible for.

Some twenty-five years earlier demands were made, even to the Monarch herself, for responsible self-government. Lord Stanley replied:

Her Majesty must decline to enter into any stipulation at once so abstract and so vague … In Neither case [ie. neither in Canada nor in New South Wales] has the Queen entered into any statement of any Theory or abstract principle of Colonial Government, nor is Her Majesty advised that to discuss such Theories, or to propound such abstract principles, forms any branch of the duties which the laws and constitution of the British Empire call on Her to discharge (Quoted in Clark 1969, p.96).

This long winded ‘No’ could not be repeated once it was possible to demonstrate that the Australian colonies were able to support themselves and show that there was also a sustainability based on population growth. With the exception of Western Australia the political development of the colonies followed a similar pattern. Bicameral constitutions were proposed with Houses of Assembly and Council which reflected as closely as the colonial conditions would allow the structure of the Parliaments of Britain. Inevitably the squatters by various means ensured that their influence and privilege would be perpetuated by the new ostensibly democratic structures of government (each colony embraced universal manhood suffrage).

In New South Wales, a leading pastoralist, W.C. Wentworth proposed that there should be established a hereditary aristocracy of pastoralists. While this was scorned out of consideration by the people, the pastoralists did succeed in securing a nominated Legislative Council which they would use to deflect the ‘excesses’ of democracy. In Victoria, Van Diemen’s land and South Australia the powerful elites assured their continued ascendency through restricted franchises into elected Legislative Councils. These were far more effective in perverting the course of democracy than were the New South Wales ‘aristocrats’. The peculiarly Australian acceptance of the need for a mechanism of checks and balances to the excesses of democratically elected small ‘l’ liberal, nominally socialist and generally democratic governments clearly has its origins in these arrangements. That these were made by the politically conservative, and the loudest cries of protest when they are used.
against them, emanate from conservative governments is not without significance. It would appear to be reasonable for the checks and balances to be used to dismiss a liberal government in 1975 but it is heinous to propose amendments to a bill, to dispossess Aborigines of their land, introduced by a conservative government in 1998!

A degree of independence for individual colonies was achieved as a result of a complete turnaround on the part of the British Government in 1850. Only three years earlier Lord Grey made a detailed proposal for a limited federal legislature that could make laws binding on all colonies in certain specified fields. The reaction was greeted by disappointment and rejection in all colonies except Victoria. The reason behind both these reactions was that the power of the New South Wales self-appointed aristocracy would be compromised. Already the animosity between New South Wales and Victoria, that has become such a powerful Australian motif, had surfaced.

**A Time For Consolidation**

Now that the various colonies had gained a degree of independence concerns turned to development of the land and the control of villains of various kinds. In Victoria and Queensland where gold mining continued for many years there was a constant need for a significant police presence. The harsh life of the goldfields often translated into behaviour of a harsh nature. Much of this aggression was directed against the significant number of Chinese who by various means managed to persist in arriving at the diggings in spite of actions, both legal and otherwise, to prevent them. The diggers complaint was that the availability of Chinese labourers reduced the going rate making it very difficult to earn a living working on the goldfields. The deep animosity that grew has become a part of the accepted Australian perception of the threat of the yellow hordes waiting to invade from the North. Over a hundred years later this animosity would be stirred up again to help justify joining with the USA in war in Viet Nam. Even after that experience the attitude is still strong with frequent exhortations to be wary of the waiting invasion force to our north appearing in the letters columns of Australian newspapers.
Outside the goldfields the major areas of contestation was in the conflicting needs of agriculture and pastoralism. In the early days of the colonies the wealthy were able to appropriate huge tracts of land as gentlemen squatters. As the population grew, the sense of this arrangement increasingly came into question:

Out of the 31,467,816 acres in the hands of squatters as licensed runs in the colony of Victoria in 1858, the annual yield for home consumption in the colony and for export had a net value of 1,997,469 pounds or one shilling, three and one-half pence per acre. Besides, those who occupied the thirty odd million acres could not supply the people of Victoria with food (Clark 1969, p.133).

The behaviour of the squatters was the cause of much of the developing colonies’ problems. The newly developing bourgeoisie in the cities took up the cause of equality of opportunity for all residents of the colonies. The greatest losses this policy would cause would be to the squatters who were not to capitulate without a fight. The first battles in this campaign were waged in the legislature of New South Wales. A bill was introduced in the lower house that would allow blocks of crown land to be purchased for £1 per acre with a minimum size of 320 acres. This guaranteed that land would only be available to those who had accumulated a substantial amount of capital to invest. The squatter controlled upper house initially would not let this bill pass but were eventually out-manoeuvred when their five-year term ended with a threat to flood the upper house with nominees sympathetic to the bill. As the bill was conservative the agreement of the upper house was gained without taking action to nominate alternative members. With the success of the bill in New South Wales similar bills were successfully presented in the legislatures of the other colonies and the first battles were won.

In New South Wales and Victoria the land acts allowed squatters to make selections of land on his own squatting run, not only in his own name but also in those of his family, friends, employees and even fictitious people. By this method it was possible to make their runs unsuitable for other selectors simply by selecting the prime portions of land:

By careful selection of water holes and river frontages, squatters could render useless most of the rest of their runs. This process of picking the eyes out of a run became known as ‘peacocking’. … Free selectors could also indulge in
peacocking and then hold a squatter to ransom by cutting off access to water for his stock (Clarke 1992, p. 130).

A combination of a lack of knowledge of the viability of land for agriculture and the behaviour of squatters who had land selected from their runs was responsible for much of the rural poverty and misery in New South Wales and Victoria in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. Much of the land was totally unsuited to small-scale farming and that which was, was coveted by the squatter who had lost it. The experiences of the Kelly family in outback Victoria were not untypical of the lives led by unsuccessful free selectors. Their son, Ned, became, in the first instance, a feared criminal, but subsequently an Australian icon, referred to in many Australian man’s description of himself.

Having witnessed the problems encountered in the first land bills, those enacted in South Australia and Queensland stressed occupation of the selected land as an essential qualifier for selectors. Through this measure a greater degree of success was initially achieved in those colonies. Indeed, in the 1860s South Australia produced half of Australia’s wheat on land freed up by the selection process. In addition, wheat was also exported to the other colonies and to Britain. In all almost two million acres of agricultural land came into production through free selection in South Australia. The situation was not quite so successful in Queensland, while agricultural success did occur it was at a great social cost caused, in the main, by isolation.

The Kelly family represents an extreme example of the social problems that were generated by the development of the land. At the same time life in the cities was not always better as Australia suffered a number of economic recessions during the second half of the Nineteenth Century and many workers lived in as abject poverty in the cities as that in which failed selectors lived in the bush. Both in the city and the bush there were enormous contrasts between the poor and the wealthy. The British interpretation of the protestant version of Christianity suggested that this was a right and fitting representation of the will of God who preordained each person’s station in life. However, while over twenty percent of the population was Roman Catholic, Catholicism offered little hope either with its conviction that worldly wealth was in fact an impediment to the chances of eternal salvation. The only hope
lay in crime or the organisation of labour. Australian tradition has a special place for both of these.

Whereas very few people would support the notion of crime as a way of life there is often a degree of sympathy for the individual who runs foul of the law, that is if the crime is not one that directly and physically harms another person. The degree of support for the release of Alan Bond who was convicted at law of having fraudulently acquired many millions of dollars is testimony to this. Curiously the level of support for organised labour has not been so enduring, probably as a result of a sustained propaganda campaign from the successors to the Nineteenth Century squatters.

While the difficulties were being played out in the bush a different kind of development was occurring in the city. There was an intentional push to define an Australian national culture. While this move was associated with the growth of a manufacturing base in the cities, the image produced was one of the bush:

A sunlit landscape of faded blue hills, cloudless skies and noble gum trees, peopled by idealised shearers and drovers. Australians were urged to respond to this image emotionally, as a test of their patriotism (White 1992, p.25).

This represented a major change in the perception of Australia. For the first time the image was created by Australians rather than Europeans. The changes went beyond mere imagery with Australia becoming, in the eyes of some, the social laboratory of the world. Grounded on the income from agriculture and mining, radical liberal measures were introduced: old age pensions, graduated income tax, centralised wage setting, the payment of MPs combined to create an almost unique expanded role for government. The steady improvement in the standard of living ground to a halt with the depression of 1891. The liberal advances did not fade away, rather, they became the foundation for far reaching developments in society. As a response, to the usual tactics of business when economic conditions deteriorated, of laying off workers and reducing wages, workers joined forces to protest. The resulting industrial action brought to the fore champions of liberal philosophies which culminated in the formation of labour parties which became established in the colonial parliaments
surprisingly quickly. These and the newly founded middle-class federation movement combined to oversee a vote of all six colonies to vote to become a nation.

**Federation and a Constitution of Dissent**

It is probably an over simplification to say that the colonies simply voted to become a nation. The process was quite a tortured one which had its origins in 1880 when Henry Parkes proposed there should be a federal council established to deal with issues of common interest to the colonies. It took five years for this to come to fruition, the council was virtually powerless and restricted to offering advice. Parkes was not to be satisfied with this and again he argued for greater cooperation between the colonies. To achieve this, he maintained, it was essential to have a federal government with, at least, responsibility for defence. This argument struck a chord and at a conference of colonial premiers a resolution, to hold a national Australasian convention to devise definite proposals, was passed.

The Queensland Attorney General, Sir Samuel Griffith, drafted a proposed constitution that in essence if not in detail forms the basis of the constitution eventually adopted. Free trade between states and a bicameral system of government with an upper house representing each colony equally were the main points in the proposed constitution. As the conference was held in 1890 at the beginning of a time of economic depression and social upheaval the ensuing debate was often punctuated by changes of governments in various colonies. The result was the demand for many changes, the majority of which were to preserve the interests of individual colonies in the proposed federation. The resulting constitution which was, eventually, after a number of false starts, accepted by the people, excepting those of Western Australia, could not be described as one that should produce a united nation as:

> it [was] clear that the colonists had no intention of centralising power and administration except in certain limited areas. Unification under a single central government was not at all what they had in mind (Clark 1992, p.178).

Between receiving Royal assent in July 1900 and Federation on January the first 1901 John Forrest, the Premier of Western Australia, succumbed to the pressure to put aside the self interested demands of his colony and join the federation. The
referendum vote was strongly in favour of joining the rest of Australia “and on 17 September 1900 Queen Victoria accordingly proclaimed that on the first day of the new Century the people of the Australian colonies would be united under the name of the Commonwealth of Australia” (Clark 1992, pp.180-181). It is significant that before the new nation was allowed to come into being the British Government had demanded that changes were made to the constitution that ensured the protection of British interests in the country. In spite of the independent status of Australia it was not until another ninety years had passed that the recurring demands of Britain were questioned in a serious way by any Australian Government. The Prime Minister of the time, Paul Keating, was vilified in some quarters for this attitude and significant back pedalling has occurred since his successor came to power.

It could be argued that the cohesion and sense of nationhood that has grown since federation has done so in spite of the constitution rather than because of it. However an enduring aspect of the Australian perception of itself as a nation is the importance of the rights of the States. It is an argument that is repeatedly used to justify actions that are at odds with the changing expectations of the world community. This is a particular type of parochialism that is strongest in the more remote States and Territories and has led to the formation of some quirky and disturbing political movements that in many ways appear not to be congruent with what is understood to be ‘Australian’.

Possibly the only thing that managed to truly unite the nation in the years immediately after Federation was a commitment to keeping Australia white. Immigration was important for the continuing development of the country and when sufficient white people in various categories were not available, special arrangements were made to allow those who could not pass the dictation test in a European language, to stay for up to five years. A highly contentious use for this test, long after it had fell into general disuse, was found much later in relation to the powerful anti-communist attitude that was to develop in Australia.

From the vantage point of the end of the Century it is hard to imagine what would have become of Australia if something had not happened to unite the fledgling nation. Even when it did happen there was argument in Australia not to get involved. On August 3, 1914, Prime Minister, Joseph Cook “announced the
government’s decision to place Australian vessels under the control of the British Admiralty and to offer the imperial government an expeditionary force of 20,000” (Clark 1969, p.199). In response one newspaper affiliated to the labour movement published an article saying, “If Europe is to get drunk with blood, there is all the greater reason why Labour should keep a clear head” (Clark 1969, p.200).

**The Common Purpose of War**

The argument against becoming involved was not supported and quickly drowned in the sea of patriotic fervour in favour of Britain. Cook’s force of Australians and New Zealanders (ANZACs) was assembled within three months. Apart from a few minor engagements close to Australia the first campaign in which Australians were involved was to assist the British gain control of the Dardanelles to allow access to the Dead Sea and exclude Turkey from the war.

**Gallipoli**

The two most significant icons of Australian history are: Ned Kelly and Gallipoli. Whereas the icon of Ned Kelly represents an aspect of Australia that celebrates an antipathy towards authority and is not quite respectable nor generally acknowledged, Gallipoli has grown in stature and is increasingly cited as an important part of the Australian ethos.

The ANZAC force was shipped to Egypt for training at a camp near Cairo. On 1 April they were informed that all leave had been cancelled so as to prepare for the attack on the Turkish coast of the Dardanelles:

> It was an imaginatively conceived plan that foundered on mismanagement and was to involve Australia in one of the worst defeats suffered by the British forces during the war (Clarke 1992, p.196).

The plan depended on the attacking force being able to secure a cliff-lined beach head and move inland. Mistakes made in the landing place made this impossible but attempts were continued for nine months against a well trained and well supplied defending force. By the time the British command bowed to the inevitable over ten thousand ANZACs had been killed and twenty-four thousand wounded. The campaign was a spectacular failure but a reputation had been made and a national
day instituted on 25 April, the anniversary of the initial landings. Gallipoli and the ANZACs had become icons for a nation that is said to have come of age through the sacrifice of so many lives and limbs.

**The War in Europe**

After the Gallipoli landings were abandoned the ANZACs were transferred to the Western Front and for three years were little more than another section of the British forces. In the main the ANZACs were held in high regard as good soldiers, although towards the end of this time there was an increasing incidence of desertion. Unlike the British, the Australian command would not allow deserters to be executed and the perceived lack of discipline of the Australians caused considerable consternation among the British high command.

In spite of this Australian troops maintained their reputation as first class soldiers. Curiously, one of the most important developments in bringing the war to an end that was inextricably linked with Australian military command and troops is barely remembered. In the spring of 1918 the German army had made an almost decisive attack on the allied lines. For the first time in the war Australian troops were commanded by an Australian; Sir John Monash. He was given the task of counter attacking at the village of Cambrai. For the duration of the war to that date the method of attack was a major bombardment of the enemy lines followed by the infantry leaving the trenches and attacking the opposing trenches with light weapons and bayonets. This resulted in the space between the two sets of trenches becoming where the majority of the millions of casualties were incurred. Monash decided to alter the strategy with the use of tanks, which had been largely ineffective to that point, to provide physical cover for the advancing infantry. By the end of the time allowed for the battle the Australian troops were up to three miles beyond their objective. An effective means of moving the front line in trench warfare had been found and the tactical advantage created was enough to tip the balance in the allies’ favour and bring an end to the war in a matter of a few months.

*A Land Fit For Heroes?*

The Australian Government made a serious attempt to treat the returning service personnel in a manner suitable for heroes, as they were generally seen to be.
bringing back the troops in an order that reflected the needs of both the individual and the country a suitable compensation was considered to be the offer of a parcel of land to establish a farm and a subsidised loan to cover the costs. This proved to be very popular and thousands of hopeful new farmers started very hard work in all parts of the country.

After more than a hundred years the simple lesson that Australia, for the most part, is not suited to small scale farming, had not been learnt. Most of these new selectors, in spite of working extremely hard, could not make a success of their farming ventures. The result of this was that despite the very best of intentions, a sizeable group of returned soldiers were experiencing anything but a land fit for heroes.

Of those who did not take up the offer of free land some invested their state gratuity in business ventures many of which were successful. The remainder went back to or took up employment in urban areas. The latter group were given preference in job selection alienating a trade union movement that had seen real wages fall by almost one pound per week by the end of the war. These factors combined to create several enduring Australian attitudes that are still evident at the end of the Century.

While the ex union organiser Hughes was Prime Minister the discontent was kept under the surface. Elections at the end of 1922 led to Hughes being forced from office and Stanley Bruce, a businessman from Victoria, became Prime Minister. This new Government appeared to be very much one for the ruling classes.

Bruce was an English educated gentleman who drove a Rolls Royce, wore spats in cold weather and spoke with a carefully modulated English accent. The gulf between industrial labour and the federal government had never seemed so large (Clarke 1992, p.213).

Disillusioned failed farmers returning to the cities, unemployed or under-employed workers displaced by returning service men and ordinary workers who were becoming increasingly aware of the reduction in their living standards combined to generate continuing industrial strife. The Bruce Government’s response was to introduce legislation to curb the freedoms of workers to effectively organise themselves. Predictably, this inflamed the situation as is illustrated by the fact that the Victorian police force went out on strike in 1923. The industrial action was
directed at gaining a reasonable degree of security and remuneration for the workers in all industries.

The Government, as so many have since, believed it was being attacked by subversive international communist elements intent on destroying the country. The response was to attempt to deport foreign-born union leaders. Eventually the High Court ruled that this would not be legal as they were Australian.

In the meantime, however, the Bruce-Page government had gone to the people on the ‘red-scare’ issue and won a handsome victory. It was to be the first of many federal elections fought on this issue in the next 60 years, and conservative governments always did very well with it (Clarke 1992, p.215).

While controlling the expectations of the workers, the Bruce government gave great succour to its supporters. This was a time of consolidation of protection for the pastoral and agricultural industries and significant expenditure on rural transport infrastructure. At the same time additional inducements were offered to potential British migrants, not only to migrate to Australia but also to settle in the Bush.

Industrial strife continued unabated throughout the terms of the Bruce government. Bruce became convinced that much of this was allowed to continue because of the overlapping jurisdictions of Commonwealth and State arbitration systems. Proposals for reform were submitted to the people. The government was returned with a reduced majority. The resulting bill virtually ceded all responsibility for industrial relations to the states. Bruce had miscalculated the amount of support and was forced into another election, in 1929, which brought a Labor Government into power.

One of the effects of this protracted industrial turmoil and movement of returned soldiers form their farms was to recreate the large body of itinerant rural workers that had been common place before the war. These men, for they were almost entirely working men, became the archetype for the classic Australian Bush man. This was and is a character who is self reliant, tough, hard working, hard playing and will never pass someone in need without rendering assistance, that is, the original proponent of ‘mateship’. For quite some time this image was the one which represented the ‘true Australian’.

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This relatively short period after the First World War generated the pervasive Australian images of the returned serviceman, the demon trade unions, the imminent threat of communism and the image of an Australian being a man from the Bush. It is significant that for all the permanence of these images there is no reference whatever to even the existence of women in Australia.

The Great Depression’s Lasting Impact

With the change of government in 1929 Jim Scullin, the new Prime Minister, was seen as a far more acceptable leader by the workers who had felt excluded by the previous administration. However, any expectation of change was to be quashed by the reality of the international depression. A small country, located thousands of kilometres from its markets and dependant on primary industry for its income was inevitably hit hard by the economic disaster that swept the world. There simply were insufficient funds to finance any significant social programs or improve the income of ordinary workers. In fact, the reverse occurred with the situation of ordinary Australians becoming desperate. At the height of the depression in 1933 “nearly one third of the bread winners were unemployed (Clark 1969, p.219). Of course, unemployment not only affects those without a job. With only two thirds of the workforce in paid employment the amount of money circulating in the economy reduces to almost the same proportion consequently those with work end up with a much smaller disposable income than in times of a moving economy.

The contribution of this period to the image of Australia and Australians is restricted to that of a reinforcement of the Australian as a man of the Bush. Large numbers of unemployed men left the cities to try to find work in rural industries, they would walk from town to town and farm to farm. The depression was affecting the rural sector just as badly as the cities but a reputation was generated that country people could be relied on to find at least a little work that would be paid for with a meal. A cartoon in the Bulletin (1933) illustrates the plight very well:

THE BAGMAN: Any chance of a job about here, Boss?

THE BOSS: Well, you could come in with one of us cockies and go fifty-fifty in what we ain’t makin’ (cited in King 1978, p.128).
From Depression to War

The battle with the depression was a long drawn out affair that only came to an end with the Second World War. Unlike the previous conflict this war did not produce the same powerful images and traditions. However, the ones that had been created in the First World War were certainly reinforced. The reputation of the Australian soldier was enhanced by contributions in all theatres of the conflict, but, again, it was in defeat that some of the strongest images were made. The tenacity of the Australian prisoners working on the Burma Railway has become well renowned and the fighting retreat South along the Kokoda Track was one that prevented ultimate defeat and marked a significant turning point in the war against the Japanese in the Pacific.

It is probably significant that the last quarter of Australia’s history, which begins with the Second World War, has produced, proportionally, far fewer typifying images of the country than each of the preceding three-quarters. Much of that which has happened in the last fifty years has served to reinforce the images created in earlier times.

The Post-War Dream

Around the world the First World War created significant effects on individual nations, and in Europe itself the aspirations of many nations were satisfied with the demise of empires that had their roots in previous centuries. The Second World War impacted in very different ways with millions of people, mostly civilian, becoming refugees desperately trying to find somewhere to call home. The developing nation of Australia accepted many of these people in a bid to spur the growth the country needed as well as to provide the labour required to maintain the enormous economic growth caused by rebuilding, not only at home but also by the international demand for the primary produce that Australia had in abundance.

Although no one was aware of it, this period was at the beginning of multicultural Australia. The refugees and immigrants that came to the country in the twenty years after the war were from a wide range of, mainly European, lands. Although, at the time, they were disparagingly called reffos and English migrants were treated little better as Poms, they were all, eventually, made welcome and recognised for the
contribution they had made to the development of the country. This was a time of huge gains for the working class, so much so that the class almost ceased to exist. It became almost impossible to differentiate the middle class from the working class leading to a very important image of Australia as an egalitarian society. The truth is closer to the existence of a blurring of the divisions created by the affluence of the workers who were in high demand and short supply at a time of frantic economic growth.

The 1950s was a period when Australian life was so good there was little need for contestation. As a result social development could not compete with the booming economy. For this entire decade and beyond Robert Menzies was Prime Minister. It was a period of which Donald Horne referred to Australia as ‘The Lucky Country’. This term was adopted as confirmation of the success the nation had achieved. Of this Horne later commented:

> For me, there was the particular humiliation of the misuse of the phrase ‘the lucky country’. I had invented it as a warning of trouble ahead, using it as an ironic comment on the second-ratedness of the Australian leaders of that time, but in the mining boom ‘new nationalism’ of the John Gorton era it became a phrase of congratulation, and insofar as it was still seen as having any sting, it was used not to criticize leaders but those whom they led. …That a term intended to be a warning was transformed into a form of self-congratulation reflected a streak of profound silliness in whole sections of Australian scholars, media people and intellectuals in general (Horne 1987, p.9).

The extent to which Australia was socially out of step with the rest of the world is illustrated by the fact that at the end of his Prime Ministership, Menzies led the country to war in Viet Nam where no other country but the USA would become involved. One of the reasons for the conviction that this was the correct action lies in one of the most enduring motifs of the era. That is the belief that Australia was seriously threatened both from within and from the Asian North by communism. Certainly the lead had been taken from America and Senator McCarthy’s anti-American hearings but there is also a long tradition in Australia of this fear being used to sustain a conservative government that had little else to offer. Of course, the split in the Labor Party assisted in this endeavour with the Democratic Labor Party
using the fear of communism to ensure that Labor could not achieve a majority in the Lower House on a number of occasions.

Menzies’ shadow lived on in the governments of his conservative successors but the explosive social changes that were spreading, across the Western world were beginning to make themselves felt in Australia and Menzies legacy could not accommodate them. By 1972 there had emerged a very strong tide of opinion that there were many social objectives that should be achieved and that the only way to do that was for the government to use public funds for those ends, the election slogan of the ALP of the time summed it up by stating that “it’s time”.

Unfortunately for the new Labor Government almost immediately after its being elected international events brought the economy to a new level of concern. The 1960s were a beginning of questioning the status quo in almost all fields, by 1972 governments of certain countries realised the power they held in being the major suppliers of fuel for the enormous industrial expansion that had been going on since the end of the second world war. When these governments, quite reasonably, decided that it was time they saw a fair share of the benefits of the importance of their oil Western economies that depended on this supply of cheap fuel were badly battered. The direct effect of this move on most Western economies was what became termed stagflation, that is, high inflation, low or no growth and high unemployment. The conservative opposition used the still strong national memory of the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s to justify the blocking of supply. Donald Horne relates the events at the 1975 Metal Trades Industry Association annual meeting:

“We belonged to a nation where there was the grand illusion that the economic crisis of combined unemployment and inflation was caused entirely by Gough Whitlam. McCleland pointed out that there was a world crisis of which Australia’s experience was only a part but when Fraser presented this as buck-passing there were rustles of assent. When he said surely Australia could find its own answers to economic problems there was a great cheer (Horne 1976, pp.55-6).

Horne, clearly, was not aware of the mechanisms that drive public opinion and how they can be used to make new approaches to action seem dangerous. Public opinion
is highly dependent on the culture of that public. This culture is not something that changes over the short period of a few years as it is based on a cultural history that has developed over decades, if not centuries. Fraser’s chauvinistic calls were answered in public opinion because they appealed to a simple view of the world that had become too complicated to comprehend.

Stereotypes of Australia that had been built up over a century or more were of a young and thriving nation with the energy to take any challenge head on. It was natural, in the early 1970s to extend the legendary care for the underdog to supporting social policies that looked after the less fortunate members of society. However, when the international economic crisis hit, the new information that was being applied to predisposition was easily called to question. This led to the opposition being able to justify the blocking of supply and so leading to the dismissal of the Whitlam Government. Having been installed as caretaker Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser was able to reassert old stereotypes by making suggestions that the actions of the Whitlam Government were dangerously un-Australian. Horne (1976) described this process as a “continuing campaign of ‘revelations’ [about what the sacked government had been doing] none of which was to be substantiated” (p.13)

Predispositions are not fixed; they can be modified by differing perceptions becoming accepted as a result of the “mainstream effect” (Zaller 1992 p.98) in which there is consensus in the elite discourse, that is, that the majority view of both sides to an issue are in agreement. It is this process that is most likely to lead to a change “in long term response probabilities” (Zaller 1992 p.119) or public attitude.

If the events of November 1975 and their consequences over the ensuing years are considered in relation to this understanding of the development of public opinion it becomes clearer how an economic rationalist approach to government, the economy and the individual has become accepted so readily by both sides of Australian politics.

During the depression of the 1930s Keynesian economics were introduced after a short period when the neo-classical approach of reducing government activity in the economy had proved ineffective. Both in Australia and overseas this proved
effective and continued to do so through the boom years of the 1940s, 40s and 60s. As a consequence the major economic problems that occurred after the OPEC price increases of the early 1970s were blamed on the government rather than the repeated depressions that have been a major component of the capitalist system (Maddock 1982, p.50). The elite discourse was that because the government had embarked on such major reform so quickly it was unable to deal with the economy. Paradoxically, economic rationalists of the “new right” such as Malcolm Fraser and John Howard used this dissatisfaction with the government’s failure to control the economy to push an alternative approach that maintained that government should minimise its involvement in the economy. As these policies developed it became necessary to give them “a rhetorical gloss, a ‘philosophy’ to add some kind of rationale or legitimacy to [their] actions” (Patience 1982, p.82).

New terms were introduced to the elite discourse such as monetarism, supply-side economics, the Laffer Curve and rational expectation. All of these had in common that there was an implicit blame laid at the door of government policies for high levels of unemployment, high inflation and low growth. While these policies reflected those of the right of Australian politics there was another factor looming that led the Australian Labor Party, once it regained power, in 1983, to adopt those principles as central components to its own policy. While they were in opposition the elite discourse had been very supportive of this *laissez faire* approach to economics and inevitably the change in public attitude filtered through into the ranks of the ALP. It had become axiomatic that small government was good and public spending was bad. The development of opinion followed a similar path to that devised by the pig Napoleon in George Orwell’s *Animal farm* in which the parody of elite discourse was the sheep chanting “four legs good, two legs bad”.

After the general election in 1983 Labor found itself working with a public service that was the product of this discourse and the advice it gave was based on rationalist principles. This was compounded by the development of the Senior Executive Service, within the public service, that provided top level advice and policy development for the various ministries. Members of the SES attached to Treasury, Finance and the Prime Minister and Cabinet Departments were predominantly economics and business graduates from institutions that had a heavily neo-classicist
bias and in turn tended to be heavily in favour of rationalist economic approaches (Pusey 1991). The implication of this is that a “mainstream effect” (Zaller 1992, p.98) in the development of public opinion was generated in which virtually all the persuasive messages in the media were supportive of economic rationalist policies and there were no negative cueing messages to suggest that the policies may not be in the public interest.

As a result of these historic factors there has been a significant change in public attitude in favour of rationalist perceptions of the economy and their relationship to the government of the country at all levels. Even at the start of the Twenty-first Century, with a conservative Government, the rationalist discourse has undergone reinforcement although it is suffering some criticism and Australia appears to be entering a new phase of opinion development in which there are “two-sided information flows” the results of which will be somewhat less clear cut as attitude change in response to a two-sided message can take different forms at different points in time, depending on the relative intensities of the opposing messages and the prior distribution of opinion (Zaller 1992, p. 207).

As in many Western countries there has been a significant change in public opinion in relation to economic policy. While the change has been towards the right of the political spectrum it is one that has been embraced by people from both sides of politics. As with most changes in opinion this has not been a conscious move but one that has evolved through the processes of public opinion development. The historical reasons behind this change in Australia are different from those that are relevant to other countries and will probably remain significant in shaping the political scene of the Twenty First Century.

The Bicentenary, Sport and the Original Australians

Apart from the defining issues raised by the politics of the nation, Australia has gleaned much of its image from the success of its sporting heroes. Yvonne Cawley (Goolagong) was even given the status of honorary Australian on winning Wimbledon, the zenith of tennis achievement. Her Aboriginality was forgiven rather than forgotten over twenty years before a group of Aborigines, including Kathy Freeman, Mandawuy Yunupingu and kin, Michael Long and colleagues in AFL,
became so successful that mainstream Australia was forced to acknowledge that they were Australian too. This embracing of the indigenous Australians coincided with elaborate celebrations for the two hundredth anniversary of Governor Phillip landing to establish that penal colony in New South Wales. Just as in Phillip’s time Even the lowest in society had their place as long as the social boundaries were not crossed while at the same time the pretence was maintained that they did not really exist.

The fact that Yvonne Cawley had to be allowed into Australian society so that that society could bask in the reflected glory of an Australian sporting achievement is a reflection of a powerful aspect of what it means to be Australian. Overt racism had become unacceptable with the development of an increasingly liberal society. The belief that there were races that were lower on the evolutionary scale was a part of mainstream social theory until relatively recently when the weight of evidence to the contrary around the world could no longer be ignored. This liberal social attitude developed to the point where Aborigines gained full citizenship rights in the 1960s. When the development went further with the victory for Eddie Mabo, in the Australian High Court, which explicitly stated that Australia was not, in fact, Terra nullius at the time of European settlement the bound of tolerance had been reached for many Australians.

The discourse that the Mabo case initiated legitimated a section of society to express its racist philosophy, leading to the rise of Pauline Hanson: a significant phenomenon in late Twentieth Century Australian polity. Even so the discourse has not given racism sufficient power to allow it to be openly expressed. When challenged with being racist Ms Hanson is emphatic that she is not:

She is not against Aborigines because they are Aborigines, but because they are given taxpayer’ money. They are not real Aborigines, only half-caste. A long time ago they committed genocide by killing off the first inhabitants of the continent, who may well have been Caucasian. Their mothers ate their babies. Their men ate white gold miners. They haven’t assimilated. They are for separatism, for ghettos. Pauline Hanson points out that ninety-four per cent (note the pseudo-scientific precision) of Australia’s large mammals became extinct as a result of pre-European occupation – one in the eye for the greenies. Fire-stick farming destroyed vegetation with baleful effects ‘far more than
Late Twentieth Century Australian society has adopted as extremely important the image of Australia as a highly successful sporting nation. The implications of this include the necessity of embracing those who until they achieved sporting success were outsiders. In the same way two hundred years of Australian immigration became vital, partly to provide a national foundation on which sporting success can be constructed. There was almost a point where these multi-cultural and Aboriginal backgrounds became important in their own right but it appears that the speed of change was just a little too great.

Horne (1987, p.7) illustrates how important, and diverting, sporting success has become when discussing the poor industrial performance of the country leading to it being “ranked in terms of the technological basis of … exports, Australia comes twenty-first [in the OECD]”. This became irrelevant as the perception of Australian technology was based on the success of its high technology in producing a race-winning keel for a sailing boat.

Conclusion: Australia and Australians – The Myths

Traditions and Culture are vital contributors to public opinion as expressed by the members of a national society. Both of these are the product of the history of the nation and the way in which it has been remembered. In this chapter the important aspects of the history of Australia have been examined in relation to factors that contribute to public opinion at the end of the Twentieth Century. An essential part of this process is the way in which historical events are remembered. In many instances these events are remembered accurately but in a number of significant instances the memory is distorted, probably due to the perceptions of those who actually recorded the events rather than through misinterpretation at a later time. This has led to the perception of Australia and of Australians including a number of myths; myths that are important in the way in which decisions are reached about the future of the country and its society.

These myths include:
♦ The real Australia is the outback or the ‘Bush’ as capitalised by Banjo Patterson.

♦ The real Australian is a man of the Bush.

♦ Australia is an egalitarian society.

♦ Mateship is an enduring aspect of Australian society.

♦ Australia really is a lucky country and as such its future is assured.

As early as the third quarter of the Nineteenth Century Australia had one of the highest proportions of city dwellers in the world. Initially this was the result of migrants and convicts coming from the well ordered lands of Northern Europe; the untamed bush presented too much of a threat to most. Later it became clear that although there were seemingly endless acres of land available the reality was that it could sustain neither European style farming nor the number of people it requires.

The myth of the Bush man has its origins in a desire of established colonists, particularly those born in Australia, to establish a distinction between themselves and the new arrivals. In the late Nineteenth Century even committed city dwellers in Sydney would wear cabbage tree hats as a mark of association with the Bush.

While it is true that the boom years of the post Second World War period saw incomes rise to the point that differentiation between classes was hard to see and a perception of a dislike and distrust of authority has led to a less deferential attitude to those of a higher class, Australia is still a class based society. From the earliest days of the colonies a certain group of wealthy individuals have endeavoured to create an aristocracy that holds a significant amount of power. The constitution stripped any political power from this group but the status and financial might of its members has ensured that there is still significant power in their hands. The demise of many pretenders to this aristocracy in the fall out of the economic troubles of the late 1980s bears witness to its continuing exclusiveness.

Mateship was important to the peripatetic labourers of the depressions. It was also a significant quality of the ANZACs. The willingness to help out a colleague even if the individual was almost as badly off as the one facing difficulties was vital to survival at those times. This is certainly carried on among many groups of
Australians but the concept has been appropriated by those to which it was not an important attribute and is being used in a way that contradicts its original manifestation. John Howard, the current Prime Minister, sees mateship as important but presides over a government that demands a reciprocal responsibility from those in greatest need to compensate for the help given – hardly mateship in action!

The phrase the lucky country is used repeatedly to congratulate Australia and Australians for what has been achieved. The phrase was originally coined for a very different purpose; one that still has currency over thirty years later. Donald Horne wrote the phrase in an assessment of the place that Australia held in the world in the early 1960s. The context of the phrase is:

Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people’s ideas, and, although its ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise. A nation more concerned with styles of life than with achievement has managed to achieve what may be the most evenly prosperous society in the world. It has done this in a social climate largely inimical to originality and the desire for excellence (except in sport) and in which there is less and less acclamation of hard work. According to the rules Australia has not deserved its good fortune (Horne 1964, p.239).

The truth of Horne’s assessment is illustrated by the current situation in Western Australia where, at a time of strong economic growth and something of a general understanding of Horne’s critique, the economy is foundering simply because of its reliance on primary production. The return for resources is dwindling yet decisions are being taken that compromise growth industries, such as tourism, to shore up resource exploiting forestry industry that has a very limited future. Western Australia is very lucky that those resources are there but the luck in respect of relying on them for economic health appears to be running out.

Having identified the origins of the culture and traditions of Australia the ground is prepared for the examination of the current public perceptions that are based on them and applying the results of this to educational phenomena. The subsequent chapter will build on the historical analysis contained in this chapter to analyse the ways in
which public opinion affect the perceptions of the significance of what is occurring in schools and how this affects the decisions that parents and their children make regarding choice in education.
CHAPTER NINE
Opinion based Change in Action

Introduction

To have any meaning or purpose the consideration of the wide range of contributory factors to the formation and change of opinion, both individual and public, must be applied to real phenomena in the real world. Suitable real world examples can be found in a number of policy changes that occurred within the sphere of education towards the end of the Twentieth Century. These examples of policy change, which are to be used in this section of the study, were outlined in the opening chapter.

While the three examples of policy change were described in isolation in Chapter One, the relationship they have to each other is acknowledged in this chapter with the phenomenon of a trend towards choosing vocational in preference to academic subjects at post-compulsory level being dealt with first. This course is followed as it is this trend that can most readily be shown to have a direct impact on the way in which education is perceived and understood to work.

Having identified this trend the next step is to identify why this was occurring. At that time there were a number of closely linked phenomena becoming established in the public sphere of the Northern Territory. Firstly, education, which had been considered to operate outside the realm of politics, was becoming increasingly embroiled in political discourse. Secondly, the perception that students were leaving schools with a lower standard of education than in earlier times had been transferred from the realm of dissatisfied nostalgia and appropriated by groups and individuals for their own political purposes. Thirdly, within the educational establishment there was a growing acceptance of the notion of accountability. The debate on accountability had broadened to embrace the desires and expectations of a range of emerging political viewpoints. Using a Critical Theory perspective, together these can be demonstrated to have had a significant effect on public opinion concerning education’s purpose within society with a consequent effect on the way people acted in relation to it.
This chapter will examine the phenomena that were becoming established at that time and include them in an analysis of public opinion relating to education. In doing this it will be possible to relate these changes in public opinion to specific changes in decision making behaviours of senior high school students and their parents. It will be argued that the implication of this will be that a model will have been created that can explain changes in the field of education.

The parents and students involved in the decision making dealt with in this study would represent a fairly typical cross section of the segment of society that make direct use of the public school system. As there is this wide range of personalities and experiences among the people being considered it is clear that any unusual mode of child rearing could not have been experienced by all of them. Had this been the case the unusual upbringing could have explained any temperament and personality, experiences that would have implications for social, intellectual or moral development affecting opinion development. As this is clearly not the case then the most important contributors to their collective (public) opinion must be the traditions and culture of Australia and elite discourse.

However, it is valuable to consider, at this point, that the nature of Australian culture is one that encourages a rather conservative approach to child rearing. An important part of this involves teaching the child a significant degree of respect for authority. This aspect of common child rearing is very likely to predispose the opinion of the individual to accept that the power of the elite is legitimately held, thus providing a foundation for future opinion development.

The background to the traditions and culture of Australia was discussed in detail in Chapter Eight. This history is one that generates what could be likened to an opinion infrastructure onto which attitudes and, subsequently, opinions will be attached. The people involved represent a reasonable cross section of Australian society (admittedly with an unusually large representation of Aborigines) who have shared histories which are significant in the nature of the opinions held and are important in steering the direction of the changes in the direction they have moved. However, they alone can not explain the changes implied by the identified phenomenon.
It would be virtually impossible for anything other than elite discourse to have affected such a wide range of people to generate the concurrence in opinion that is suggested by the data. In addition there is evidence that the same phenomenon was becoming evident in other parts of the country at the same time (see Healy 1995). It is for this reason that the section of this chapter following the reporting of the results of the analysis of the subjects actually chosen by the students concentrates on the effect of elite discourse on opinion change in relation to this issue. As elite discourse is a social phenomenon a Critical Theory based analysis of it is made.

The Effect on Decision Making on Children’s Education

As previously discussed one of the phenomena that suggested this research manifested as an apparent change in the subjects being chosen at post compulsory school level. These manifestations had only been witnessed in one location but other educators had commented on similar experiences. The changes that had been noticed were a reduction in the number of senior students opting to academic subjects with a commensurate increase in the number of vocational subjects being chosen. These vocational subjects appeared to be specifically in the business studies curriculum area.

To confirm the validity, or otherwise, of these observations an analysis of the numbers of students completing Year Twelve courses was made. The Northern Territory Year Twelve courses are those administered and accredited by the Senior Secondary Accreditation Board of South Australia (SSABSA). SSABSA maintains a library of reports holding information about the number and location of students studying all the year twelve courses offered. As the phenomena had been observed in the Northern Territory the analysis was restricted to data for that geographical and administrative area.

Was There a Change in Subject Type Being Studied?

The concerns that related to the perceived nature of the changes in educational choices were for the provision of an education that was, in part, important to higher education. Due to this the obvious data to examine were those for Publicly Examine Subjects (PES) as these were the subjects that would usually give access to university entrance. The Northern Territory data for, a surprisingly small number of,
PES candidates for the years 1988 to 1997 showed no evidence of any change in subject choice. This result was somewhat perplexing until a careful consideration of the specific conditions in the Northern Territory was made:

- The Northern Territory is a very large area with a very low population density.
- Well over half of the population reside within a few hours drive of Darwin.
- Apart from in Darwin and the towns of Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy and Jabiru (these four towns have a total population of approximately 40,000 - 20% of NT total) there is no secondary education available.
- At that time the Northern Territory University (NTU) accepted a mark of 59% in School Assessed Subjects administered by SSABSA for entry into most undergraduate courses.

These factors have two significant consequences: firstly, most year twelve students planning to go on to study at university intend to study at NTU in Darwin. Secondly, as SAS courses are seen as less demanding than PES courses there is a tendency for students to study a combination of PES and SAS or only SAS courses to gain access to university. This suggested that an examination of the data for SAS candidature in the Northern Territory would be valid for the purpose of this study.

The analysis of the data had two components: counting the number of candidates for each course and categorising subjects as either academic or vocational. As some SAS courses are available as one semester units a full year’s candidacy is counted as two units and the number of units studied was used for comparison (Appendix 3 contains a full list of academic and vocational subjects).

Table 1 shows the relationship between the academic subjects and vocational subjects actually recorded by SSABSA as being completed by students in the Northern Territory for the years 1988 to 1997. From 1988 to 1993 there is a constant relationship with around seventy percent of courses studied being academic, albeit with a slight dip in 1991. In 1994 there is a change in the relationship which proves to be the beginning of a trend which develops to the point in 1996 where academic subjects represent only slightly over forty percent of the total (A full breakdown of
all the data is given in appendix 3). The changes in subject type selection represented by these data could be argued to be a response to the discourse outlined in the sections that follow.

Table 1. Comparison of academic and vocational year 12 SAS subjects studied from 1988 to 1997

**Vocationalism in Schooling**

The elevation of economics to the prime consideration of Australian governments was discussed in chapter six. This manifested in a range of ways in different sections of Australian society with rationalisations of various kinds being very common. A rationalisation that is particularly important to the rise of vocational education is that of the push towards flexible work practices as it was seen that:

standardised production [would] increasingly give way to flexible production systems especially in manufacturing. Such flexible systems place a high premium on broadly skilled staff at all levels of the design, production, management and marketing process (Dawkins & Holding 1987, pp.4-5).

This flexibility demanded that workers had the ability and basic skills to be able to take on a wide variety of roles within the workplace. This, inevitably, demanded a
level and type of worker training that had not been necessary in the past. As training is a costly endeavour, any means by which this cost could be transferred away from the employer would be eagerly sought. An easily identified target for this transfer was the provider of new workers in the form of school leavers. A rhetoric developed that referred to an expected level of efficiency and effectiveness, particularly in the provision of potential workers who possessed skills that would enable them to become profitable in the shortest possible time. The level at which these skills were acquired was to be confirmed by performance indicators by which the efficiency and effectiveness of education was to be judged as “[e]ducation, it would seem, is valued by advocates of performance indicators largely for its economic utility (Garbutcheon-Singh 1990, p.8).

That this expectation of schools to provide a significant degree of training became held across a wide spectrum of society is illustrated by the official attitudes of both the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. These organisations, the leaders of which rarely saw things in anything like the same light were in concert; “they both [saw] education as being strongly vocational, closely tying education to the workplace” (Watkins 1991, p.41).

**What is Gained From Vocationalism?**

The move towards an increase in vocational education at senior high school level is associated with a belief in a kind of ‘human capital’. The notion of human capital was developed by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964). It is grounded in the same neo-classical view of economics and society as economic rationalism. In this model society is seen in investing in the skills of individuals through education as a means to increasing economic growth. Conversely the individual also invests in education as a means to increasing earning power.

In this way, it can be claimed that education is positively correlated with marginal productivity and thus rewarded correspondingly in the form of higher wages (Watkins 1991, p.42).

This is very closely aligned with the economic rationalist view of the world which values a combination of the technical function of education and the efficient use of resources, in this case human resources. This objectification of human beings then
allows for a view of equality of opportunity that is able to ignore the starting point of individuals from varying socio-economic backgrounds.

While the problematic nature of viewing people as objects allows for some debate, there are two social problems in which human capital and its associated economic theories encounter apparent paradoxes. Firstly, the logical conclusion of these theories must be that poverty is caused by lack of training or skills. In actual fact, the enormous investment in education that these theories have launched has had very little impact on poverty within society. Secondly, if education, skills and training together are the ingredients of increased income for all it should be impossible for discrimination to occur based on any other cause. The reality is that a range of discriminations continues to impact on workers. Women with identical skills to men, in many cases, receive noticeably less pay than men, while identifiable racial minorities, both male and female, suffer the same fate. In addition, the fact that equity of educational achievement has not led to equity in earnings with the same divisions in earning capacity being maintained is a very powerful argument that human capital theory can not be justified. Levin (1984, p.11) maintains that:

> The ostensible failure of human capital theory to predict the effect of changes in the distribution of education on the distribution of earnings has been a major reason for recent challenges to human capital theory.

In spite of this the dominant economic paradigm of the New Right continues to champion the value of vocational education. This vociferous support for such a dubious policy direction has also led to changes to the attitudes of a large segment of society who have come to understand vocationalism as a vital requirement for securing future employment prospects for graduates of post-compulsory school education. This has reached the point that “[h]uman capital theory has become so ingrained in any literature relating to education and work that the ideology espoused is taken as common-sense and viewed uncritically” (Watkins 1991, p.44).

In spite of increasing levels of vocational education being provided in schools the unemployment rate for school leavers and young Australians has continued to increase dramatically over the same period. This will come as no surprise to any one who has referred to the findings of researchers who have examined the relationship
between skills taught in these subjects and those actually required in real jobs (see Meyer & Wise 1982 and Kliebard 1990). Sweet (1987) suggests that rather than creating a growth in the skills required in school leavers, technology growth has led to a decline in the number of skilled attractive jobs for young Australians. This work supports similar research in the United States which found that:

While the ten fastest growing jobs are concentrated in the health and technical areas, they will only generate about four percent of all new jobs. However, the ten occupations generating the most jobs – waiters, sales clerks, fast food workers, janitors etc. – will contribute thirty per cent of all jobs (Watkins, P. 1991, p.48).

The arguments in favour of increased vocationalism in education are invariably couched in the terms of improved employment chances for the school leaver. By comparison the value of human capital theory is seen as increased profitability, for business, through reduced training costs and savings through workplace flexibility. As the push for increasing vocationalism in education has its origin in the business community it is reasonable to deduce from this that the true objective is the latter. The rhetoric of vocationalism does not stand up to scrutiny:

… major evaluations of vocational programs have repeatedly questioned the benefits of vocational training. Although some studies have found that vocational graduates have lower unemployment and receive higher wages than other comparable students, the majority of studies have concluded that there is little economic advantage to vocational training, as opposed to non-vocational, at the high school level (Kantor & Tyak 1982, p.2).

Vocationalism in senior high schools does not have support from research and it introduces no useful academic skills that are not contained in the established curriculum. An argument can be made for some vocational training for students forced to stay at school, to qualify for the Common Youth Allowance, who would otherwise leave at fifteen years of age. Beyond that no justification exists, but state education departments are still advocating increases in vocational education across the senior school curriculum. That these demands are not called into question when there is no evidence to support the claims made for vocationalism can only be explained by a significant degree of support for the notion of vocational education in
public opinion. The political background for the elite discourse that has moulded this opinion has become entrenched in society to such a degree that it has attained the status of ‘common sense’ and as such beyond question. It would seem that educational disadvantage is being created merely to provide for the unjustified requirements of a political ideology that has the power to shape a range of social phenomena to its own ends.

**Are Education and Politics Really Separated?**

It is almost entirely in the Twentieth Century that governments, and subsequently the societies they control, have moved to create a division between authority and education. Prior to this the political expectations of education were quite openly that citizens graduating from the education system would be strong supporters of the status quo and as such would present no threat to the continued concentration of power in the hands of a small elite. Illustrations of this manner of overtly political education may be found in the contemporary literature of authors such as Charles Dickens and D.H. Lawrence. Although Dickens was a writer of fiction, he used his craft as a means of making comment with the intention of forcing social change. In his novel, *Oliver Twist*, Dickens contrasts the lives of poor children in London with the life of a child of the wealthy. Education for the poor does not exist as such while the child of the wealthy is trained in the ways that society ensures that the dominant culture is reproduced. These educations are not provided by the state but their political bases are easy to see. For a perspective on more formal provision of education an example may be taken from Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*. Lawrence makes an extremely illuminating and pertinent description of the organisation and expectations of a school in a working class area. This description shows that, again, respect for the authority that maintains the status quo is a very high priority of the education provided. Although these examples are taken from fiction they should not be disregarded because of this. They were written by contemporary observers with strong social concerns for the implications of this specific phenomenon. In addition the approach taken here is not without precedent as Protherough (1984, in Watkins 1986) used a variety of, mainly English, novels in research to trace the leadership styles of Headmasters, spanning the historical period represented in the works of Dickens and Lawrence.
Many changes occurred in education, during the early part of the Twentieth Century that had significant effects on the way it was, and is, perceived in society. Most important of these was the quick expansion of the state provision of schooling to all sectors of society, to the extent that after some sixty years, state education is available, to a relatively advanced level, to young people in almost all developed and in many developing nations. Unfortunately, the situation in many developing nations, particularly in Africa, has suffered a reverse in more recent years. The rapid expansion in education was prompted by the sudden quickening of pace in the development of technology that occurred in the wake of the industrial revolution. These changes created a need for both a more sophisticated workforce that could cope with the new technology in the workplace and a more technologically aware consuming public that would provide the market for the products of these new technologies.

At the same time, significant changes were being made in the way in which education was controlled by the incumbents of the new positions of professional administrators. Following the confusion and corruption of educational governance in America at the beginning of the Twentieth Century (Wirt & Kirst 1982, p.3) there was an inevitable reaction. Administrators who attempted to impose control through the use of the increasingly popular ‘scientific management’, were able to create an environment for themselves which set them up as the experts who should naturally control the provision of education. Scientific management is based on the principles of careful study of work practices to ascertain the one most efficient means of completing a task as advocated by Frederick Taylor (Callahan 1962, pp.9-41) that increasingly became the norm in administration.

A similar process, though far less dramatic in extent, also occurred in Australia. Some of the vestiges of this are still in existence in the various school systems today, with the continued importance of superintendents in the hierarchies and the growing interest in testing to assess the efficiency of individual schools (see NT Department of Education1987).

These two factors had a significant effect on the development of the perception that education should necessarily be held to be separate from the factional politics of state government. As such, a large proportion of the population was being provided
with an education service and there was a “[f]aith in an apolitical professionalism in public service generally and in State-supported schools specifically…” (Iannaccone 1984, p.8) it was naturally seen that here lay a path to a more socially equitable society. The achievement of students in the system would be dependent, totally, upon natural ability and individual endeavour with no favour being given to any sector of society. To enable this to occur it became important to divorce education from political intrusion.

In spite of this nominal separation of education and politics it must be accepted that public education is provided by governments and there is an inevitable connection between the two. The ‘apolitical’ attribute that education carries refers only to “its relationship to the public politics of the State and its political parties” (Iannaccone 1984, p.8). The suitability of this relationship and the wider separation that it is often used to imply is one that is used by the very factions that appear to be excluded by it. The implication is that education is “somehow more sacred and pure than matters settled by voters and their elected representatives” (Iannaccone 1984, p.8).

At the same time, however, these representatives may be applying their ideology to the education system that they ultimately control.

In recent years there has been a growing perception that education has been failing its expectations in several ways: from the beginning of this Century it has been expected that universally available public education would increase social mobility for all able children from all social classes. The degree to which this has failed to occur is such that political mileage is available to politicians who, for one reason or another, wish to target public education. It was expected that an educated workforce would accelerate economic growth and consequently create greater employment opportunities for all; the reality is that the opposite has occurred, not necessarily as a result of increased education yet still a failure of the public education system is targeted as a cause. In this situation the state must look to education to explain and correct this failure to achieve the expected results. This creates an environment of a more overt politicisation of education through the necessity of its being brought into the realm of public political discourse. However:

The State pays a price for such expanded conflicts in education. Their extension into the general politics of the nation is likely to change them into self-renewing
political conflicts, eventually calling the legitimacy of the State into question. What begins as attempts to compensate for a loss of confidence in public education contribute to a legitimation crisis of the State (Iannaccone 1984, p.9).

In Australia at the end of the Twentieth Century these legitimation crises have come to manifest as a general dissatisfaction with the political process, and more particularly with the major political parties which have presided over the causes of them. The rise of extreme politics of the right is very much in line with the predictions of Habermas (see Kellner 1989) except in that manifestations such as the advent of ‘Pauline Hanson’s One Nation’ are not the product of an administrative attempt to provide legitimacy. However, it could be argued that public opinion generates a typical attempt to provide a legitimacy of its own making to fill the void caused by the government’s legitimacy crisis.

The Nature of Politics

One of the more obvious manifestations of the politicisation of education has been the persistent criticism that there has been a significant reduction in the standard of educational achievement, particularly in the area of literacy, and to a lesser extent numeracy, in state schools over the last twenty years. Until recently this was a rather curious debate as there had been no empirical evidence tendered by the supporters of the argument yet still it became generally accepted as fact. This may be argued to be the result of the way in which certain political parties have seized upon the debate as a vehicle for advancing their ideological stance towards education and the wider role of governments and private organisation in providing services. In more recent years evidence has been produced in relation to literacy. However, this evidence can be argued to owe more to the requirements of justifying earlier claims and ideology than to true empiricism. This evidence is discussed in detail at the end of this section.

Schattschneider (1960, p.2) states that “[a]t the root of all politics is the universal language of conflict. … The central political fact in a free society is the tremendous contagiousness of conflict.” The Northern Territory Government joined this conflict with statements by politicians and policy documents such as the Northern Territory Education Department’s Towards the Nineties. This document includes references to
excellence and accountability, the introduction of standardised testing in primary
schools, and the establishment of an external examination in maths and English as a
significant component of assessment at year ten. In taking this course the
Government has used the conflict over standards to politicise carefully chosen
sections of the provision of education.

Once the education system is politicised to this extent it creates the foundation for a
political conflict which in turn may be joined by any pressure group from the society
that is affected by the political system. The situation now exists in which education
has become a legitimate part of the state’s politics, but just what politics? The most
relevant answer to this must address the effects of politics, or in Easton’s (1965)
terms “Outputs” which are the “authoritative allocations of values or binding
decisions and the actions implementing and related to them” (Easton 1965, p.126).
It must also be remembered that these outputs are not the simple results of decision
making, but rather the resulting direction taken after the pressures and ideologies of
those directly involved in the political process have had their effect.

Schattschneider (1960) describes politics in the terms of the coming to the fore of a
dominant conflict for:

What happens in politics Depends on the way in which people are divided into
factions, parties, groups, classes, etc. The outcome of the game of politics
depends on which of a multitude of possible conflicts gains the dominant
position (p.62).

The politicising of education opens up for general debate the issues that have been
hitherto restricted to those with authority, such as that of senior officers or the
authority that practitioners achieve within the community through their everyday
activities. However, this is a situation that neither the Northern Territory
Government nor its Education Department found desirable, or even acceptable,
because it opened up for public scrutiny the internal debates that led to the decisions
that created the existing shape of education in the Northern Territory. This would
present a situation where the factions in the “political universe” (Schattschneider
1960, p.62), could change the boundaries of the conflict relating to public education.
To maintain control of the definition of the conflict relating to education, procedures
have to be instituted that serve to divert the rise of alternative conflicts from both within and from outside the Education Department, for as Schattschneider (1960, p.67) states:

… political strategy deals with the exploitation, use and suppression of conflict. Conflict is so powerful an instrument of politics that all regimes are of necessity concerned with its use in governing and with its effectiveness as an instrument of change, growth and unity.

The implication of this is that whoever can control the definition of the conflict has ultimate political control, to which end various techniques are used.

**The Roles of Public and Privatised Politics**

Iannaccone (1984) maintains that there are different sorts of political conflict. The sort that is usually considered in conjunction with politics *per se* he refers to as “public politics” (p.12). Another important type of conflict is concerned with the day to day running of an organisation, referred to as “privatised politics” (p.12). It is clear that at any one time only a relatively small number of conflicts can be under the scrutiny of public politics. As a consequence many important conflicts are dealt with well away from the debates of the factions and pressure groups that operate within its realm. These privatised conflicts have a major role to play in governing society but because they are conducted inside the bureaucracies of government and its departments the decisions that are made and consequently the bodies that make them come to be considered apolitical. Public politics gives legitimacy to these apolitical bodies by delegating responsibility to them. It is the ability to use these apolitical organisations to control which conflicts become public and, more importantly, which conflicts become repressed by being delegated to the realms of the privatised conflict that enables governments to maintain control of what is debated in the realm of public politics.

The privatisation of conflicts has further significant effects on the way in which issues are dealt with. In considering these privatised conflicts, exclusion of the ability of certain groups to join in the debate are created as “[p]rivatised conflicts confer special advantages to insiders, as against non-members and to organisational elites, as against rank-and-file members” (Iannaccone 1984, pp.13-14). In addition
to this there is a very strong tendency for issues to be broken up or trivialised into component pieces which can be dealt with by various sections of the organisation. The effect of this is to appropriate the debate on major issues and convert them into petty squabbles about organisational structure.

Until the end of the 1980s the Northern Territory Government administration had been successful in maintaining the appearance of the apolitical status of education. However, at that time two factors emerged that worked towards the emergence of a much wider public conflict. Firstly, as the Government delegated authority to the Education Department and so helped in the creation of the myth of apolitical education, the Department needed to develop means of dealing with the private conflicts that arose. To answer this need the bureaucracy became more and more hierarchical and centralised. “Each of [its] levels became additional steps in handling complaints by parents, pupils and teachers” (Iannaccone 1984, p23). This is a symptom of the way in which organisations act to insulate themselves from outside influences by diverting conflicts as they arise and dealing with them in a fragmented way. The natural effect of this is for the organisation to move towards a state of homeostasis where, to protect itself and its elite, the organisation becomes structurally rigid within and progressively more isolated from the ever changing outside world. Naturally there comes a point when the organisation is so gravely out of step with society that its entire structure must come under public scrutiny.

In April 1991 the Northern Territory Government published the recommendations of their Estimates Review Committee. It soon became very obvious that education was in the front-line of cuts to government spending, specifically in the intention to close nine schools across the Territory and to reduce the numbers of teachers in the remaining schools. This was enough to bring the whole of the education system into the arena of public debate. At a time when education, in general, was being lauded as the hope for the future of the nation by the Prime Minister the Northern Territory Government, in the name of economic expedience, was reducing its own contribution to it. This represented the point at which the organisation had become so out of step with the expectations of the people of the Northern Territory that its structure and the individuals that represented it were thrust in to the arena of public polity.
It was at that time that serious moves towards the introduction of national testing of students at various points of their schooling were being made. Also at that time the debate around devolution of responsibility for decision making in schools was beginning to gain momentum. As a response to the issues that were appearing in relation to education there was also a move within the teachers’ organisations to amalgamate and present a united face to conflicts in education that were occurring in all states and territories. The result of this was the formation of the Australian Teachers’ Union, the first nationwide union for teachers in state schools. Together, these developments represented a significant increase in the number of educational issues that had become a part of public politics. This process has continued over the rest of the decade to the point where education is inextricably intertwined with mainstream Australian politics.

The Standards Debate in the Northern Territory

By the beginning of the 1990s public debate about the standards of literacy and numeracy among school leavers had reached a mature stage, not only in the Northern Territory but also in the rest of Australia. Similar debates had been entered across the education systems of developed nations all over the world at the same time. The maturity of the debate is reflected in the fact that in 1992 the House of Representatives’ Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, issued a report entitled The Literacy Challenge.

Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) in discussing this report and the flurry of testing and research that it prompted across the various Australian education departments state:

Since 1945, literacy debates have accelerated and what is meant by the literate person has changed. … During the 1950s the ‘ideal literate person’ was construed as a moral subject, during the 1960s as a technical/skilled subject, during the 1970s the main understanding of the literate person focussed on a deficit/disadvantaged subject and by the 1980s the association between education and economic restructuring was strongly made and accordingly the literate person was conceived as an economic subject (p.12).

During the first two of these decades the debates were very low key, being restricted to discussion about the purpose of education, indeed the use of the term ‘debate’ is
probably unjustifiable as “[i]n the mid-1960s, literacy barely rated a mention” (Hodgens 1994, p.13). The transition from an issue of virtually no concern to one occupying the attention of the Federal Minister for Education for considerable time in 1996 and 1997 provides important information that is useful in gaining an understanding of how the standards debate developed and how the public opinion that it generated came to affect other aspects of education.

The generation known as the ‘baby boomers’, that is those born between the end of the Second World War and the early 1960s, have had many well-reported effects on society. Arguably, the first of these was the requirement for an acceleration in the provision of schools and the training of teachers. One of the consequences of the resulting lowering of the average age of teachers was that new pedagogical ideas were put into practice at an unprecedented rate (Hodgens 1994, p.15).

The pace of change increased until the early to mid 1970s when another factor was introduced to the landscape of educational change. After electoral success in 1973 the Whitlam government introduced measures to rectify disadvantage and increase equity in Australian schools.

The result of these two factors provided an opportunity for conservative supporting media owners to increase their attacks on the Whitlam government. Changes in education are an easy target for criticism as virtually all of a newspaper’s clientele have successfully learnt to read. The evidence is perfectly clear: the old methods were successful so any new directions must be viewed with suspicion. The opportunity to combine this with charges of ‘social engineering’ based on the moves to ensure equity in education was too much to resist. The media repeatedly published stories referring to surveys and research that purported to provide conclusive proof that the standard of literacy of school students was deteriorating. However, “[t]ypically, precise details of sources of surveys are not given. The ‘education experts’ behind most school surveys remain as anonymous figures in the recesses of education departments” (Hodgens 1994, p.19). A common source of information for these reports was employers and employer groups who expressed dismay at the educational standard of the school leavers they employed. A kind assessment of the media’s reporting of this issue would be that reliance was entirely on unsourced data and anecdotal comments. A more critical assessment would be
that the media were entering a propaganda campaign against a government that was attempting to introduce equity into society and so threatening the status quo that advantaged the elite that controlled those media.

Axiom 1 of the RAS model states that where there is significant political awareness there is also a significant receptiveness to persuasive messages. The persistent media campaign to highlight this perceived deficit in literacy and numeracy had the effect of increasing the political awareness of this issue even in those individuals who would normally have a low general political awareness. Only one side of the debate was generally available in the media leading to a very powerful axiom 1 response. That is, public opinion was changed to the point there was, and still is, a general belief that literacy and numeracy levels achieved by school students are far below those that should be expected. The most recent manifestation of the reinforcement of this persuasive message, based on recent research, was disseminated by the Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training. It is valuable to make a critical analysis of the researchers’ and the minister’s contributions to the standards debate as, although this occurred almost a decade after the effects on decision making were becoming noticeable, it represents an excellent illustration of how the debate evolved.

**How the Standards Debate was Intensified**

The research was undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) for the Managing Committee for the National School English Literacy Survey with the results being published as *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School Literacy Survey* (Masters & Foster 1997). A complementary publication, *Literary Standards in Australia* (Masters 1997) was intended as a simplified synopsis of the full report, giving graphical representations of the performance of the sample students tested and samples of work representing below, at and above the expected standard at years three and five. The various graphical representations of performance are all measured against a scale of zero to six hundred. There is little discussion in the documents as to the relevance of this particular scale, it has to be assumed that it is purely arbitrary, although points on this continuum are designated as means, again with no discussion as to why.
The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, David Kemp, in his preface to *Literacy Standards in Australia* states that he asked for its production “to provide the wider Australian community with information about the performance standards in reading and writing of Australian school children” (Masters 1997, p.ii). Unfortunately this is not achieved due to the lack of any discussion concerning the way in which data are represented in the many graphical figures. This omission requires the reader to use her knowledge of statistics and spend considerable time to work out just what they may mean. This alone is sufficient to render the publication useless in providing the wider Australian community with any useful information, yet it is not the only factor contributing to making the document difficult to use.

This case serves to illustrate the ways in which this report is difficult to use to gain valid information. This same difficulty gives rise to the situation where it is very easy to take pieces of data and make very wrong conclusions from them. The Minister, Dr Kemp, states that “a disturbingly high number of Australian school students are failing to meet a minimum acceptable standard in literacy” (Masters 1997, p.ii). A careful analysis of the data presented does not support this assertion.

**Some Basic Premises**

Within the discourse immediately preceding and following the publication of the report much reference has been made to the number of students not achieving the required or expected standards in reading and writing. The data used to support these assertions are contained in *Literary Standards in Australia* in which the results of the survey were used to develop a cut-score indicating the minimum literacy standard expected in the areas of writing and reading. This presents the careful reader of the report with some problems:

- The cut-scores are meant to represent levels of competency that should be attained by the ends of years three and five. The assessments for the report were made in August and September - only two thirds of the way through the year (Masters 1997, p.6).

- The chart shown on page 17 of *Literary Standards in Australia* shows that there are a significant number of students performing at a level very close to the cut-
score. It is reasonable to surmise that a reasonable number of these would improve their performance to attain results above the cut-score by the end of the year. All the charts in the reports show a continuous improvement in attainment over time (Masters, p.17).

- The same chart shows the approximate location of the cut-score on the arbitrary continuum of 0 - 600 but does not state the numerical value in relation to that score.

- The cut-score points were arrived at after analysis of benchmarks which had not been finalised at that time. This allows for some suggestion the cut-scores may be placed inappropriately (Masters 1997, pp.46-47).

- It is conceded that there are areas within the benchmark that are not addressed in the development of the cut-score and that the level of the skills assessed in relation to the cut-score could only be approximated (Masters 1997,p.46; Masters & Foster 1997, p.iv)

- The notion of a “cut-score”, particularly in relation to literacy is problematic. The approach that demands a quantitative analysis as the only valid type of empirical evidence is strongly disputed in most areas of research but particularly in education. While great store is set by the cut-score approach (Masters 1977, pp.10-11) tacit acceptance of the validity of a more qualitative analysis appears in other parts of the report (see Masters & Foster 1997, appendix 3, pp.311-329).

Some Concerns With the Testing Methodology

Reading ability is assessed by the use of written responses to various texts. This must raise questions as to the validity of the test as the assessment of reading and comprehension ability is totally dependent on the child’s writing ability. If the child has one or more of the wide array of difficulties or handicaps in relation to writing the real ability to understand and comprehend will have no relationship to the result of the assessment. Eco (1995, pp126-132) argues very strongly that the lack of language to respond to a text leads to a perceived lack of achievement of understanding that can not be supported by fact. The danger that this presents is that children assessed as having difficulties with reading will be placed in remedial
programs that are not appropriate for attending to the difficulties they actually face (Masters & Foster 1997, pp.107-108).

In similar vein the method used for the assessment of viewing and listening were entirely dependant on written responses. Considering the apparent range of deficiencies uncovered by the assessment of writing ability it is surprising that the researchers did not modify this section of the assessment to allow for them (Masters & Foster 1977, pp.129-130 & pp.169-170).

From the information given it would appear that the assessment of speaking was based entirely on the students’ performances in making presentations to a group of people. The vast majority of speaking situations that people, and in particular children, experience are what could be termed intimate, that is, with a small number of people (say 2 - 4) who are involved with the discussion. This is a very different situation from making an oral presentation to a class or assessor, which places the speaker in a potentially intimidating position that will, in many instances, affect the way in which the individual is able to use speech for effective communication (Masters & Foster 1997, pp.149-150).

Why Use a Cut-Score Model of Assessment?

Masters (1997 pp.10-11) describes how ACER went about arriving at a minimum score on their assessment pieces that would equate to having met the performance standard relevant to the year level of the student involved. This description includes references to working with the writers of the reading and writing benchmarks. This is an important section of the chapter as this collusion is used to give legitimacy to the cut-scores. In fact, at the time that this was carried out the benchmarks were many months away from being finalised. In addition the benchmarks do not readily translate into a “pass mark”

There are two significant indicators as to the possible reasoning behind the, apparently, overwhelming desire for a cut-score method of demonstrating literacy. Firstly, in his preface Dr Kemp states that he asked for Literacy Standards in Australia to be prepared to provide a more understandable means of reporting the findings of the National School English Survey. Secondly, Masters (1997, pp.11) states that although the “Survey Management Committee decided to indicate a range
of scores of scores on each scale within which the draft benchmark was located” the
Minister requested that standards in the form of a cut-score be set. It can be seen
from this that it was the Minister who was keen to have a cut-score model. The
question that this poses is Why?

In his role as Minister for Schools, Dr. Kemp has introduced a policy of encouraging
the establishment of new, small private schools at the expense of public schools. In
conjunction with this the Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment process has been
introduced, which results in the situation that, at inception, for each child that enrolls
in a private school the Commonwealth recurrent funding for four students in the
public sector is redirected to the private sector (Kelly 1998). It is very clear from this
that the Minister, and the Government, have a strong ideological preference for the
privatisation of education.

Setting the cut-score within the range indicating satisfactory performance will
inevitably lead to a distortion of the numbers below the satisfactory level. By
exaggerating poor performance in vital basic educational requirements the distortion
of the perception of performance of schools is reinforced. The existing public
discourse is that there has been a long-standing deterioration in the standards of
literacy and numeracy in “our schools”. The fact that there is no reliable evidence to
support this contention and there is some to contradict it is ignored.

In reinforcing this perception of schools the discussion has invariably been in
relation to the public school sector. By insisting on this approach to reporting
literacy achievement the Minister has made a major contribution to reducing
confidence in the public school system and so reinforced his and his Government’s
ideological position of encouraging people to move their children from the “failing”
public system into private schools.

*Low Achievement as ‘Defect’*

Claims, whether from the media, politicians or community groups responding to the
discourse on standards in schools, imply that the reason for the low achievement
levels in literacy and numeracy is some form of defect. To some the defect is in the
individual. It is suggested that “there is a significant component of the population
who have reading problems that are biological and/or psychological in origin. To
others, the defect lies in the home life of the child with too much exposure to television and poor parenting. This argument is advanced by individuals who have a concern for the moral make-up of young people with specific reference to discipline and responsibility.

Possibly the most common target for accusations of defect are teachers and schools. The example described earlier of Minister Kemp’s contribution to the discourse is one that very strongly implies that the schools are at fault. Another substantial group cite the political activism of teachers implying that they are not committed to their task of teaching. This is particularly common in comments from university academics not concerned with education (Hodgens 1994, p.22; Moran 1999).

The title of Moran’s (1999) article, *WA education system must try ever harder* implies the other major target for creating defects in standards: the government. Governments have responsibility for providing and overseeing education, when standards are perceived to fall it is natural to expect them to take some of the responsibility.

**Employers’ Response to the Standards Crisis.**

The discourse concerning standards of literacy and numeracy has provided a very powerful agent for changing public opinion concerning not only the main issue of standards but also concerning the status of state provided school education. In the Northern Territory at the beginning of the 1990s industry was experiencing a difficult time. The recession of the time had a severe impact on the NT economy with pressure being applied from many quarters to reduce expenditure. The standards debate and the resulting acceptance of the need for accountability provided an avenue for applying pressure on schools to take on responsibility for the training of potential workers on the pretext of providing school leavers with the skills needed to be successful in the labour market.

The economic climate across Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s was one that was very difficult for business. Unemployment was becoming an increasing problem with companies cutting work forces at every opportunity. One of the earliest casualties in this environment was training within industry. Almost a decade later Australia is still suffering the consequences of an almost virtual end to
apprenticeships. Industry had such a wide choice of applicants to choose from for the few apprenticeships that credential inflation (see Collins 1989) developed to almost ridiculous levels. At this time one of the new car dealerships in Darwin advertised the position of apprentice motor mechanic with a minimum requirement of a year eleven pass in Maths 1 and Maths 2. These courses were the highest level of maths offered in the Northern Territory/South Australia senior curriculum. It is most probable that a student studying these subjects would not have the necessary attributes to make a good mechanic, both social and technical, but because of the number of potential applicants available the employer was able to attempt to use academic achievement criteria as a selection tool.

The misunderstanding of the range of assessments used within education for different purposes illustrates how one of the most important factors in changing public opinion regarding the role of education came about. From the earliest appearance of the standards debate in the 1970s employer groups had been making their own contribution decrying the perceived lack of literacy and numeracy skills of school leavers. Frequently the claims made were used as a “pretext to attack the government” (Hodgens 1994, p.20). Much later in the debate the statements from industry groups changed in a small but significant way. This discourse changed from concerns about standards generally to concern that schools were not producing school leavers with the necessary skills to satisfy the requirements of the workplace. It would be easy to see this as merely an alternative way to make the same point but careful and critical analysis of the statements being made uncovers a very different agenda. What these groups increasingly asked for from school leavers were specific skills and knowledge that had not been a part of the general school curriculum in earlier years. The standards debate had given the opportunity for employers to make demands on the education system that, in effect, transferred responsibility for some aspects of training from industry to schools. This aspect of the discourse has developed throughout this decade as is illustrated by a major report, by Margaret Denney, in the recruitment section of the Weekend Australian (13-14 February 1999, p.33).

Under the Headline “Schools Fail Test: Industry” various industry spokespeople comment on how schools do not provide the skills students need to secure jobs:
The main areas being neglected in the secondary school system are English, communication and presentation skills. …

… secondary school leavers today lack vital skills in self appraisal. …

Mr Robertson quoted a Japanese model he witnessed on a recent trip to Tokyo where middle managers go into school for one or two hours each week to conduct study groups on business subjects such as disciplines, business reports and mission statements. …

… young people miss out in personal presentation, with simple elements such as voice training an important component of sales.

Most of the deficits blamed on poor schooling are ones that traditionally would have been covered by training in the workplace. Increasingly employers, it would seem, have come to expect schools to perform their basic training for them. More importantly, the fact that these statements are given such credence in the media has led to a change in public opinion concerning the nature of secondary education and what the curriculum should aim to achieve.

**Accountability**

In 1988 The Northern Territory Department of Education published a major policy document, *Towards the Nineties: Excellence, Accountability and Devolution*. This document provided an outline of the intended directions that education would take in the ensuing decade.

The third initiative outlined in the policy document is entitled “Accountability”. This section is a clear implementation of the theory of human capital. It states emphatically that a major function of schools is to provide effective members of the workforce. The purpose of this policy is to develop the credentialling process in line with the requirements of employers who clearly had a major role in the development of the policy. Perceived future developments include industry/business representation on school councils; business adopting a particular school with the intention of “influencing the school and making the total school curriculum more attuned to economic life” (p.15); the development of an industry-education
consortium to advise the Minister and school/industry exchanges for teachers to experience the commercial employment world and vice versa.

What was being proposed by the Northern Territory Department of Education was clearly a response to “demands for improved accountability and better policy making in education [which] have joined with fundamental economic fears about competitiveness and technological advancement” (Ruby 1988, p.32). The accountability that was being demanded was not accountability to those for whom the education service was being provided, rather it was to governments bureaucracy and “significant groups in the community to which [the government] was being accountable” (Garbutcheon-Singh 1990, p.9). The expectation from which this demand for accountability emanated also implied an urgent need to apply a corporate management approach to the administration of state education. This approach includes strategies such as “the formulation of corporate plans, program building, program evaluation, performance indicators, performance contracts for senior managers and sometimes performance pay” (Wilenski 1988, p.216). The prime concerns of the corporate management approach are efficiency and effectiveness, unfortunately the kinds of efficiency and effectiveness demanded are not necessarily the kinds that are important to the provision of an education that is most appropriate for all students in the state school system. The simplification that this type of efficiency requires tends to disadvantage those from less privileged backgrounds as it demands that all students should be provided with the same level of service, ignoring the fact that these students do not have the same starting point as those from more privileged groups.

In terms of public understanding of the education system, the discourse that surrounds this move to corporate management promotes education as a service that has a direct relationship with the requirements of commerce and industry rather than with the wider needs of the individual that it is provided for. In effect education had its accountability transferred from the community for whom it was created to the advocates of corporate management for government services. As these advocates were the owners and representatives of industry and commerce the understanding of the reason for the provision of state education became available for those groups to determine and to publicise in elite discourse. This effectively made it impossible for
there to be any contradictory political messages concerning the purpose of education to be included in the discourse. As the sources that they represented had high levels of credibility within the community, they fulfilled the requirements of the Resistance axiom of the RAS model of opinion change.

The Changes to Public Opinion of the Early 1990s

In the twenty years preceding the early 1990s there had been much discourse concerning a perceived drop in the literacy and numeracy standards of school leavers. This discourse ran concurrently with a very powerful propaganda campaign by the proponents of laissez-faire economics and libertarian politics (cf. discussion concerning the New Right and its propaganda organisations in chapter seven). In combination elite discourse about these issues developed a change in public opinion concerning public education. An image of education as being only of value to the individual in receipt of it was created. The term ‘user pays’ came into common use in relation to education, implying that the student was a user or ‘client’ of the education provider and as such was in receipt of a good that could be used in the economy as could any other consumer item. The discourse reduced education to a commodity that was to be used in ‘the market’ whether that is the ‘job market’ or the ‘education market’ is unimportant. What is important is that education had become a commodity to be traded in the wider market place:

Students are to enter the work-force with marketable skills and value is accorded knowledge, skill and various forms of production according to whether they satisfy market demand and enhance the market economy. Knowledge is to be regarded as an investment that ‘pays off’ for individuals in a job, for industry in a better trained labour force and for the nation in economic growth (Kenway, Bigum & Fitzclarence 1992, p.3)

‘The market’ has become an enduring icon of the discourse around Laissez-faire economics. The argument is that if the market is allowed to operate in an unfettered manner the economic growth that this will generate for the operators within the market will also benefit other members of the market based community (no longer ‘society’!). This principle is based on the theories of Adam Smith which, like other principles of laissez-faire economics present some difficulties for the expectations of a “truly civil society” (Cox 1995).
The notion of all members of the community benefiting from economic growth generated by operators within the market has its origins in Adam Smith’s (1994) allegory of the invisible hand guiding the economy in a direction that is benefit to every one (p.423). The difficulty that this presents is Smith’s own definition of just who every one actually is. He makes a very strong distinction (p.178) between “men of rank” and wage labourers. The fact that Smith’s discussion of the wage labour market suggests that the market forces of supply and demand would operate to provide a control on the population of the working classes by setting the point of equilibrium of wages at subsistence level. When there is an oversupply of labour (too high a population) the wage would drop below subsistence level and the excess population would be eliminated by an increased mortality rate among the children of the working class. Conversely, if there was a shortage of labour the higher than subsistence wages would allow for a higher survival rate of children to fill the demand for workers (p.80). Clearly Smith did not see wage labourers as being beneficiaries of the ‘invisible hand’. The implications for using this economic model in the current social climate will clearly generate conflict yet the power of the propaganda has been sufficient for the general acceptance of the market model of economics.

Similarly the notion of user pays is discussed without question while the real identity of the user of public services remains anonymous in the discourse. For example, according to the economic rationalist model a graduates from university with a degree in engineering is considered to be the user of the education services and as such should pay for the financial advantages it confers. This simplistically maintains that there are no other beneficiaries of this education. In reality the subsequent employer must benefit from the education in the form of knowledge and skills that are used to generate profit, the wider community also benefits through improvements in lifestyle or services that the engineering works bring. If the student were a medicine graduate the benefits to employers and society would be even greater through reducing costs due to illness and premature death. This argument can be repeated for every level of education that a person may achieve and it can be applied to virtually all publicly provided services, particularly health, yet the notion of user pays is gaining ever-greater credence in the community. It can be argued that the reason for this is the effectiveness of the political messaging of the proponents of
Laissez-faire economics, economic rationalism and the New Right has been particularly effective in shaping public opinion. This has occurred as there has been virtually no contrary messaging and the sources of the political messages are perceived as being highly credible. The credibility has been enhanced by the fact that virtually all parties in the public sphere are supportive of the economic rationalist paradigm (see Pusey 1991).

The Trilogy

During the period of discourse concerning corporate management principles in education the Federal Government had been following a path that already accepted that this should be the model for the future of education. At the beginning of 1991, the Federal Government commissioned a report reviewing future directions for post-compulsory education. The Finn Review (DEET 1989), as the report came to be known after the name of the committee chair, Brian Finn, the Managing Director of IBM, was released in July of that year. It introduced the notion of competencies to the wider educational community. However, as competencies were included in the terms of reference there was a suggestion “that the agenda was firmly set from the outset (Dudley & Vidovich 1995, p.162). In the school context competencies were demanded by industry as a means of identifying prospective employees with the desired skills. In the training sector competencies were established as the means of assessing skills acquisition throughout both the practical and theoretical components of a training course such as an apprenticeship.. Even in this latter area there was debate as to their efficacy as very often the skills displayed in one process were accepted as being transferable to other associated but potentially very different situations.

During much of 1991 and 1992 The Mayer Committee (DEET 1992) continued the work started in the Finn Review. The competencies identified were:

- seven employment-related key competencies: collecting, analysing and organising information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organising activities; working with others and in teams; using mathematical ideas and techniques; solving problems; and using technology (Mayer 1992, p.3)
That the report specified that school education should have industry specific objectives should not be a surprise: after all it is entitled *Putting General Education To Work*.

The third report, the Carmichael Report (DEET 1993), in this trilogy was released in March 1992. The main concern of this report was the establishment of an entry-level training scheme for school-leavers. This relied heavily on the competencies introduced in the preceding reports. In addition there was greater emphasis laid on a role for schools in the training process for future workers.

The rhetoric of the standards debate and the corporate direction demanded by the ideology of the New Right had been successful in formalising the transfer of responsibility for initial work-place training from industry to the education system. Curiously, all this activity probably had very little effect on any public opinion concerning it as the experience of educators showed that those involved in decision making about post compulsory school choices had little, if any, knowledge of these reports. It is likely that the stimulus for producing these reports with their particular ideological slant was the same as that which developed the opinion of students and their parents: they were the product of the same discourse, albeit arrived at independently.

**The Opinion of the Minority**

The argument for opinion change as described could be considered to have one fatal flaw. If the process was as powerful as may be suggested, the questions being posed in this study would not be raised as there should be no individual able to identify them as their opinion should concur with everyone who has received the persuasive messages of elite discourse. Clearly this is not the case, so the question of how it is possible for there to be contradictory opinions when the power to shape attitudes is so great must be posed.

Axiom two of the RAS model of attitude change provides the theoretical explanation as to how this occurs. The RAS model states that the level of political awareness is a vital factor in the receipt of political cuing messages which carry the necessary information concerning the relationship between the predisposition of the individual and the message itself. The level of the individual’s political awareness is
proportional to the likelihood of rejecting a political message that is contradictory to the political predisposition.

This provides an explanation of why a significant majority of parents came to have the opinion that education’s role was one that was in line with the changed expectations of industry and commerce. For argument’s sake, if it is conceded that the number of people with political predispositions in favour of each side of politics is approximately equal. Also that one third of the population have a high level of political awareness and support the right of the political divide, and similarly one third of the population have a high level of political awareness and support the left. This leaves one third of the population with low political awareness divided into supporters of each side. When there is a consistent and persistent discourse supporting one side of politics the third that is highly politically aware and supportive of that stance will accept the message while the third from the other side will reject it. This leaves one third with low political awareness with no reasons to accept or reject the message other than the fact that there are no contradictory messages presented by elite discourse and that the sources can be seen as reliable. In this situation the RAS model states that this latter third will be highly likely to accept the message.

The example presented above is very simplified in terms of the proportions of the population in each group and it ignores the fact that there is a range of political awareness rather than three discrete levels. In spite of this it serves to illustrate how elite discourse has the power to mould the attitudes of a large proportion of the population. That there is a group that holds contradictory attitudes is illustrated by less well publicised contributors to elite discourse who are providing alternative views. It is useful to consider how some of these contributors are dealt with within the media to show how it is possible for them to exist while having very little power to challenge the dominant paradigm. Those discussed below are representative of dissenting voices but the manners in which they are politically neutralised are common to many others.

Robert Manne was until relatively recently the editor of Quadrant, a magazine publishing politically liberal and conservative views. For some years Manne had been questioning the efficacy of an economically rational approach to government
(see Manne 1992). In 1998 he was removed from his position by the owners after mounting criticism of his views was received. His replacement, Paidric McGuinness is well known for his radical conservative and libertarian views. The removal from his position was the initial response to Manne’s contradictory persuasive messaging in this case.

Philip Toyne is a widely respected conservationist who produces consistently well argued cases against many of the icons of developmental economic policy (see Toyne 1994). Very little attempt is made to provide arguments against his cases, rather he is labelled a “greenie” and ipso facto a non-person within the community. This is a common tactic that often uses taunts of not being in the real world to denigrate the presenters of valid arguments. Possibly the most memorable of these was Federal Treasurer, Paul Keating, referring to WA Greens Senator Christabel Chamaret as “Tinkerbell” when she presented her argument against passing some sections of his Federal Budget. McGuire (1985) discusses this means of dealing with dissent in some detail.

Phillip Adams broadcasts an overtly left wing interview program four nights a week on the ABC’s Radio National. He also has what he himself terms a ‘token leftie’, column in the Weekend Australian. Adams is dealt with in two ways: as a presenter on ABC he is ignored as irrelevant to the real world of business and its associated politics and economics. The tokenism of News Limited is somewhat more subtle as by including his views in their mainstream they are neutralised by the weight of contradictory discourse in the rest of the paper. This process is dealt with in detail by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972). The recent debate about the ethics of John Laws’, and other ‘talk-back’ radio presenters’, arrangement, with the banking, and other, industries provides an interesting insight into the way in which Adams is marginalised. Adams recently published a book describing the nature of the ways in which the commercial talk back radio shows actually operate (Adams & Burton 1997). In spite of probably being the nations authority on the work of John Laws and similar presenters, he has not appeared anywhere in the media’s almost frenzied coverage of the topic.

Probably the most common means of dealing with attitudes contradictory to the dominant view is similar in nature to the way in which individuals who have a
presence in elite discourse but is universally applicable; the use of the term ‘politically correct’. The normal use of this term occurs when a reasoned argument to counter one that encompasses care and consideration of other human beings can not be devised, that argument is denounced as ‘politically correct’. This denunciation has the effect of consigning the presenter of the argument to a disposal area for ‘bleeding hearts, ‘do-gooders’, ‘greenies’ and myriad other terms used to vilify the holders of arguments that are difficult to counter with reasoned debate. The effect is that contrary attitudes are neutralised while the emotional response to the dominant attitude is strengthened by its moral fight against the ‘vile’ opposition.

This process provides the constant reinforcement of attitudes that is necessary to generate persistent pressure on opinion for it to move in the same direction that attitudes are pushed by elite discourse. The end-product is a slow change in opinion that serves to strengthen the position of the social elite.

**Conclusion**

In an attempt develop an arguable explanation for changes to public policy concerning education that were not the result of any discernible political process an analysis of elite discourse concerning education over recent decades was made from a Critical Theory perspective.

The first issue that emerged from the discourse was the politicisation of education. In political discourse much effort has been spent to ensure that there has always been a strict boundary between politics and education. In spite of the fact that governments, both state and federal, have various responsibilities in the provision of education they had always tried very hard to maintain education as a non-contentious issue. This changed shortly after the election of the Whitlam Labor government in 1972. There were two factors that contributed to this politicisation: a reaction to the speed that reforms were being made and the international economic crisis caused by OPEC’s oil price rises. Probably the latter was most important as it created an opportunity for the supporters of Laissez-faire economics to mount a campaign against the interventionist economics that had been followed since rebuilding after the Great Depression of the 1930s.
As a part of the politicisation process the discourse included a consistent questioning of the education system as to its success in teaching even the basics of literacy and numeracy. This debate was appropriated by various groups to further their own demands that education should provide new workers who had already been partly trained in the specific needs of specific jobs.

As a development of the standards debate the notion of accountability was given credence. This led to education being brought into a corporate model for the provision of services with efficiency being one of its main concerns. Education increasingly became seen as a cost to the taxpayer at a time when the dominant economic paradigm was one that demanded reduced taxation as a means to freeing industry and commerce to make the most of the opportunities provided by the ‘market’. To justify the cost of education it became important for it to be able to demonstrate that it could be shown that its ‘product’ was one that had an immediately tangible value.

These factors combined over a period of twenty to thirty years to generate a change in the perception of education. No longer was it enough to provide young people with the skills to operate effectively in all aspects of society through an understanding of its underlying culture and the knowledge that that culture requires for successful existence within it. Rather it became necessary for education to produce a ‘marketable product’ that had a tangible value in the ‘market’. To achieve this the education system, particularly at its post-compulsory end, had to change to provide a certain degree of what had traditionally been considered training. Traditionally, training had been provided by industry and commerce with the assistance the Technical and Further Education service of the government. Government reports made it clear that these activities should be more closely aligned with the school sector, thus reducing the requirement of industry to take financial responsibility for initial training of workers.

These aspects of education occupied a considerable amount of elite discourse concerning education. Throughout this period there was very little in the way of any contrary discourse as the owners of the elite discourse were strongly in favour of the economic direction represented by these changes. Consequently, the potential to change public opinion concerning these issues was very great. That this, in fact,
occurred is witnessed by the data showing that students studying at Year Twelve level had altered the type of subjects chosen from one representing a general education to those that represent a more vocational, training based view of education.

From the perspective of the critical theory approach being used in this study the implications of this were that the individuals affected by these changes were being manipulated in a way that worked towards the maintenance of the status quo. In concentrating on vocational studies and *de facto* training in the school system the students have less experience of curriculum that prepares them for effective participation in culture and society. This tends to strengthen a social structure in which a privileged minority continue to hold considerable power and influence within society while the remainder of the population are disempowered and have little choice but to accept their position in society. This process is a hegemonic one in which the culture of the privileged minority becomes accepted by those it disempowers, as the possibility of an alternative does not arise.
CHAPTER TEN

Summary

Introduction

In a liberal democracy such as Australia change to public policy is understood to occur after an open process, that involves, at least some of, the population as well as politicians, their advisers and public servants, has been followed. Ideas aimed at addressing the demands of a problem or situation are offered for debate and a final resolution is attained and subsequently applied. However, there appears to be another, far less common, process leading to policy change, which occurs from time to time. This process is not an open one and includes very little in the way of contribution from anyone other than the government front bench and their closest advisers. Three instances of policy change within the sphere of public education, which appeared to follow this less democratic and open to critique process, were the catalyst that inspired this study.

Although these instances of change appear to be discrete events, it is evident that they have worked together to produce significant consequences for the ways in which a range of individuals perceived the education system and the ways in which they interacted with it. Assuming that there had to be a reason for the occurrence of these policy changes, it was decided to explore what might reasonably explain the process that led to these changes to public policy. This appeared to be particularly important in that they had the potential to generate significant consequences for the life chances of a very large number of young people as, arguably, the very meaning of education was altered by these changes to public policy. In other words, if it had indeed not been the resolution of public debate and consideration that had legitimised these changes to policy then what did provide their legitimacy? What is possibly more pertinent, is why the changes were made at all, as, if there were no demonstrable benefits to the students within the education system, who would benefit from them?

The answer to this question lies partly in a definition of education itself:
Education has fundamental connections with the idea of human emancipation, though it is constantly in danger of being captured for other interests. In a society disfigured by class exploitation, sexual and racial oppression, and in chronic danger of war and environmental destruction, the only education worth the name is one that forms people capable of taking part in their own liberation (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett 1982, p.208).

Although little more than ten years had passed since this was written, and while the country had drawn away (at least a little) from the danger of war, and even though oppression based on gender or race had receded somewhat, the validity of this definition remains. The gender issue was gaining recognition for its claims and the offer of a treaty with Aboriginal Australia had brought the race issue closer to a successful resolution (for the time being, at least). Until the years immediately preceding the perceived phenomena, parents and their children had made decisions about schooling based on ideas such as this. Of course, they were tempered with a consideration of the life directions to which the student aspired, but the latter were not the overwhelmingly dominant considerations.

As Connell et al. (1982) note, there was always a danger of education being appropriated by groups within society which held a somewhat different view of society. Indeed, arguably, this is what in fact occurred. Because of its ubiquity, the discourse of an influential group -- the main providers of elite discourse -- provided the social environment in which a change of public opinion could develop. In the preceding years young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds had typically made careful choices in schooling to achieve an upward social mobility; if only they could! “A number [of school leavers] do aspire to work which they do not stand a chance of getting, either because they have not got the ability or because they have not followed the appropriate educational path” (Carter 1966, p.107) (author’s emphasis). An expectation had thus been created, by the effect of an elite discourse on public opinion, that all school leavers aspiring to find work should follow the “appropriate” and, we might assume essentially similar, educational paths.

Having identified this change in society’s relationship with education it became clear that to fully understand the ways in which it had occurred it would be necessary to examine how public opinion came to be both formed and changed. The notion of
public opinion implies that a large group of people within society (the public) could hold identifiably similar opinions about particular issues. Any issue that could be the subject of public opinion must be a political one, that is, an issue that relates to the way in which society is structured and controlled. However, opinions can not be held collectively by a group of people, rather it is the individual that holds the opinion and so becomes a part of the group of individuals holding that opinion about a specific political issue. If, in turn, this group grows sufficiently it will come to qualify as a ‘public’ and public opinion, concerning this issue, will be as one with the opinions held by the members of this group. If this is accepted, it becomes clear that to understand the development of public opinion it is necessary to gain an understanding of the opinion formation, development and change processes in relation to the individual.

As the word ‘opinion’ is one that is widely used in many and varied contexts, it is necessary, before the task of gaining this understanding may be commenced, to commit to a definition of opinion that is be used throughout the investigation. The definition used in this study is:

‘The underlying conviction of an individual that has been generated in response to his/her fundamental life experiences. This may be overridden by temporary salience given to a different perspective from time to time which in turn may come to be included as a component of the individual’s fundamental life experiences so creating a partial change in the underlying conviction’.

**Opinion Formation**

An opinion will begin to form when the object of that opinion is first encountered. For example, a mature person, encountering a handwriting implement such as a pen or pencil being used for the first time, would begin to form an opinion about it. The opinion would necessarily be very crude but would, nevertheless, be available for development and change. This initial opinion is likely to be something like ‘there exist stick like objects that can be used to make marks on surfaces.’ While this description of an initial opinion appears to be fairly obvious, personality traits could affect its nature. The temperament of this individual may modify the opinion in
areas where there are potential alternatives: a very suspicious, distrusting temperament could colour the opinion in relation to how the marks appear or whether there may be other similar artefacts in existence and so on. These areas of divergence are likely to affect the ways in which subsequent development and change occur. While the example used is rather fixed and socially inconsequential it serves to illustrate how the nature of the formation of an opinion could affect the eventual opinion held.

If indeed, temperament is a contributor to opinion development then the factors that determine temperament must also be contributors. What this demonstrates is that an understanding of developmental psychology is vital to gaining an understanding of the development of opinion. Temperament is the earliest identifiable trait in the development of an individual, followed by the development of the personality, which begins after the first year of life but continues throughout it. Because it is an ongoing process, a wide range of factors affects the development of personality. The work of Freud, Pavlov, Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg are important in coming to an understanding of not only the development of personality but also the ways in which this development relates to the ways in which opinions are formed and developed.

As temperament and personality have been shown to provide the bases for the initial formation and early development of opinion it follows that an examination of the ways in which these traits are developed must be valuable in building an understanding of opinion development. Important associated factors in this sphere are: prejudice, which has much of its origin in the early socialisation and experience of the child and the adoption of stereotypical descriptions, the origins of which are more dependant upon the culture the child is brought up in than the immediate familial environment. As the child grows older, and into adulthood, the effects of membership of or association with groups within the community become increasingly important to the development of opinion

Opinion Change

Once an opinion is formed and developed it becomes available for change in response to a stimulant contained in information received. There is a range of ‘cognitive theories’ of opinion or attitude change each allocating a degree of
emphasis to various aspects of received information that are able to affect the evaluative process of the individual. The first of these are collectively referred to as consistency theories in which an individual is seen to exist in a state of psychological comfort in relation to the beliefs, attitudes and opinions held. When information is received that creates a level of discomfort in relation to these feelings the situation arises where a change must occur or the information rejected. There is an implied participation on the part of the individual in rejecting or accepting new information and consequently making the changes. Therefore, the theory allows for contradictory attitudes to be held as the nature of the logic used allows for the rejection of information in certain instances while accepting it in relation to others. A variation of ‘consistency theories’ is represented by ‘Dissonance Theory’ which considers the level of psychological discomfort generated by the receipt of new information, creating the need to make a choice in relation to the attitudes held. The importance of Dissonance Theory lies in its suggestion that an individual will actively seek out further information that is able to reduce the dissonance created by accepting new information. The fact that information is sought is particularly relevant as the ways in which information is transmitted to the individual is one of the central issues relating to this work.

A third group of cognitive theories of attitude change concentrate on ‘cognitive response’. Cognitive response theories suggest that, on receiving information, the individual attempts to assimilate it into the beliefs and attitudes already held. Cognitive response theories make an attempt to explain how the individual actually thinks about the information being received and the issues that surround it. The important thing is that there is a component of active involvement in the attitude change that is being considered.

A Proposed Model for Explaining Attitude Change

It must be remembered that for the purposes of this work, opinion represents a deeply held conviction that is not easily changed while attitudes are less deeply held and available for relatively easy change. Attitude has the potential to force changes to opinion, albeit slowly, by a process that can be likened to a float anchored in a tidal estuary. The float is buffeted in many directions by the tide, the current of the river and winds from all directions. The only force that is not cancelled out is that of
the river current which will slowly change the position of the anchor downstream by its constant pressure on the float above. Attitudes are represented by the float while the anchor represents opinion that is only changed by a consistent pressure exerted by attitudes in one particular direction. The pressures are created by information which almost exclusively is provided by elite discourse. Even that which does not appear to have its origin in elite discourse arrives via other conduits such as friends, associates, relatives or teachers is most likely to have had its origin in elite discourse as that is the probable source from which these associates originally received the information.

A universal concern of researchers into the ways in which public opinion is changed and developed is that of “how citizens learn about matters that are for the most part beyond their immediate experience, and how they convert the information they acquire into [attitudes]” (Zaller 1992, p.40). The source of this information as referred to in this work has been termed ‘elite discourse’, that is, information, discussion and comment delivered by the media. The ways in which this information is received and processed by individuals to alter their attitudes are used as the basis of the model of public opinion change. This model is modified and used in this work to suggest how public opinion, in Australia, has developed.

This model, the Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model is made up of four axioms:

A1. RECEPTION AXIOM. The greater a person’s level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend (in a word, to receive) political messages concerning that issue.

A2. RESISTANCE AXIOM. People tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predispositions, but they do so only to the extent that they possess the contextual information necessary to perceive a relationship between the message and their predispositions.

A3. ACCESSIBILITY AXIOM. The more recently a consideration has been called to mind or thought about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration or related considerations from memory and bring them to the top of the head for use.
A4. RESPONSE AXIOM. Individuals answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them (Zaller 1992, pp. 42-49).

The RAS Model and Australian Society

Having nominated the RAS model as a workable means (after modification to allow for Australian conditions) to gaining an understanding of how public opinion is developed and changed, it is incorporated into an examination of the basis for the development of Australian public opinion. It must be remembered that what is normally referred to as ‘public opinion’ does not equate with the definition of opinion that is used in this study, rather it equates much more closely with what is considered to be attitude.

Attitude and opinion rely on more than merely elite discourse for their formation, development and change. Culture and tradition are also vital to the generation of opinions and attitudes and as these are specific to a nation’s society the opinion held within that society must be unique to it. To understand how opinion has developed in Australia, the history of the nation must be examined to identify events that have had a lasting impact on the culture and the traditions of the country, as they are understood by the people. The emphasis given to the population’s understanding of culture and traditions is significant in that it is the people that bring their understandings to the opinions they form. This cognisance of the role of culture and tradition is utilised in the analysis of the information presented by elite discourse in relation to it, thus contributing to the overall understanding of the development of public opinion.

To enable a full analysis of elite discourse to be made, it is essential to understand the nature of the proprietors of the media that disseminate it. A knowledge of those who own and consequently control the media that supply elite discourse allows an analysis to be made of the ideology and motivation that lies behind it. This is, arguably, a significant factor contributing to the development and change of attitudes and opinion, as it has been shown that ownership of significant media organisations bestows a significant degree of control of the nature of the output of that medium. This control is not overt and it could be successfully argued that it is not even
intentional but it does contribute to the process of hegemony as described by Antonio Gramsci (1971), and, of course, hegemony and the development of public opinion are inexorably linked.

Elite discourse is not confined to the more overt current affairs aspects of the various media, rather, all media carry some component of persuasive messaging. To illustrate this, consider contemporary architecture, as it would be easy to pass this over in looking for potential opinion change factors. In fact the artistic statements made in architecture have the ability to send very powerful messages about the nature of the society in which we live. Expensive private hospitals (e.g. The Mount Hospital, Perth, WA) entrance foyers that echo the opulence of five star hotels give a powerful message about the medical elite who finance them and an expectation regarding the affluence of the clientele. At the other end of the architectural scale the design of public housing (or its total absence) also sends a powerful social message concerning power relationships in society. In similar, and more overt, ways every sector of the arts and entertainment media, from sport to ballet, from cartoon to “Old Masters” and so on make a contribution to the dissemination of elite discourse. Each of these contributions has, to a lesser or greater degree, a role to play in the development and change of public opinion.

Australian history, like that of most nations, is one that gives greatest import to those events and identities that reflect the aspirations of a relatively small number of individuals who hold power and are most benefited by the ways in which it is wielded. In the early days of Colonial Australia these individuals were drawn from those chosen to form an administration and those who followed shortly after, bringing money and a determination to set themselves up as a landed aristocracy. Since those early days virtually all power has been dispensed by their successors, even to the point of them dictating the nature of the democracy that Australia now enjoys. The description of the nation in this highly restricted way has a significant effect on the way in which people understand themselves in relation to the society in which they live. The definition of an Australian is one based on a highly restricted history. It is this history that has a major role to play in informing the development of the opinions of the people it defines.
Public Opinion and Social Change

By bringing together these various contributors to the development of public opinion a point is reached at which an understanding of how the dominant public opinion of an era, that is, the attitudes of a majority of the people at the time, is gained. This information is used as a means of explaining phenomena occurring within education in the early 1990s. It is insufficient to use the argument that public opinion was at a particular point as a reason for the situation at that time, as educational decision making is not based on attitude. Rather, it is dependent on a deeper held conviction – what has been termed opinion in this work. The argument presented is that the attitudes that represent the dominant public opinion, and the discourse that generated it, had been consistent and persistent to a sufficient degree to cause a shift in those more deeply held convictions that opinion is dependent upon. This then allows for an acceptance of policy change that merely appears to echo the change in public opinion and does not address the concerns that would have been raised if the usual policy development process had been followed.

While it is argued that the opinion of a significant number of people had shifted in this manner it has to be acknowledged that elite discourse is not omnipotent as there is a significant minority whose opinion does not fall into line with that predicted by elite discourse. Confirmation that this is consistent with the argument of this work exists within the axioms of the RAS model of attitude change. Axiom two of the model deals with an individual’s tendency to resist persuasive messages from sources not considered to be consistent with their political predispositions. An interesting illustration of this is provided by the fact that Shadow Ministers in the current ALP opposition, who were ministers in the Hawke/Keating governments, which were strongly supportive of Laissez faire economics, still maintain a contradictory stance towards economic rationalism. It could be argued that their discourse is beginning to have an effect on the opinions of their current colleagues with an increasing questioning of the validity of that approach to economic management.

Public opinion is more than an indicator of how public figures are performing in the eyes of the population. It is a phenomenon that has vital ramifications for the way in which the nation develops. That public opinion affects the way people understand
the society in which they live has been shown to be beyond debate. With sufficient understanding of the processes that cause this to happen it is possible to predict how changes will occur or even enable intervention to reduce the potential damage that these changes could cause.

**Options for Further Application of an Australian Theory of Opinion Change**

In the five years since this work was commenced there appears to have been a significant change in the way in which policy concerning contentious issues is dealt with in the political arena. Public opinion is now cited as a justification for the introduction of new and, seemingly, undebated policy. For example, after a classic provision of the “Mainstream Effect” in which virtually all elite discourse vilified, in a wide range of ways, the asylum seekers and refugees who had made their way to Australia’s maritime borders, with the intention of finding sanctuary, a number of policies were introduced, virtually without debate, with the justification that public opinion was demanding that kind of response. That the government spokespeople had generated the public opinion being cited, through involvement in elite discourse, was not an issue as the process was either not understood or intentionally ignored.

A development of this work would be very useful in bringing the processes discussed into the public arena so that a greater understanding of how policy is being implemented without reference to the democratic process.

The benefits suggested in the previous paragraph will only eventuate if the process of public opinion change becomes well understood. If this does not happen there is the potential for unscrupulous individuals who have gained this knowledge to use that understanding for personal or political gain. When the very effective methods utilised in ensuring there is no contradictory elite discourse (as discussed in chapters 7 and 9), concerning these contentious issues, it would be easy to surmise that this may already be happening.

At a time of international warfare, such as that being experienced at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, it is clear that public opinion is being manipulated to a greater extent than ever. This work has the potential to provide the means by which a wider understanding of what is occurring in the sphere of politics and its associated
media can be made available to a significant proportion of the people affected by the decisions being made.
Appendix 1

Contributors to the Formation, Development and Change of Opinion
Opinion Formation and Development

- **Temperament:**

  At 2-3 months of age Thomas & Chess (1977, p.153) found that children had one of three temperament types: easy children, slow-to-warm-up children, and difficult children. The descriptions of these types give some indication of the ways in which these different groups of children may develop deep seated underlying opinions and possibly how they may then be modified as a result of their temperament.

- **Personality Development:**

  Developmental psychology has identified a wide range of factors and situations that affect the ways in which the personality develops. Included in developmental psychology are the areas of social development, moral development, cognitive development. Each one of these areas have the potential to contribute to the development of opinion.

- **Conditioning and Learning:**

  Influential people in a young person’s life, such as parents, relatives, friends and teachers, make a significant contribution to the development of a young persons’ opinion. This process does not end with childhood; many aspects of it continue throughout life.

- **Prejudice:**

  Prejudice are formed by three major factors: Childhood Socialisation, salient incidents and repeated exposure.

- **Stereotypes:**

  Inherent laziness leads individuals to use stereotypes to categorise people or
situations rather than go to the trouble of actually finding out. Because peoples’ actions and situations are important in the development of opinion it follows that stereotypes have a very important role to play. The level of inherent laziness varies from individual to individual in the same way that all other personality traits do.

- **Groups:**

  The groups to which individuals belong affect the development of opinion as there is a ‘group opinion’ in the same way there is a ‘public opinion’.

- **Culture and Tradition:**

  The ways in which people live their lives (culture and traditions) have a fundamental effect on the way in which the world is viewed. This must have a fundamental effect on opinions and attitudes which are all based in the individual’s environment.

**Opinion Change**

- **Cognitive Theories of Attitude Change:**

  Various theories that attempt to describe the environmental factors that have a psychological affect on the individual that causes attitude change:

  Heider’s Balance Theory suggests that the acquisition of new information that is contrary to the existing attitude cause a psychological imbalance that must be rectified by changing attitude to accommodate it, thus returning psychological balance.

  Festinger’s Dissonance Theory deals with the dissonance caused by environmental understandings that are challenged by the receipt of new information. As dissonance is psychologically uncomfortable attitude has to be made to return to consonance.
Cognitive Response Theories see cognitive responses to messages as the step between receipt of messages and creating attitudinal responses to them.

2. **The Receive-Accept-Sample Model of Attitude Change**

This is the model used throughout the study. It is based on four axioms which relate to the way in which elite discourse provides information, persuasive messages and political understandings:

A1. **RECEPTION AXIOM.** The greater a person’s level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend (in a word, to receive) political messages concerning that issue.

A2. **RESISTANCE AXIOM.** People tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predispositions, but they do so only to the extent that they possess the contextual information necessary to perceive a relationship between the message and their predispositions.

A3. **ACCESSIBILITY AXIOM.** The more recently a consideration has been called to mind or thought about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration or related considerations from memory and bring them to the top of the head for use.

A4. **RESPONSE AXIOM.** Individuals answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them (Zaller 1992, pp.42-49).

**Attitude Importance**

The importance of the issue to the individual has a role to play in attitude change; if an issues is important to the individual it is far less likely to be changed by the receipt of new persuasive messages.

**Attitude Instability**

Expressed attitudes are often unstable due to the effect of salience of recently received messages.
**Mainstream Effect**

If elite discourse provides only one point of view with little or no contradictory messages attitude change is likely to occur even in those whose predisposition would predict otherwise. Clearly, this effect is less likely to occur with highly committed and well informed individuals.

**The Polarisation Effect**

Where there is a strongly polarised debate there will be a polarisation of attitudes in line with existing political predisposition.

**Two-Sided Information Flow Effects**

When there is a strong political message being produced with a less powerful contradictory message, the less powerful message, over a long period of time, can prompt attitudes in its favour.
Appendix 2

A Condensed History of Media Ownership in Australia Between 1928 and 1982

(condensed from Chadwick, 1989; Bonney & Wilson, 1983; House of Representatives Select Committee on the Print Media, 1992)
1921: Keith Murdoch appointed editor of the Melbourne Herald.

1922: Hugh Dennison launches Sun News Pictorial to challenge The Herald.

1924: Keith Murdoch becomes managing director of Herald and Weekly Times (HWT).

1925: Sun News Pictorial bought by Murdoch, for HWT, after closure of the Evening Sun.

Morning Star launched by Victorian Farmers’ Union.

1926: Murdoch led syndicate purchases West Australian issuing shares to West Australians to divert criticism of interstate control

The weekly Canberra Times launched.

1927: Morning Star bought by a subsidiary of HWT.

1928: Murdoch led syndicate purchases ailing Adelaide Register turns around its fortunes to challenge the successful Advertiser. This leads to the Advertiser’s owner agreeing to sell to the syndicate which, shortly after, closes the Register. Murdoch strikes an agreement with Adelaide’s only other proprietor (News) ensuring they will not move into each others’ markets.

1930: Warwick Fairfax appointed managing director of John Fairfax and Sons Ltd.

The depression affects viability of the Adelaide News. Rescue package by Murdoch leads to HWT gaining control

First commercial radio network established with HWT (3DB) as well as other press proprietors diversifying into that media.

1931: Murdoch, wishing to replace the Scullin government, organises Joe Lyons to defect to the newly transformed United Australia Party. With press backing Lyons’ party defeats the Scullin Labor government late in the year.
1932: Managing director of Dennison’s Associated Newspapers, Clyde Packer’s fortunes saved when NSW Premier Jack Lang dismissed by the Governor.

Clyde’s son Frank and previous Deputy Prime Minister, E.G Theodore buy The World from the AWU. Almost immediately they accept £86 000 from Dennison in return for closing The World and not competing with the Sun.

The ABC established to operate alongside commercial radio.

1933: Lyons Government recommends the knighthood of Keith Packer.

Australian Women’s Weekly launched by Frank Packer.

Murdoch’s Brisbane Courier and John Wren’s Daily Mail merge with Murdoch gaining editorial control in return for Wren receiving a greater proportion of the dividends. (John Wren was the moving force behind the criminal libel charge made against the campaigning author Frank Hardy for the content of his novel Power without Glory)

Melbourne’s daily Argus publishers launch the evening Star in competition with HWT’s Herald,

1934: With Sir Keith Murdoch’s support Lyons government is re-elected. Murdoch makes recommendations for cabinet positions and is quoted as saying that he put Lyons into Government and he will put him out.

1935: Murdoch falls out with Lyons due to the introduction of controls of radio ownership limiting to one station per metropolitan area, two capital city stations, three in any one State and five in total for any one owner. Murdoch has interests in three metro stations and HWT has eleven stations.

1936: Melbourne Star closes leaving Herald without competition.

1939: Murdoch and Fairfax endorse Menzies as Prime Minister, after Lyons dies, in spite of criticisms of his perceived disloyalty to Lyons.

1940: Menzies informs Fairfax general manager that Ezra Norton, the publisher of the weekly Truth, is seeking permission to import extra newsprint to
establish an evening *Daily Mirror*. While cabinet agrees, the other newspaper publishers protest strongly with Fairfax papers criticising Menzies very strongly. Two months later cabinet revokes the *Daily Mirror’s* newsprint import licence.

Sir Keith Murdoch appointed Director-General of Information.

Menzies resigns as Director-General of Information shortly after.  

1941: Decision regarding *Daily Mirror* reversed after sympathetic minister appointed as Minister of Trade. Menzies comes under attack in *Sydney Morning Herald*. After party intrigues involving the Minister of Trade Menzies resigns as Prime Minister.

Menzies successor, Arthur Fadden, resigns after being unable to gain support of independents in the budget debate. John Curtin forms a minority Government.

1942: Curtin Government consolidates regulation of broadcasting with the passage of the Australian Broadcasting Act.

Keith Murdoch elevated to the chair of HWT.

1944: A dinner held in Melbourne to discuss the organisation of the non-Labor forces to form the Liberal Party. Attendees include: Robert Menzies, Sir Keith Murdoch, Fairfax general manager, Rupert Henderson, Frank Packer, and Associated Newspaper’s Eric Kennedy.

1945: The new Chifley Government makes arrangements that ensure the ABC has the ability to develop its own, independent, news gathering service.

1949: Sir Keith Murdoch buys control of the Adelaide *News*, from HWT in return for granting HWT the first option on his holding in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*. 

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British *Daily Mirror*, group joins Ezra Norton to buy *Truth* and Sydney *Daily Mirror* as the foundation of a pro-Labor chain of papers.

Chifley's Government defeated by the new Liberal Party led by Menzies.


1952: Sir Keith Murdoch dies bequeathing much of his interest in the media to his son, Rupert.

1953: Royal Commission recommends that the ABC should run a television station as a means to limiting the concentration of control held by the commercial operators.

Rupert Murdoch returns from England to take on the role of publisher of the Adelaide *News*. The first option on Sir Keith’s holding in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* is taken up by HWT.

Fairfax gains control over Associated Newspapers, locking out bids by Sir Frank Packer and HWT. Sydney’s newspapers now owned by Fairfax (*Sun & Sydney Morning Herald*), Ezra Norton (*Daily Mirror*) and Packer (*Daily Telegraph*).

Associated’s *Sunday Sun* and Fairfax’s *Sunday Herald* amalgamated into the *Sun-Herald*

1955: The first four commercial TV licences are granted. The major newspaper proprietors are the predominant owners of the recipient companies: Packer owns 30 percent of Sydney’s TCN9, Fairfax, 38 percent of Sydney’s ATN7, HWT, 85 percent of Melbourne’s ATV7. David Syme and Co (The *Age*) 35 percent of Melbourne’s GTV9 with British Associated Newspapers owning 15 percent of Melbourne’s HSV7 and 12 percent of Sydney’s TCN9.
1956: Menzies Government introduces legislation to control the ownership of television stations although existing holdings are not affected as long there is no further expansion. These limits remain until 1987: an owner may only have one station per metropolitan area and no more than two stations in total.

HWT acquires Brisbane evening *Telegraph*.

1957: The Melbourne *Argus* closes leaving only the *Age* and the *Sun News-Pictorial*. HWT buys *Argus*’s plant, three radio stations and two associated papers.

1958: Menzies ignores the Australian Broadcasting Control Board report advising the Government to seek applications from organisations without existing television interests, and grants the Adelaide (NWS9) licence to Murdoch and (ADS7) licence to HWT along with Brisbane (BTQ7).

Fairfax buys *Daily Mirror* from Ezra Norton to head off a feared move into the Sydney market by HWT.

1959: Menzies Government accepts Broadcasting Control Board recommendations to bring in other players with the granting of television licences for regional stations.

TVW7 Perth starts broadcasting with substantial investment by West Australian Newspapers Ltd.


*Daily Mirror* purchased from Fairfax by Murdoch, the deal includes printing capacity in Melbourne and Brisbane.

TVT6, Hobart, owned by Davies Bros Ltd., publisher of Hobart *Mercury*, but largely owned by HWT.

1961: Packer, Murdoch and Fairfax make no competition agreement for the Sydney suburban newspaper market.

1964: Fairfax acquires *Canberra Times* and CTC7 Canberra

The *Australian*, the first national daily newspaper, launched by Murdoch.

1965: TV ownership limits tightened further.

1968: Murdoch gains information, through a circuitous route, from ASIO that is used in a page one article in the *Australian* discrediting William McMahon, one of the contenders for Prime Minister following the disappearance of Harold Holt. It becomes impossible for McMahon to stand and John Gorton is, subsequently, elected to the position and becomes friendly with Murdoch.

1969: Murdoch purchases London’s *News of the World* and the *Sun*.

Symes launches *Newsday* to compete with the Melbourne *Herald*. It only survives eight months costing Symes $3 million. *Herald* raises its advertising rates.

1971: Fairfax launches the weekly, *National Times*.

1972: The three big newspaper groups -HWT, Murdoch and Fairfax - are formed when Murdoch purchases the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* from the Packer family. At the same time Fairfax increases its holding in Syme to over 50%.


1979: Murdoch buys ATN10, Sydney.

Murdoch makes a $125 million takeover bid for HWT. Fairfax makes a large counter bid causing Murdoch to withdraw making a large profit.
HWT loses a very large amount on the deal but is satisfied having prevented Murdoch’s expansion. The investment in HWT causes problems for concentration of ownership as it makes Fairfax’ investment in HWT greater than in David Syme & Co, publisher of *The Age*. The Trades Practices Commission eventually decides to take no action in regards to this situation.

1981: Fraser Government passes amendments (known as the Murdoch amendments) to the Broadcasting and Television Act, greatly weakening the powers of the ABT to use its public interest discretionary powers when approving ownership changes in broadcasting licences.

Murdoch acquires London *Times* and *Sunday Times*.

1982: A design change to Aussat favours the major media owners desire to allow for the transmission of programming to areas covered by independent rural stations.

Murdoch launches Brisbane morning *Daily Sun*.

Ranald McDonald and the Syme family sell all their David Syme & Co shares to Fairfax.
Appendix 3

Academic and Vocational Subjects Studied at Year 12 SAS level in Northern Territory Schools
### Academic SAS Subjects

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Australian Studies</td>
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<td>Design, Prac &amp; Theory</td>
<td>Drama</td>
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<td>Home Economics</td>
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<td>Physical Ed.</td>
<td>Physical Science</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Photography (prac.)</td>
<td>Geological science</td>
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<td>Applied graphics</td>
<td>Creative Woodwork</td>
<td>Aboriginal Studies</td>
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<td>Religion Studies</td>
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**Vocational SAS Subjects**

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<td>Computing Studies</td>
<td>General Typing</td>
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<td>Law &amp; Business</td>
<td>Legal Studies</td>
<td>Natural Resources Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Typing</td>
<td>Shorthand Speed and Stenography</td>
<td>Small Business management</td>
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<td>Furniture Construction</td>
<td>Welding &amp; Fabricating</td>
<td>Word Processing</td>
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<td>Automotive Maintenance</td>
<td>Metal Machining</td>
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<td>Workshop Practice</td>
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Appendix 4

Number of Arts/Academic and Vocational SAS Subjects Studied by Northern Territory Students 1988-1997
## Northern Territory: Year 12 subjects studied 1988-1997

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