

“You’re Not the Boss of Me!”

High School Student Behaviour and Identity as Symbolic Self-Interpretation

Ciawy Tay

BA (Hons), Grad Dip Ed

Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology
School of Social and Cultural Studies

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Abstract

This person-centred ethnographic study examines the link between students' individual interpretations of selves and their social interactions. It is based on yearlong participant observation, supplemented by interviews, at Pine View High, a public school in Perth, Western Australia. Its key questions focus on adolescents' perceptions of themselves, of others at school (teachers and peers), and on how these perceptions affect their behavioural interactions.

Various accounts have been given for student behaviour. This study's analysis concentrates on students' individual interpretations of identities as playing a key role in shaping their social interactions. Identity and behaviour are conceptualised as being symbolic, their meanings formed through interpretation. It is the symbolic significance of behaviour in students' social relationships that is seen as being relevant to their interpretation of self-identities. This study's theoretical framework primarily uses a symbolic interactionist analytical lens, which is supplemented by connectionist schema theory as a means to examine the cognitive aspect of lived experiences.

This study explores how the meanings students give to their actions contribute to, and are influenced by, their perceptions of themselves and their social relationships. Relationships with others are depicted as providing the deciding context for how they understand their identities and actions. The thesis examines how the adolescents' responses towards adults were informed by their interpretation of the latter's identities and interpersonal relevance to their own lives. It also discusses how students' self-perceptions influence their friendship choices, which also forms a part of how they define their identities.

This study contributes not only to our understanding of the lived experiences of adolescents but also to our consideration of teaching practices. It helps us comprehend the symbolic motivations for students' actions, particularly the nature of the role their self-interpretation has as a significant motivator. It also helps teachers to understand that the socially contextual nature of how actions can be interpreted means that what they might perceive as antisocial behaviour might be perceived differently as social behaviour by the students themselves and their peers. These insights can assist policy-makers and educators in the field in adopting teaching practices by encouraging understanding beyond what is immediately observable of students' behaviour and address its underlying causes imbedded in their individual experience.

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION:

This thesis **does not contain** work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.

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1

Introduction

It was the student teacher's first practicum and he had been struggling with controlling the behaviour of the students in that class. Most of the students at that school had proven unproblematic, but he had found a few that were too much to handle. Two Year 9 girls had started calling him 'Fred', and when told not to, started call him 'Derf'—'Fred' backwards—instead. And then there was Frank, a Year 10 student who had just returned from a week-long suspension. The student teacher realized that asserting his authority over the boy would be a gargantuan task.

While the students were working on their worksheet that period, he walked around the room. As the student teacher was doing this, he noticed that Frank was on his feet and away from his desk. The boy was joking around with two other boys on the other side of the classroom. Mustering his most commanding voice, he called out, "Frank, please sit down." His command went completely unheeded, so he decided to try again.. "Frank," he shouted. When the boy actually faced the student teacher added, "Sit down." Again, Frank was undeterred and resumed his conversation with his friends. Finally losing his temper, the student teacher barked at Frank, "*Sit down!*"

The class fell silent. Frank faced the student teacher, but far from showing any sign of fear, he glared defiantly, bellowing, “You can’t tell me what to do! *You’re not the boss of me!*”

I was the young student teacher in this story, which took place some years before the study presented in this thesis. It presented a catalyst for my interest in examining the motivations for student behaviour and their relationships with teachers, and was therefore part of the germination of this study. The questions that arose out of my encounter with Frank reflect well the main questions and concerns of this thesis. In his statement Frank laid out two things: that he would not do what I told him to do, and that he did not perceive me as his ‘boss’. The implication, of course, was that the two were connected. But what is the nature of that connection? How does the way a student perceive a teacher, and their relationship with that teacher, affect the nature of the student’s behavioural interaction with the adult? For that matter, how does their perception of themselves and other people at school influence their behaviour in general?

These questions express the issues and concerns that I explore in this study. The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate the interconnection between individual students’ perceptions of identities, both their own and those of others, and their actions, based on an analysis of ethnographic data. While my encounter with Frank was not the only catalyst for my interest in student behaviour and relationships, which culminated in this thesis, it does help emphasise the need for the type of research that presented here. The first step in addressing these research questions is to construct a theoretical framework to serve as an appropriate analytical tool.

In search of a theory: Theoretical framework

In the early stages of this study, I had not yet committed myself to an established theoretical basis for my study but had aimed only to investigate the connection between students' sense of personal identity and their behaviour. My determination at that stage was that the study would be focused on students as individuals. To this extent my approach concerning theory is true to anthropology's general commitment to the inductivist research method, in which empirical observation leads to the construction or selection of theoretical framework (Jarvie 1983:313). Erickson (1984:51) describes how this concurrent development of theory and data collection takes place: "[T]he fieldworker generates a situation-based inquiry process, learning, through time, to ask questions of the field setting in such a way that the setting, by its answers, teaches the next situationally appropriate questions to ask."

Initial analysis of ethnographic data collected during my fieldwork suggested that the study requires a third point of interest, which is a social interaction or relationship. This conclusion was derived from the observation that much of how the students perceive themselves and others seems anchored in their social relationships, as is the meaning of their behaviour towards others at school, teachers and classmates alike. The analytical tool employed, then, must be geared towards examining how individuals create the meanings of identities and social behaviour in these interactional and relational contexts. I find such a suitable theoretical framework in symbolic interactionism, as employed by scholars such as

George Herbert Mead (1934), Herbert Blumer (1969, 1972), Irving Goffman (1959, 1963) and, more recently, John P. Hewitt (1991, 2007). For this reason, I primarily position this thesis as a symbolic interactionist study of the school. I also further draw from the works of other scholars concerned with the symbolic aspect of human experience and interactions that are not strictly located within symbolic interactionism, such as Martin Sokefeld (1999, 2001) and Gary Gregg (1998).

Having adopted symbolic interactionism as the main theoretical motor of this study, the logical next step would be to define its focal concerns, the first of which is identity. Symbolic interactionists such as Hewitt (1991) postulate that meaning is not inherent in objects but is constructed through the process of interpretation. In this sense objects are said to be symbolic. Our understanding of who and what we are—our identity—is likewise not inherent in our being but is constructed through interpreting different facets and aspects of our existence as symbols. Identity, therefore, is conceptualized as the interpretation of the self, or self-meaning.

The idea of identity as self-interpretation is neither novel nor restricted to symbolic interactionism. Such a conception of identity has been employed as far back as Dilthey's (1977) descriptive psychology. Today, it has become, as Brinkmann (2008:404) says, a "hermeneutic tradition" in psychology and the social sciences. The conception of identity that I employ in this thesis is therefore firmly founded on existing scholarship. However, what identity as self-interpretation means is diversely understood. Rosa (2004) lays out four ways that this has been conceptualized in the past, divided along two axes: societal or individual, and implicit or explicit. I recognize the important input of societal factors and also

make references to conceptions of implicit self-interpretations as exemplified by bodily habits, feelings and *habitus* (Brinkmann 2008:412). However, this being a symbolic interactionist study, I view identity mainly as a product of a reflective self-image interpretation, and it is therefore individual and explicit. More precisely, I perceive it to be the product of *symbolic* self-interpretation, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. To my knowledge, a conceptual lens that views identity in this manner has seen little use in school research, especially in the context of individual students' interpersonal relationships with others.

Since this study views identity as an interpretation of the self that takes place within individual students, it is logical to ask how this takes place on the cognitive level. For this purpose, as part of my theoretical framework I also draw from cognitive anthropology, specifically schema theory. This theory postulates that our understanding of things is mediated by schemas (or *schemata*), mental structures representing aspects of the world, including ourselves (Strauss and Quinn 1992, 1997; D'Andrade 1995). I incorporate this into the symbolic interactionist conception of identity that I have described above by conceptualizing schema connections as the internal cognitive mechanism for the process of self-interpretation, in the form of self-schemas (Markus 1977, Howard 2000, Jung and Lennon 2003, Valentino et al. 2008). The inclusion of cultural inputs into our identities is mediated by our incorporation of cultural schemas in our self-interpretation (Strauss and Quinn 1997:82, D'Andrade 1995, Nishida 2005). Together with symbolic interactionism, schema theory as used by cognitive anthropologists forms this study's core analytical framework. Throughout this thesis I will also employ other theories, which I will mention and briefly outline as needed.

On methodology

Regarding the methodology of this study, I will outline two aspects: the selected general approach to the research topic and the specific method of data collection and analysis. First, this study's general approach is what has been called 'person-centred ethnography' (Levy 1973, 1990; LeVine 1982; Levy and Hollan 1998; Hollan 2001). Initially developed within psychological anthropology and drawing psychoanalytical techniques and theory, this type of approach views ethnographic subjects more than just informants from whom the researcher extracts information on cultural and or social systems. Instead, the focus of analysis is on the personal and individual life experiences, emotions and thoughts of the subjects themselves (Levy and Hollan 1998). LeVine (1982:293), who first used the term, says that while standard ethnography "produces a cultural description analogous to a map or an aerial photograph", person-centred ethnography "tells us what it like to live there". This, then, is an approach well suited to a theoretical framework built around symbolic interactionism, and especially to its conception of identity as the product of reflexive self-interpretation. Its focus is, therefore, on individual persons' internal experience more than on the sociocultural factors that inform that experience, a common feature it shares with the methodology of person-centred ethnography.

The approach is also evident in the works of scholars I draw heavily from who are not explicitly identified with symbolic interactionism. I speak here of Sokefeld (1999) and Gregg (1998); both their ethnographic analyses focus on the experiences and conscious reflections of central characters, which the

anthropologists treat not merely as anecdotal evidence for cultural trends but as their main points of interest. Sokefeld (1999) focuses on one incident experienced by one subject, which he then uses as a starting point for his discussion. Gregg's (1998) discussion similarly focuses on the self-reflections of a handful of subjects, which he expands into an examination on various aspects of identity. This thesis adopts the same kind of approaches taken by these ethnographers. This person-centred ethnographic approach utilized in this study is also well summarized in Linger's (2010) question (and the title of his paper), 'What is it like to be someone else?' He argues for the importance of looking at subjective consciousness and the subjective viewpoint in studying human experiences, arguing against "reduc[ing] experience to an objective sociohistorical epiphenomenon" (Linger 2010:222). In the same vein, the aim of this study is to examine students' subjective experiences instead of attempting to objectively deconstruct the systemic and structural factors impacting on those experiences.

This leads to my second point on this thesis's methodology, which concerns ethnographic data collection and analysis. I emphasized the notion that this is a study of individual self-interpretations and social interactions: it is unrealistic to attempt to address in detail the individual experience and motivations underlying the behaviour of each student in a school of hundreds. Instead, my analysis will centre on a handful of students whose social interactions and relationships I consider to be most illustrative and insightful to this study's main concerns. My approach to data collection, which focuses not on a group but on a handful of individuals, is similar to Wolcott's (2003) in *The Man in the Principal's Office*, an ethnography that analyses schooling by following the life and activities of a single principal called Edward Bell. The major difference is that while I collected my

data by following two teachers, they are not the focus of this study but the students, unlike Wolcott, who does focus on the principal he was 'shadowing'. The teachers are significant because they serve as gatekeepers to the students, and also, more importantly, because they are an essential part of the adolescents' school lives. Likewise, I choose not to identify patterns of behaviour or social dynamics among the entire student body but to analyse them as individuals, in keeping with this research's approach as a person-centred ethnography. Having observed the students in their classes for some time, I narrowed down my focus to a number whose interactions with teachers and/or peers seemed most insightful in addressing my thesis question.

As is common in qualitative ethnographic research, participant observation has been the primary method of this study's data collection. I selected this method because it offers the best way to obtain the kind of ethnographic information that I am interested in. The 'participant' part of participant observation means that the ethnographer becomes involved in the life of their subjects, at times even engaging in activities that it is centred around their lifestyles (Erickson 1984, Hopwood 2007). For example, Wacquant (2004) trained for, and participated in, competitive boxing as part of his participant observation. As such, the intensity of observation and the length of interactions involved in participation observation allow the researcher access to the rich detail of individual life experiences that person-centred ethnographic research works with, making it highly suitable for the approach (DeWalt et al. 1998). This is especially so when the goal is to "tell us what it is like to live there", as LeVine (1982) puts it, which is the aim of person-centred ethnographic research. The main site for data collection through participant observation was the classroom, where most of my contact with the

students took place. In addition, I also engaged them, and their teachers, in other areas of the school—the yards, the staff room, the football oval and so on—during break times.

Since my theoretical framework was still in the process of being developed at the beginning of the fieldwork, I kept the scope of my observations broad for some time. I took note of everything, from where students were positioned in the classroom and in the schoolyards, to the accessories they wore in addition to their uniform, the colours of their bags and the classroom activities that they were assigned by their teachers. At this stage, included in my notes were any aspects of students' appearance and actions that might somehow be related to identity and/or self-representation. Eventually, as my observation in the field led me to focus my research question on students' social relationships as the conceptual bridge between self-perceptions and behaviour, I consequently began to centre my observations on the adolescents' interactions with teachers and peers.

I also supplement participant observation with structured semi-formal interviews with ten students, whom I selected in a semi-random fashion. My selection was semi-random because even though I did not have strict criteria for the kinds of students I would interview, I did aim for my interviewee pool to be sufficiently diverse relative to the school's demography. I made sure that I had at least one male student and one female student from each year group between Years 8 and 10. I also ensured that my interviewees included both students from immigrant backgrounds and those who were born in Australia. Finally, I made certain to include students of various ranges of perceived academic ability, from those in the Education Support program, to 'mainstream' students, to those that were

members of the elite Academic Enrichment Program. In most cases I also preferred to have built sufficient rapport with my interviewees before interviewing them in order to have as much cooperation and openness from the students as possible.

There were some difficulties with conducting interviews as part of the data collection process. Part of the problem took place before the interviews themselves could take place. I was ethically required to obtain permission from students' parents to interview their children. This, however, was occasionally easier said than done because of various reasons. One illustrative example was my attempt to interview Year 9 student Allen, whom I considered to be a good potential interview candidate due to his reputation for misbehaviour in the classroom and his relationship with his teacher Jay. However, despite being reminded ample times, Allen never returned to me the permission slip that I asked him to have his parents sign. Unfortunately, Allen left Pine View before I managed to gain the permission to interview him.

Further, most of my interviewees (or their parents) declined for their interviews to be recorded, and as a result their responses had to be subsequently reconstructed from written notes and from memory. Materials from these interviews are used as appropriate in this thesis to support data from direct observation and informal conversations with the students, as recorded in my field notes. In using data from interviews in my ethnographic analyses I have also been hindered by a methodological limitation, namely that at the time of the fieldwork I was still in the process of constructing my theoretical framework and research questions. Because of this, I subsequently discovered that some of questions—and,

consequently, answers—I included in my interviews were not as relevant to the final research questions as I had thought. As a final note regarding interviews as a method of data collection, I also consider it prudent to mention that I did not formally interview teachers because the two teachers I followed, Jay and Dan, were most of the time accessible enough that I could gather enough data from them through informal conversations.

One general issue I encountered concerned my role as a researcher among the subjects of my study. McCall and Simmons (1969) consider the issue of the researcher's role to be "perhaps the single most important determinant of what [the ethnographer] will be able to learn" of their subjects. This is because, among other things, the researcher's role in their subjects' community acts as a key device for securing information (Gold 1958). How the subjects perceive the participant observer in relation to themselves impacts on how much and what kind of information they are willing to confide to the ethnographer. This limits and delimits what is available for the ethnographer to observe. For example, Walker (1988) says of his relationship with the students he was researching in "Stokeham", his fictionalized name for the school:

Once they were convinced that I was not a teacher, was not part of any authority structure, and would respect their confidence and confidentiality, the footballers and soon many others capitalized on my writer role by casting me in a more specialized part as their publicist, and took some pains to see to it that I got their side of the Stokeham story correct. (Walker 1988:21)

Further, as Hopwood (2007) notes, a researcher's role in relation to his or her subject can and usually does change during the course of the fieldwork. As I will detail later, this was what happened to my own role among Pine View's students and teachers. I had decided that I would not have or seek to have a formal role at the school, a decision that was made with the support of my supervisors. This was

in contrast to the decision of, say, Hopwood (2007:52) or my colleague Wee Loon Yeo (2011) to take up official roles as ‘classroom assistant’ and boarding school ‘residential assistant’ respectively at the schools where they conducted their research. The closest to a clearly defined role that I had in relation to the school’s inhabitants was what Snow et al. (1986) call the ‘buddy-researcher’.

One disadvantage to not having adopted a formal role was that many students did not immediately know how to approach or respond to me. Echoing what Walker (1988) has said regarding his own experience, I discovered that most students I met found it difficult to relate to an adult at school without casting them in a particular formal or informal role. Early in the year, my efforts to get to know them and to encourage them to open up to me was met with understandable hesitation. On the other hand, the ‘neutrality’ of my role at the school also meant that most students did not identify me as a teacher, which helped me gain their confidence.

I have also kept ethical considerations in mind. All the names of people mentioned here, both teachers and students, are pseudonyms, as is the name of the school itself, Pine View High. Each of the characters described or mentioned here, however, is based on an actual person; none of them are composite personalities. Aside from their names, nothing about them or their life experiences has been changed. Doing otherwise, as Wolcott (2003:5) has also noted, would “risk removing those very aspects that make [those experiences] vital, unique, believable”. This is especially important because this ethnography is centred on persons and not on social systems; to significantly alter aspects of the persons analysed would render the entire endeavour moot.

Before interviews, interviewees were asked to fill in a form, to be signed by both the student and one of their parents, which authorized the material collected to be used in the research. The form also asked whether they were willing to have the replies recorded on an audio recording. They were again reminded that their names would be replaced by pseudonyms, not only in the finished thesis but also in my field notes. This was also intended to encourage them to be honest with their answers. Finally, to ensure that everyone involved in the school knew what was taking place, at the beginning of the academic year a notice was printed in the school newsletter briefly detailing the existence, nature and purpose of my research there.

The School

The school that I selected as my fieldwork site was Pine View High. First built in the 1960s, it has today become what Forsey (2006a:60, 77–78) calls a ‘middle of the road’ school. This means that it has neither a reputation for widespread behavioural problems nor a large percentage of high achievers (and by implication, especially well-behaved students). A ‘middle of the road’ school is one whose student body is not generally seen as being either extremely defiant towards the school hierarchy or as having a high percentage of high achievers. Pine View High is a public school situated in the eponymous suburb of Pine View, a neighbourhood located fairly close to the city centre of Perth, Western Australia. Its student body was composed mainly of local Australian students from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, with international students making up a

small but noticeable proportion from countries including India, Indonesia, Japan and Iraq.

As is the case with other Western Australian schools, teachers at the school were organized into different departments, or 'learning areas'. My own teaching background led the school's principal to place me with the Society and Environment (or Social Studies) department; both of the teachers I followed were members of that department. Pine View also hosted two special programs. The first, called the Academic Enrichment Program,¹ was for students deemed to be high achieving, especially in subjects such as mathematics, science and computers. The program was known as Education Support. It was designed for students with 'special needs' and learning difficulties, and was heavily supported by the school's cadre of teaching assistants. The school also ran relatively well-known specialized sports programs that attracted children from outside its surrounding suburbs.

Overview of chapters

The next two chapters will lay out this thesis's theoretical framework, beginning with a discussion on the notion of identity as self-interpretation in more detail than what has been presented in this chapter. I conceptualize how students' identities are simultaneously symbolic and cognitive, as well as culturally and socially influenced. These will be outlined in Chapters 2, which comprises this thesis's theoretical motor. There I discuss the internal processes of interpretation through which an individual constructs their identities. I follow this with a discussion on

¹ Not the program's real name, which I cannot give here because it would easily reveal the school's actual name.

the social, cultural and relational influences on the process of self-interpretation, following on with its interconnection with social behaviour.

Chapter 3 is largely a narration of my yearlong fieldwork at Pine View High. Here I introduce the focal personalities in this ethnography, as well as the school that they inhabited. I recount some of the significant events, incidents and encounters that are relevant to my central questions here. The purpose of this narrative chapter is to provide the reader with some familiarity with these characters, as well as to give sufficient context to my analyses of their relationships.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I present my data analysis, in which I directly address this thesis's concern regarding the link between students' identity and behaviour. In Chapter 4 I focus on students' relationships with adults at school. I begin by exploring students' interpretations of identities, both their own and those of teachers and other staff members, as well as the relational contexts on which they base those interpretations. I explore the role of interpersonal relationships and how its development can change the dynamics between individual students and teachers. I discuss how these impact on their behavioural interaction with the adults. In Chapter 5 I analyse students' peer interactions, focusing on the role of friendships and their choice of friends, exploring how it informs and is informed by the ways they interpret their identities. Whichever aspect of students' relationships at school I focus on, my analysis will point towards examining this thesis' central question, which concerns the interconnection between identity and behaviour in the context of social relationships.

Contributions

In terms of theory, the most novel contribution this thesis offers is to offer a reinterpretation of symbolic interactionism via contemporary developments in connectionist schema theory. In more practical terms, the original contribution that the study offers is in translating that theoretical reinterpretation into the context of schooling and formal education. I feel that anthropological and sociological studies on education is somewhat lacking in investigations into student behaviour from a perspective that considers the actions of students in symbolic terms, much less a perspective that is supplemented by the insights derived from recent developments in schema theory.

There have been many studies that form our understanding of students' social behaviour as the product of social and cultural processes. This study investigates how those processes inform the adolescents' creation of meaning, especially where it pertains to their identities, and how, in turn, this influences their behaviour. It is in this sense that this thesis presents the most original contribution, in that it applies the established theoretical foundations of symbolic interactionism and schema theory to what is a largely novel setting for those theories, namely the school and the relationships of the students that dwell within it.

The findings and conclusions of this study is also especially meant to contribute to teachers in active duty, such as Jay, Dan and others whose stories are told here, in terms of a better understanding of the psychosocial dynamics behind their student's behaviour. The conclusions offered here will offer teachers insight into why certain students respond to them positively while others in less cooperatively manners. They

will be able to see how the manners in which their students perceive themselves and their relationships with their teachers affect their actions at school. Educators will then be able to address these deeper issues in designing their pedagogy and management of student behaviour rather than focus merely on the observable symptoms of misbehavior.

While the different parts of the analytical chapters—Chapters 4 and 5—are parts of the same thrust of argument, responding to the same research questions, in practical terms they are also intended to contribute to the various people that play different roles in the formal education system. For instance, in addition to illustrating the nature of students’ relationship with teachers, the section dealing with relief teachers in Chapter 4 is meant to offer some insight to active duty relief teachers as to the possible causes of the unique difficulties that they encounter in their work. This may potentially allow relief teachers to modify their approaches to students accordingly. As another example, the main purpose of my discussion on the dilemma experienced by the chaplain is to highlight the dual formal and informal nature of students’ relationships with staff members. However, it might also be helpful in crystalizing the nature and cause of similar issues that active duty school chaplains might experience in their job.

If nothing else, the insights yielded by this thesis might at least help teachers, education assistants and other school workers to understand the students that are at the centre of their work by lending them a perspective that moves past visible behaviour and towards some of the unseen processes that produce those behavior. It is possible that, with further research and public discussion, these practical contributions might in the future help improve the training and practices of educators in their various roles at school.

2

The Importance of Being...: Social Behaviour and Identity as the Interpretation of Self-Meaning

Jay, whom students knew as Mr. Schneider, their Society and Environment teacher, had assigned them an activity from the textbook, an individual task that would take up the entire period. The class comprised of students in the high achieving Academic Enrichment Program and most of them had quickly become quietly preoccupied with what they had been instructed to do. It was quite early in the year and I decided to use the opportunity to get acquainted with the students, so I left my usual observation spot at the back and walked around the room to meet them. As I paced around and watched them do their work up close, some acknowledged me with a look, others glance cautiously at me, while others still ignored me. It was then that I first spoke to Celine, whose desk was diagonally across the room from my spot, near the door. I gave her worksheet a quick glance and realised that she had not done nearly as much as most of the others had. I asked her about her progress, and she admitted that she was not doing well with the task. “Why not?” I asked her.

“Because I’m *stupid*,” Celine replied.

Celine seemed to maintain this image of herself as being “stupid”, at least until she left that class halfway through the year. During another lesson, in which the class had to work on some pictures, I noted in my field notes:

I went around. Celine kept talking [...] She showed me her pictures. She'd stopped colouring in the sheets. She said it was "gay". She's the dumbest, and she just knew it, she said. Because, unlike the girl next to her, she doesn't do the work. I asked why, she said she doesn't like it. Is she again dissociating [herself from] the "nerds"?

This is also reflected how she described herself in our interview:

Me: "Describe yourself in a few sentences."
Celine [C]: "Energetic ... enthusiastic... Not so smart [...]"
Me: "Why do you think you're not smart?"
Celine: "'Cause I'm not."
Me: "How do you know you're not?"
Celine: "Because I'm the dumbest in the class [laughs]"
Me: "Don't say that. [laugh]"
Celine: "I *am*! [laughs louder]"
[...]
Me: "What do you feel are your weaknesses?"
Celine: "Learning"
Me: "Learning?"
Celine: "Yeah. And listening."
Me: "Listening? ... Why do you think your listening and learning are weaknesses? Do people tell you that or do you just feel it?"
Celine: "[Thinks] Umm... it's both."
Me: "Both?"
Celine: "Yea. Also my weakness is, like, when people ask me to do stuff, I don't."
Me: "[...] Why don't you do it?"
Celine: "[Laughs] I don't know"
Me: "Now you said earlier that you feel you're not very smart. Do you feel uncomfortable with that or do you feel fine with that?"
Celine: "Uhm... [thinks] fine."
Me: "[...] So you don't want to be an ultra smart person?"
Celine: "Nah, I don't want to be that smart. I just don't want to be *really*, really dumb."

The Academic Enrichment Program, in which Celine and her classmates were enrolled, had the reputation of being 'nerdy'. On one occasion early in the year, Jay warned Celine's class group that he was going to give them lessons that were more difficult than those for the other Year 9 classes. However, the teacher said, he was confident that the students would be able to handle it. Then he turned to Celine as he asked, "And why is that, Celine? Because you're...?"

"*Nerds!*" Celine's she said loudly in response for all the class to hear.

The way she responded to Jay's question also conveyed almost a sense of pride at the idea. It is clear that Celine was one of those that perceived the Academic Enrichment Program class as being comprised of 'nerdy' students. Yet, in private, the kind of person she perceived herself to be—"energetic, enthusiastic" and "not so smart"—as revealed in her interview, would seem to be incongruent with what she thought of her class group:

Me: "How do you feel about people in your class?"

Celine: "Too nerdy."

Me: "What's wrong with that?"

Celine: "Everything. I don't like being around them. Holly, Tami and Mary are okay. Also the boys in the back of the S&E class."

I also asked her in the interview if there were any subjects she did not like. She gave science, computing, mathematics, English and Indonesian as her least liked subjects. The first three classes she mentioned were the focus subjects of the Academic Enrichment Program. In contrast, Celine gave sport as her favourite subject, which might seem more closely associated with being "energetic, enthusiastic" than are the program's more academic core subjects. Therefore, there seems to be some kind of connection between the way Celine perceived herself and her favoured types of schoolwork.

It was one of her main reasons for wanting to leave the Academic Enrichment Program. Moreover, being in the program, Celine said, not only forced her to do subjects she did not like but it also excluded her from enrolling in art and other similar subjects that she was more interested in. Celine also said that the program kept her from subjects that she felt were more suitable for the kind of person she was, and instead made her do 'nerdy' subjects that she felt did not reflect who she was:

Me: “How do you like being in this [Academic Enrichment Program] class?”

Celine: “I don’t like it. I tried out for it, got in. Mum made me choose [between] two - “great opportunity and everything”. I don’t like it, so I chose archery [specialist program].”

Me: “Why not?”

Celine: “The work’s too hard. I don’t like the people in my class. I don’t like the teachers. I don’t like being called a nerd. People do call me nerd. ‘Mini-nerd’. Do I look like a nerd? Yes, big time. [Laughs] I’m the dumbest in the class, I feel like everyone does work and stuff. They can do all the work, I can’t. It’s too hard.”

[...]

Me: “Would you rather stay or leave this class?”

Celine: “Leave. I’d really be happy. I can’t leave [the Academic Enrichment Program] because if I do have to leave archery. I don’t want to. I really like archery. Computing and science are extra classes. I don’t get to do other things like phys[ical] ed[ucation], metalwork. It’s the major reason for clash with my mum. Also, I’m an only child, no dad. I’m asked to do too much[...]

As Celine indicated, her mother was strongly opposed to the idea of her daughter leaving the program. Aside from what Celine said, I also found out from Jay that the girl’s mother wanted her daughter to be more academically oriented as a student instead of mostly oriented towards sports or art, as were many of her friends. I spoke to Rick Winfield, the school chaplain, about Celine, whom he had been counselling. While Jay said he believed the girl would be better off in the Academic Enrichment Program, Rick had a slightly different opinion regarding her situation, as I recorded in my notes:

Caught up with Rick in the staff room. Spoke to him about Celine, whom he said was referred to him by “a teacher”. He confirmed that there is a struggle between Celine and her mum, especially that her behaviour is about an attempt to get out of [the Academic Enrichment Program]—Rick confirms that Celine’s mum sounds like she wanted her to be in [the Program], which Celine doesn’t. And that she wants Celine to do something she couldn’t do. [...] Rick told me she said she feels under pressure because she feels she is not as smart as the other kids in the class.

Rick’s remarks supported my strong suspicion that Celine’s perception of herself as “stupid”, and hence her reluctance to be in the Academic Enrichment Program, contributed to the behavioural problems reported by many of her other teachers. This is implied by what Celine herself told me:

Me: “Any subjects that you don’t like?”

Celine: "Science, computing, maths, English, Indonesian"
 Me: "Why don't you like them?"
 Celine: "'Cause the teachers strict, and have no sense of humor like Mr. [Jay] Schneider."
 Me: "Do you think Mr. Schneider has a sense of humor?"
 Celine: "[Smiles] Yea."
 [...]
 Me: "How do you think other people feel about your behaviour?"
 Celine: "Teachers probably don't like it. Oh, I know they don't like it."
 Me: "How do you know this? 'Cause they told you?"
 Celine: "Yep. And some of the students in my class laugh. They think it's hell funny. And some would just think it's... pathetic."
 Me: "How do you know this? Did they tell you?"
 Celine: "Well, um... Well, my friends come up to me after I get thrown out of class and they're, like, 'Wow, that's funny what you did.' And then I was, like, 'I didn't mean to do it. It's just... she was being really mean to me, teacher's hell picking on me. And she was, like, she's only watching me, no one else.'"

Jay told me that he regularly met with those other teachers to discuss Celine's situation and shared with them his belief that taking her out of the Program would only lead to her behaviour becoming worse. Further, Jay had volunteered to supervise her as a sort of mentor. For a period of time she was to report to him at the beginning and the end of each school day. When she saw him after school, she was to present him with a 'behaviour card', on which her teachers were to write a short report of her behaviour during each of their classes. At least for a while Celine seemed to comply; on a number of subsequent occasions I saw her in the Society and Environment office after school to speak to her teacher about her daily progress. Celine also seemed to be compliant towards Jay in the classroom. Celine's behaviour in his Society and Environment class generally conformed to Jay's expectations, and when she did incur his censure, she would submit to his discipline.

Unfortunately, even Jay's measure was not sufficient to completely change her behaviour in her other classes. In the end, Celine got what she wanted: her behaviour was deemed to be too problematic for the Academic Enrichment Program. Alley, another girl in that Year 8 class who said that she did not like

Celine, related that “she’s always mucking around. We made a journal of what she’s doing and they kicked her out.” But this seemed to be exactly what Celine wanted; she was subsequently placed in the regular Year 8 classes where her friends were. Ultimately, Jay was correct about the effect of being expelled from the Program on her behaviour; not long afterwards, I noted:

On the “suspension” list on the white board in the staff room is a familiar (and sadly unsurprising) name: Celine. I don’t think since she exited [the Academic Enrichment Program] her condition has improved. [...] It might’ve been better to make her stay in [the Program] but letting her do the subjects she wanted. [...] 2-day suspension.

Interestingly, Celine was not the only student with a record of problematic behaviour calling themselves “stupid”. My interview with Karl, a student in one of Dan’s Year 8 classes, contained echoes of the way Celine described herself:

Me: “Describe yourself in a few sentences.”
Karl: “Uhm.. I am... unorganised. I’m tall, I’m funny, and I’m a bit stupid.”
Me: “Who said you’re stupid?”
Karl: “I think I’m stupid.”
Me: “Why do you think you’re stupid?”
Karl: “Uh... I do things... different to other people.”
Me: “Like what?”
Karl: “Do things that other people normally wouldn’t do. I dunno what. [...]”
Me: “How do you feel about yourself and your life?”
Karl: “Uh I feel not very good [...] because I’m not doing really good at school and at home. And it’s not really good.”
Me: “Why do you feel you’re not doing good at school?”
Karl: “‘Cause I’m not doing work properly, I’m not trying as hard as normal people do.”

My conversations with Celine and Karl point to questions regarding the precise nature of the connection between students’ self-perception and their behaviour. Was their relative lack of work at school caused by their feeling that they were “stupid”, or at least more so compared to their classmates? Or did Celine and Karl feel that way about themselves because they perceived that they did not work as hard as the others? Or was there a different kind of connection between the way these students perceived themselves and their in-class behaviour?

Answering such questions, of course, involves endeavouring to explore Celine's experience of school life from her perspective, including how it informed her self-perception and how it influenced her feelings about herself. While such cognitive and emotive aspects of the human experience might be intangible, and, therefore, not directly observable, as both Linger (1994, 2010) and Strauss and Quinn (1997:15) have argued, it does not mean that they cannot or should not be studied. As intangible as the cognition and emotions associated with self-perceptions might be, they can be inferred from observable behaviour and discernable modes of communication. These expressions, as Goffman (1959) says, serve to convey one's impressions of oneself. While it is rarely possible to know the entirety of another person's internal experiences, there are external manifestations of those experiences that can serve to the observer as indicators. "[S]ince the reality that the individual is concerned with is unperceivable at the moment, appearances must be relied upon in its stead" (Goffman 1959:249). Goffman says this regarding everyday interpersonal communication, but the same principle of studying the intangible through observing the tangible is also applicable to research methodologies dealing with the inner life of human experience. There exist theoretical concepts that can be used as 'tools' to analyse them (Sokefeld 2001:528).

The analytical 'tool' that I employ in exploring the cognitive and emotional experiences of individual students like Celine is a theoretical framework primarily based on symbolic interactionism and supported by connectionist schema theory. I have discussed in the Introduction the rationale behind my positioning of this thesis as a symbolic interactionist study, particularly in regard to its approach as a person-centred ethnography. I will therefore not repeat that discussion here but

will present a short overview of the two theories, before moving on to a discussion of identity, a central conceptual interest of this thesis.

Symbolic interactionism is a term coined by Blumer (1969, 1972). It refers to a diverse body of theoretical approaches that views social interactions as mediated by the interpretation of symbols and the creation of meanings (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969, 1972; Goffman 1959, 1963; Hewitt 1991, 2007; Charon 2004). Blumer (1969) sets out symbolic interactionism's basic premises as follows: "humans act towards things based on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things", "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and society", and "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters". As I will elaborate later, in the context of this study the 'things' for which we create meaning through that "interpretative process" is the self, both our own and those of others, producing what is here presented as the definition of identity.

An exploration of the experiences of an individual, though, requires a deeper examination of internal processes taking place than what symbolic interactionism generally pays attention to. As Charon (2004:31) has pointed out, symbolic interactionism "focuses on the activities that takes place between actors" and not "the individual and his or her personality". The interaction between two or more persons, not each of the persons themselves, is the perspective's "basic unit of study". To infer how the inputs given by social interactions are internalized within the individual, and particularly how they inform one's perception of identities, this study's theoretical framework needs to incorporate a component that engages the cognitive aspect of the human experience.

For this I turn to connectionist schema theory as it is employed by cognitive anthropologists such as D'Andrade (1995), Strauss and Quinn (1997), and Burbank (2006). Schema theory proposes that our knowledge and understanding of objects in the world is mediated through connections in the mind between mental structures representing those objects, or 'schemas' (Casson 1983; D'Andrade 1992, 1995; Strauss and Quinn 1992, 1997).² Schema theorists posit that these connections are formed by life experiences, and strengthened with subsequent experiences, and that they provide the mental framework for how we interact with the world. As such, schema theory contributes to this study's theoretical framework by providing a means for understanding the internal mechanism for how factors such as social and cultural influences, as well as past experiences, help shape the ways individual students perceive themselves and others, as well as the resulting behaviour.

"Because I'm stupid": Thinking about 'identity'

The remark that Celine made about herself—that she was “stupid”—illustrates to a large extent the conception of identity that I use in this thesis. The simple remark might also bring into question some conceptions about identity in that the label “stupid” might not be a ‘traditional’ marker when it comes to defining one’s identity. When social scientists speak of identity as a concept, the term is frequently used in conjunction with others such as ‘gender’, ‘social class’, ‘ethnic’ or ‘racial’. Those studying education would then focus on gender identity (e.g. Carinci 2007), class identity (e.g. Ball 2006), ethnic and/or racial identity (e.g.

² Schemas are also alternatively rendered in the plural as ‘schemata’.

Sheets and Hollins 1999) in schooling. Alternatively, identity is often linked to cultural or sub-cultural groups. For example, this is how individuals among of Willis' (1977) 'lads', Paul Hodkinson's (2002) Goths or Eithne Quinn's (2003) *gangstas* are mainly identified; at least in these ethnographies their respective sub-cultural group identities are at the core of who they are portrayed. We also see this primacy of group identity in the portrayals of students in many classical ethnographies of schooling. Aside from the aforementioned 'lads' in Willis' (1977) study, there are also Walker's (1988) 'Greeks' and 'footballers', as well as Eckert's (1989) titular 'jocks' and 'burnouts'. This focus on group identification in defining individual identities, of course, is not surprising given that classical anthropology, as Sokefeld (1999:419) has noted, has often framed its subjects' identities more in terms of their sameness, as groups, and less on individual idiosyncrasies that distinguish them from others in the group.

Of course, this is a perfectly valid and useful way in which to view identity. Group identity is an important facet of how people define themselves, especially in the case of adolescents (Erikson 1959, Marcia 1980). It is also a facet of self-identification that I will examine in this thesis, particularly in discussing students' peer interactions in Chapter 7. However, people's identities are not solely the product of their social or group affiliations. They are only one basis for one's definition of who and what one is, which is a composite image drawing from various sources (Sokefeld (1999:419; also Cohen 1994). To clarify my position on this matter, I point to Linger's (2005:148) rough categorization of existing anthropological efforts to conceptualize identity into two camps: "the representational" (or public) and the "experiential" (or personal). The former

frames identity as “symbolic discursive”, while the latter as “mental stuff” (Burbank 2011:105).

This study’s interest is in examining its adolescent subjects as multi-faceted individuals, albeit in the school setting where they are students. Therefore, my definition of identity must go beyond focusing on just group and social identification. However this study views the concept, it also has to holistically consider identifying markers other than those supplied by social connections and affiliations. I have hinted earlier that this study conceptualizes identity as self-interpretation (Brinkman 2008). Therefore, instead of centring on any one thing that people base their conception of who they are, such as their affiliation to a social or cultural group, my perspective on identity will focus on the process through which they construct that self-conception. Factors that inform this process, such as culture and social relationships, are, of course, important and indispensable to the discussion, but they will not be its main concern. This is why, although symbolic interactionist is at the core of my theoretical framework, I also scrutinize the “mental stuff” about which Burbank (2011) and Linger (2005) write.

To illustrate and elucidate, I point to the label that Celine used to describe herself—“stupid”. Celine used the word to distinguish herself from her more ‘nerdy’ classmates, so its use did come in a social context. However, unlike labels associated with particular social, cultural or subcultural groups, term like “stupid”—or “enthusiastic” and “energetic”, two other words Celine used to describe herself—are not associated with any social group.³ Put simply, there were obviously no groups or cliques known as “the stupids” or “the energetics” at Pine

³ There are groups collectively identified by labels with similarly negative connotation when used in other context. The word ‘punk’ (Sabin 1999, O’Hara 2001) is one such label. That, however, is not the point I am making here. While the punk subculture is well established around the world, there was no group known as the ‘stupids’ at Pine View.

View. Regardless of the purpose Celine gave the word “stupid” in referring to herself, its meaning was not anchored on an affiliation with particular cultural or subcultural groups, and its use as an identifying marker is not conditional on any such association. While some sort of group membership is directly implied in labels such as ‘Goth’ and ‘*gangsta*’, or in Willis’ (1977) use of ‘lads’ and Walker’s use of ‘Greeks’ and ‘footballers’, labels such as ‘stupid’, at least the way Celine used it, do not carry such implication.

I use Celine’s remark to point to a conception of identity that is not limited only to a socially or culturally framed perception of oneself. Rather, identity as portrayed in this thesis is the product of any interpretation one makes of who and what kind of person one is based on various factors. Some of those factors might be socio-culturally derived, as with cultural identities in the traditional sense, while other, broader ones, like Celine’s remark about herself, might not be. Regardless, the theoretical framework I employ conceptualises identity as a symbolic object because the process of interpretation that produces it is symbolic. We consider the different facets of our lives as symbols and give meanings to them, which would then become part of our self-meaning. This self-meaning, or self-understanding, is what is identity is construed as in this thesis.

Of course, this does not mean that the interpretation of identity is seen as hermetically self-contained, free from any social or cultural influence. Recall that in calling herself “stupid”, Celine used her ‘nerdy’ classmates as a point of external reference, which then led her to conclude that she was unsuited for the class. Further, the word ‘stupid’ itself is, of course, a cultural symbol, the meaning of which is to any extent culturally understood. The point, however, is that external cultural and social factors such as these do not determine one’s self-interpretation

but form part of that process. Before going into how we construct our self-meaning, I must first discuss the process through which, at least according to symbolic interactionism, we give meaning to—and therefore understand—anything.

(Almost) everything is symbolic: Interpretation as the creation of meaning

Scholars in symbolic interactionism, such as Mead (1934), Goffman (1959), Denzin (1992) and Hewitt (1991, 2007), perceive our understanding, especially understanding of social interactions, as mediated by the interpretation of symbols. In general, their conception of symbols in the simplest terms can be summed up by Denzin's (1992:22) definition of it as "the means whereby individuals can indicate to one another what [...] the meanings of objects are". This is why symbols are essential to the functioning of communication and interaction between individual persons. Symbols, as Jung (1949:602) puts it, are only "alive" when they are "pregnant with meaning". They are only relevant and useful to human existence and interactions when they are meaningful to us. The question is, then, how do the meanings of symbolic objects come into being? Are they inherent in the objects, or are they defined by our use of them?

This brings us to the process of interpretation itself. Symbolic interactionists like Mead (1934), Goffman (1959) and Hewitt (1991, 2007) maintain that the meanings of symbols are not inherent in them, but can vary depending on, say, the different socio-cultural factors and contexts that inform their interpretation. Interpretation is the process through which people assign meanings to objects, events, actions, other people and even themselves (Blumer 1969, Hewitt 1991:11–

12). To illustrate this process and its role in people's construction of meanings, Hewitt (1991:44) uses the picture of two boxers locked in a bout. He compares symbol interpretation to a fighter's 'reading' an opponent's movements and predicting their strategy by analysing them. The pugilist does not accept the other fighter's observable moves at face value but tries to discern what the moves mean in the context of their bout at that moment. The fighter is said to interpret the meaning of the opponent's actions beyond what can be seen. Hewitt (1991:44) suggests that the same principle laid out in his boxing metaphor is at play in our interpretation of things in everyday life. The meanings of objects, events, people, interactions and so on are not inherent in them but are a product of how we interpret them as symbolic objects.

To be sure, not all of our interactions with each other are mediated through an interpretive process or the creation of symbolic meanings. Hewitt (2007:8–9, 43) distinguishes symbolic interaction from what Mead (1934) calls “conversation of gestures”. The latter is where our understanding of objects and interactions with others is automatic, for instance as the product of Pavlovian psychological conditioning (Pavlov 1941, 1960) or what has been called *habitus* by scholars like Mauss (1950), Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Wacquant (2011). However, because this study focuses on the creation of meanings as the medium of interaction between identity and behaviour, I will not be discussing “conversations of gestures” in great detail but will be focusing on symbolic interaction.

Having proposed that things mean to us what they do because we give them meaning through interpretation, the next step is to ask *how* the process takes place. Do we interpret the meanings of objects, people, action, and so on arbitrarily? Or are our interpretations of what they mean based on or informed by anything that

are either external (e.g. social) or internal (e.g. psychological) to us? There are two pertinent factors informing (or, at times, even constraining) our interpretation of meanings, one external and another internal to the individual. First, an external factor influencing our understanding of things is the situation or context in which we encounter them. Our interpretation of the meaning of a thing, action, or person is *situational* or *contextual* (Hewitt 2007:60–62, 147). This entails that the same symbolic object can be understood differently in different situations. In the classroom, for example, students often engage in behaviour that teachers consider disruptive, such as calling out to each other across the room. Yet in the context of a schoolyard, even with teachers present, such behaviour is generally considered acceptable. Likewise, in the same physical context different people operating in distinct but overlapping social contexts might interpret the same behaviour differently. Teachers might perceive a student who is joking loudly to be acting in a manner that is anti-social, seeing it as disruptive to the lesson and disrespectful to their authority. However, to the student themselves, and to their friends, such behaviour might simply be part of their social behaviour, even if it is against the school's expected behavioural norm.

This context of how symbolic objects can be interpreted entails that the meanings constructed in each situation in which we encounter the same event, objects or person can, to some extent, be considered unique (Hewitt 1991). We interpret each one according to the peculiar situation and context in which they are encountered (Hewitt 1991:43, 2007:141–3). Consequently, even if we have encountered those things before, our interpretation of those things in each situation might also be unique. In this sense, each interpretation has what Mead calls an 'emergent' property (Mead 1932, cited in McHugh 1968 and Hewitt

2007:142; see also Cole 1991, Blitz 1992, Goldstein 1999 and Corning 2002). The meanings that 'emerge' from our process of symbolic interpretation is idiosyncratically informed by the unique set of physical, social or psychological variables present in each peculiar context or situation. This does not necessarily mean that meanings are produced independently from social or cultural structures but it does entail that the influence those structures have varies each time. This is a slight departure from critical and structural functional accounts of how we understand the world, which lend cultural and social factors greater weight.

This proposition, however, raises further questions. If our interpretation of what things mean is an emergent product informed by context, then how do we 'know' how to understand something or someone in any given situation or context? More importantly, can there be continuity in how we understand objects, events, actions and other people from one situation to the next? If each situational encounter is unique, does it mean that a student might not recognise a classmate simply because they meet each other at a shopping mall? Not necessarily, as the mutability of contexts that provides an external input to our symbolic interpretation of objects is balanced by an internal factor, the cognitive aspect of meaning creation, that lends it a measure of constancy. It anchors our interpretations, made variable by situational idiosyncrasies, on established understandings formed by past experiences. Conceptualizing this internal cognitive facet of how we understand the world is the domain of connectionist schema theory, to which I now turn.

From experience: Schema connections and their role in meaning-creation

I analyse the internal factor influencing the process of meaning interpretation through the lens of schema connectionism. Schema connectionism (or schema theory) holds that our understanding of and response to things is mediated by networks of interconnecting 'schemas', cognitive units serving as mental representations for things in the external world (D'Andrade 1995:136–41, Strauss and Quinn 1997:53, Schneider 2005:120–22).⁴ These schemas function as a means to organize information about the world (Rumelhart 1980). Schema connectionist scholars further say that the networks of connections between schemas that inform our understanding of objects are formed by our past experiences of similar objects, and strengthened by further similar experiences (Casson 1983:430, Wallace 1970, D'Andrade 1995:136). For instance, our present perception of dogs has been informed by our experiences with dogs in the past. One might have had the experience of being bitten by a dog, causing one severe pain. This has connected the schema for 'dogs' with our schema for 'pain'. Consequently, no matter how cute or docile dogs might seem to other people, one would perceive them as potentially pain-inflicting beasts.

Further, schema theory also argues that our understanding of an object is constructed of more than simple one-on-one association between that object in the 'real' world and its mental representation. Instead, it is conceptualized as the result of a complex networks of multiple schemas, comprising not only of our schemas for the object of our focus but also schemas for other, co-occurring objects—hence the term 'connectionism' (Strauss and Quinn 1997:53). To use the previous

⁴ The term 'schema' itself was used by Jean Piaget (1929) and the theoretical concept was introduced to psychology and education by Sir Frederic Bartlett (1932), both within the first third of the 20th century, but the use of the theory in anthropology can be considered fairly recent.

example, being bitten by a dog might not only links one's 'dog' schema to 'pain', but also to schemas for the place where the past incident took place. A visit to that place might, therefore, cause discomfort despite the absence of a dog. Schneider (2005:120–1) likens schema connections to definitions in an encyclopaedia, which allows us to understand a subject by presenting us with an interconnected network of information, as opposed to a dictionary, which simply gives a simple definition of the word.

The notion that our understanding of the world is mediated by schema connections within the mind is also in line with the symbolic interactionist conception of where meaning is located. It implies that meaning is not inherent in objects being observed but is constructed in the mind of the observer. While symbolic interactionism explains understanding as taking place through the interpretation of symbols, schema theory proposes how it might take place in the mind. This also leads on to another point on which schema theory agrees with symbolic interactionism, which is the suggestion that understanding is constructed contextually. If meaning is not inherent in the object but is created in the cognition of its observer, it means that each unique situation activates a uniquely different combination of schema connections, resulting in an idiosyncratic interpretation of the world at that given time and place (Strauss and Quinn 1997:48–49,53; D'Andrade 1995:136–141). This is what Strauss and Quinn (1997:53, 65–73) refer to as the “flexibly adaptive” element of schema connections. This contextual nature of meaning would suggest that our understanding of an object is therefore “evoked in a person by an object or event *at a given time*” (Strauss and Quinn 1997:82, my emphasis). This certainly echoes Mead's (1932) conception of meaning as the product of an ‘emergent’ process of symbolic interpretation

(Hewitt 2007:142). The process of meaning interpretation, therefore, is conceptualized here as both a symbolic and a cognitive. The next step is to conceptualize the construction of identity as self-interpretation in the light of this.

In the looking glass: Identity as the product of self-interpretation

Having established that human understanding of events and things in the world is a product of symbolic interpretation, or meaning creation, questions arise about how this is this relevant to a conceptualization of identity. Symbolic interactionists suggest that we understand ourselves by perceiving ourselves through reflections, as though looking at an external object (Hewitt 1991:82, 2007). Interactionist forefather Charles Cooley (1912, 1972; also Turner 2007:509) compares it to seeing oneself in a “looking glass”; this suggestion is also found in more recent works of anthropologists focused on identity, such as Cohen (1993, 1994), Gregg (1998, 2005), Sokefeld (1999, 2001), Bhimji (2004) and Linger (2005).⁵ It is helpful, in conceptualizing this, to distinguish what is called identity here from what is commonly called the ‘self’. D’Andrade (1995:163–164) refers to the self as the ‘perceiving self’, while identity is the ‘perceived self’. The self is the person looking into the mirror in Cooley’s (1912, 1972) “looking glass” analogy, while their perception of the image they see in the mirror is what I refer to as identity in this thesis (see also Mead 1934). A person’s identity, or their ‘perceived self’, is therefore not the same as the person, or the ‘self’⁶.

⁶ The ‘self’, as Quinn (2006, following Ewing 1990) defines it, “encompass[es] the physical organism, all aspects of psychological functioning, and social attributes”. Meanwhile, ‘identity’ as I conceptualize it is, among other things, a construction of said psychological functioning

How, then, does the self construct identity? How do we give meaning to the image of ourselves in the proverbial mirror? I first give a symbolic interactionist account of the answer to these questions. What Cooley (1912, 1972) suggests with his “looking glass” analogy is that we understand our self-image as we would external objects. We understand things in the world by giving meaning to them through the process of interpretation. Therefore, the same principle is to be applied to how we understand our self-image: we give it meaning to the process of interpretation, or, more specifically, *self*-interpretation. Through reflexively perceiving ourselves as a symbolic object, we interpret who we are (Linger 2005:24; Hewitt 2007:54–55). This process of self-interpretation produces self-meaning, which is what identity is (Denzin 1992:26; Gregg 1998:44).

Similarly, schema theory’s conception of how we understand the world is applicable to our interpretation of identities. Markus (1977), among others (Gecas 1982, Altabe and Thompson 1996, DiMaggio 1997, Howard 2000, Jung and Lennon 2003, Valentino et al. 2008), speak of ‘self-schema’. Like all types of schemas, they are mental units representing the objects in the world. The ‘objects’ self-schemas represent, however, are aspects of our selves, such as our self-image, values and so on. Also like other schemas, self-schemas are formed by our past experiences, and they inform how we interpret our self-image in the present (D’Andrade 1995, Strauss and Quinn 1997, Schneider 2005, Burbank 2008).

The implication of conceptualizing identity as the product of meaning interpretation is that the contextual nature influencing our understanding of

incorporating their social attributes. Identity, therefore, is a product of the self. This distinction explains why, for instance, it is possible to speak of multiple, and sometimes even conflicting, identities, as Sokefeld (1999, 2001) and Cohen (1994) have done. It would be impossible to do so without referring to a conceptual ‘self’ managing those identities that distinct from them.

everything else, which I have discussed earlier, also applies to how we define our identities. Hence, how we interpret our identities is not fixed or set in stone but mutable, relative to the context in which it is experienced (Blumer 1972:152; Obeyesekere 1981:50–51; Hewitt 1991:8, 2007). Hewitt (2007:143) provides an example of this regarding racial conflict at school. Someone who is normally defined as a ‘student’ in everyday situations might suddenly be identified as a ‘bigot’ or a ‘victim’ in a conflict situation because the young person’s identity is interpreted depending on its immediate context or situation. Note that this context of identity interpretation is again supported by what Strauss and Quinn (1997:53) refer to as the “flexibly adaptive” aspect of schema connections (Strauss and Quinn 1997:53). The same variability in schema connections mediating our understanding of anything else also means that each situation activates a different subset of schemas in connection to our self-schemas (Strauss and Quinn 1997:99–100). This contributes to an interpretation of who and what we are that is adapted to any given particular physical or social context.

What are these contexts in which our identities are interpreted? Human beings do not generally exist in isolation as individuals. Therefore, much of how we define our self-meaning is not done in a vacuum but in the contexts of cultural and social structures. These structures provide a context informing self-interpretation, but are mere abstractions if not relevant to, and embodied in, lived experience. This necessitates an examination of the interaction between social interactions, where culture is embedded and acted out, and the self-interpretations of individual persons involved. On the individual level, our identities are shaped and influenced by other people that we interact with (Raible and Nieto 2004:146). This makes interpersonal interaction and relationships another key context for the

interpretation of self-meaning. In the remainder of this chapter I will explore these external aspects, both structural and relational, that inform identity interpretation.

The psychology of shared identities: Self-schemas and cultural schemas in the interpretation of self-meaning

The first context in which the interpretation of identities takes place is social groups. Scholars from various disciplines acknowledge that relationships with our social groups are a key influence to our self-perception (Erikson 1959, Babad et al. 1983, Keefe 1992, Terry et al. 1999, Howard 2000, Monroe et al. 2000, Abrams and Hogg 2004, Owens et al. 2010). I begin my examination of it by looking, once again, at the role that schemas play in that influence. As sociologist Judith Howard (2000:369) suggests, while individual identities and social identities are often perceived as being on the opposite ends of a continuum, they are in fact linked and interplay with each other (see also Abrams and Hogg 2004:152 and Worchel and Coutant 2000). From the social psychological perspective, Howard (2000:368) says, one reason for this is that the schemas that are associated with social groups inform our personal identities (Howard 2000:368). Group schemas, she says, inform how we define ourselves in terms of social positions, stratification statuses, gender, race, age, class and so on, and are therefore direct influences on how we define ourselves.

The external input that influences our self-interpretation, however, is not limited to our immediate social groups. In addition to self-schema and group schema, connectionist schema scholars also speak of *cultural* schemas (Strauss and Quinn 1997:82, D'Andrade 1995, Nishida 2005). Like other types of schemas, cultural

schemas are formed through life experiences. They are not, however, formed by individual life experiences. Instead, they are formed through a society's shared experiences (Strauss and Quinn 1997:122, also Garro 2000:285, Nishida 2005:402). This does not mean that people need to have identical experiences to share certain cultural schemas; they need only to have the same "general patterns" of experience of the world (Strauss and Quinn 1997:49, 82).

Cultural schemas also have a role in how individuals interpret who and what they are through their connections to self-schemas—in other words, in the interpretation of cultural identity. Self-schemas are linked to our self-perception (Markus 1977, Howard 2000, Jung and Lennon 2003, Valentino et al. 2008). Cultural identities are the product of the intersection—or rather, connection—between self-schemas and cultural schemas. Like the concept of identity itself, the notion of cultural identities has been understood in various ways. A useful way of conceptualizing cultural identities is provided by Hall (1996:211) in his study of identity representations:

in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes...

As Hall implies, because of its shared nature cultural identities are produced by shared experiences. Schema theory provides a rationale for this, which is especially appropriate given Hall's mention of "a sort of collective 'one true self'". The members of a particular cultural group would share life experiences, which would result in similarly shared schemas. These include schemas linked to how one sees oneself, or self-schemas. Since self-schemas inform our understanding of ourselves, what would then entail are commonalities in the self-interpretations of

individuals within that group. This is how cultural identities are formed in individuals (or a group of individuals) as far as schema theory is concerned. People that share a common “general pattern” of life experiences would consequently have similar cultural schemas informing their self-interpretation, therefore resulting in common identities (Hogg 2001, Abrams and Hogg 2005, Hewitt 2007:102–6).

Conceptualizing cultural identities as the product of an intersection between self- and cultural schemas helps us to understand how we integrate cultural and social factors in our self-interpretation as individuals. I will now further discuss how we incorporate cultural and social symbols in the way we interpret our identities as our self-meaning. There are a number of facets to this discussion. In exploring them I will draw from a few key scholars, whose works will take us on a journey from an American synagogue to North Africa, and to a village in Northern Pakistan, before returning, in the subsequent chapters, to Pine View High to apply the theoretical framework that is presently being laid out.

The meanings of the womb: The role of culture and the structural ambiguity of symbols in conceptualizing identities

I have presented identity interpretation as a process that is reflexive and unique to the individual, but at the same time I have also said that is informed by cultural and social factors. How do these two aspects of the process interact with each other? Cohen (1994:14–19) presents a picture of what this looks like in individual experience in his description of a Jewish Yom Kippur service in which he participated. Cohen notes that while everyone in the synagogue is participating in

the same service, each has brought their own preconceptions and prior life experiences into how they see the proceedings. While most participants share similar understandings of what the service and its components mean, each has a different experience of the service itself. To him, this underlines the suggestion that a model of meaning creation that is completely predetermined by culture “has little or no authenticity in our *own* experience” (Cohen 1994:19, emphasis added). In this regard I agree with Cohen (1994), that while cultural input is essential and to some extent shapes the way meaning is constructed, it does not override our capacity for individual interpretation.

In exploring the place of symbolic interpretation within the dynamic between individual experience and socio-cultural structures, I turn to the Gary Gregg’s (1998, 2007) work on the cultural psychology of symbols. Gregg’s (1998, 2007) ethnographic studies on the interrelation between identity and culture in North African societies offer a picture of how individual persons interact with culturally re-produced symbols in interpreting their self-meaning.⁷ Far from simply having their personal identity being determined by cultural and social, or societal, factors, the people in his accounts are clearly able to use, adapt, and take advantage of, culturally shared symbols as part of their conscious construction of identity.

There is little doubt that Gregg’s subjects draw their key motifs from the North African lexicon of cultural symbols and culturally established patterns (Gregg 1998:125). For example, Hussein uses the “hero quest” pattern of Quranic characters such as Moses and Joseph, as well as Muhammad himself, as a model in understanding his own life and troubled upbringing (Gregg 1998:128–9,

⁷ The hyphen inserted in the term ‘re-produce’ reflects the idea that social re-production is at the same time both a reproduction of (old) cultural knowledge and a production of (new) cultural knowledge, an idea that I borrow from scholars such as Forsey (2007), as well as others such as Bingham (2001: 342).

2007:129–88). Nevertheless, Gregg (1998) also points out in the individual experiences of his informants the same sense of subjectivity that Cohen (1994) highlights in his Yom Kippur service participation. Gregg (1998:125) argues that the task of “selecting and organizing different subsets of representations from [that] lexicon of symbols, images, and meanings” does not fall on culture or society but on the individual. As a result, he continued, each of his informants “has constructed an identity as [their] *own* configuration of culture”. The symbols used by the individual in constructing the meaning of their identities is provided by culture through socialization, but how each person uses or “configures” the meanings of those symbols is unique. This is consistent with what has been suggested of schema theory. I would say that Gregg’s (1998) informants share a “general pattern” of life experience with others in their society, resulting in common cultural schemas (Strauss and Quinn 1997:122). However, the uniqueness of each person’s experience means that everyone’s schemas are “configured” differently, resulting in idiosyncratic understandings of cultural symbols like the life stories of Quranic characters. This would explain how it was Hussein himself who adopted and adapted the life stories of Moses and Muhammad as a pattern for understanding his own life story; such usage of Quranic characters’ stories is not something that is necessarily prescribed by the culture of his society.

Gregg (1998) gives other, more detailed illustrations that highlight the individual’s capacity to adapt shared cultural symbols for the purpose of personal identity construction. He opens his ethnography with summaries of the biographies of Fadhma Amrouche (1989, cited in Gregg 1998), the Kabyle Algerian mother of writers Jean and Taos Amrouche; and Fatima Mernissi (1994, cited in Gregg

1998), a Moroccan sociologist and human rights activist (Gregg 1998:121–4). Both grew up as women in Muslim North African societies, but had very distinct life experiences. Amrouche was a widow's illegitimate daughter who grew up in France and became a Roman Catholic. She saw herself as a woman that had been “born in sin, lives a life of deprivation and evil” and “resid[es] in the bitterness of deprivation brought by trespass”, but desired the “lush fertile islands of divine sweetness” and “yearns ‘eternally’ for acceptance as a ‘Kabyle woman’” (Gregg 1998:124). By contrast, Mernissi sees her childhood in a Moroccan harem as being “imprisoned in legitimacy and luxury”, “yearn[ing] for political and sensual freedom” and “dream[s] of the romantic sensuality of trespass” (Gregg 1998:124). Hence, Mernissi, having grown up in what she sees as the constraints of ‘legitimacy’, idealizes the idea of ‘trespass’, seeing it as something desirable. On the other hand, Amrouche saw ‘trespass’ as being at the root of the depravity of her life as a child, and instead longed for ‘legitimacy’ as a woman belonging to Kabyle society. Their opposite life experiences have resulted in directly opposite perspectives through which they viewed ‘trespass’ and ‘legitimacy’; each found what they had to be constricting and saw what the other had to be liberating.

The difference in Amrouche and Mernissi's perceptions of ‘trespass’ and ‘legitimacy’, concepts relevant to their respective lives, demonstrates that while culture greatly informs their understanding of cultural symbols, it does not dominate their interpretation of the symbols. Consequently, the ways that the two women incorporate such symbols into their self-interpretation are also similarly idiosyncratic. The virtually opposite life experiences of Amrouche and Mernissi have led the two women to form starkly opposed interpretations of what ‘trespass’ and ‘legitimacy’ mean to who they are. This gives ethnographic

credence to schema theory's implication that life experience greatly influences how the individual interprets cultural symbols. In this case, the two women's disparate experiences resulted in their understanding the same concepts, both relevant to their lives, in distinct ways.

Gregg's (1998, 2007) most succinct illustration of how an individual person not only adopts but reflexively adapts shared cultural symbols as part of their self-interpretation is found in his account of the life of a woman named Rachida. Unlike Mernissi and Amrouche, Rachida is not famous, and, unlike the two women's stories, her appropriation of cultural symbols does not involve dramatic elements of "trespass" against society's expectation. Gregg's (1998:136–43, 2007:189–224) account of her life and words does show, however, that her incorporation of cultural symbols into her self-interpretation involved same degree of critical reflexivity and deliberateness.

Gregg (1998:129–130) uses Rachida's life story and her reflection thereupon to highlight the role of what he calls cultural symbols' "structural ambiguity" in personal identity formation. Gregg (1998:129, following Ohnuki-Tierny 1991) uses this phrase to refer to how cultural symbols "transform into different tropic types in a given context". Again, this returns back to my point regarding the contextual nature of symbolic interpretation. In Rachida's case, this entails that the meanings of her society's cultural symbols relevant to her self-interpretation is not set in stone but is open to reinterpretation. She is able to reshape their meanings in applying them to her understanding of her self-image.

Rachida is portrayed as a devoutly religious woman that actively deals with the conflicts resulting from her multiple cultural identities (Gregg 1998:136–43,

2007:189–224). She strives to blend her dedication to traditional values as a Muslim woman with her belief in modern scientific sophistication as a teacher (Gregg 1998:136, 2007:193–9). She considers her Muslim faith as the inspiration for her hard work and dedication, and the source of her divinely bestowed *baraka*, or blessedness (Gregg 1998:137, 2007:190). Her life experiences have clearly played an influential part in how she sees herself. One of the earliest of these experiences was witnessing her mother’s miscarriage as a child, which drew her attention to her own womb, somehow turning her self-image as a woman into what she believes to be “dirty, foul-smelling, worthless, unmannered, and lacking in self-control” according to her religious identity (Gregg 1998:140). Gregg (1998:140) relays to us her feeling that “[w]hen she menstruates... nature turns her into what her first story about teaching and her religious identity sets out as her core not-Me or antiself figure”.

This again illustrates how specific life experiences in the past shape one’s schema of things in the present (D’Andrade 1995, Strauss and Quinn 1997, Schneider 2005). The trauma resulting from seeing her mother’s miscarriage would likely have created a schema connection in Rachida’s mind between the womb and the image of dirtiness and worthlessness. This would then impact on how she perceives her own womb and womanhood. Schneider (2005) refers to the generalizing property of schemas: a person’s experience does not only inform their schema for that particular object but also of similar objects of the same kind. Her impact of Rachida’s experience with her mother’s womb was, in this way, transferred to her perception of her own. This resulted in an internal emotional conflict in how she is to understand the kind of person that she is.

By the time of her encounter with Gregg (1998), however, Rachida had apparently attempted to resolve this emotional conflict by addressing the “structural ambiguity” of the meaning of the object at the centre of this perception of impurity: her womb—or more accurately, the word ‘womb’ itself. As Gregg (1998) points out, the Arabic word for ‘womb’ (*rahim*) shares the same root-word (*r*h*m*) with those for ‘merciful’ (*rahman*) and ‘compassionate’ (also *rahim*), which the Quran says are among attributes of God (Gregg 1998:140). Arabic is written without vowels, root-words like *r*h*m* are consonant cores of various other words whose final meaning depends on how it is modified in actual practical use (Ryding 2005). *Rahim* and *rahman* are two ways the root-word *r*h*m* can be modified, each with a different meaning. Therefore, as a symbol, the meaning of the word *r*h*m* itself is literally ambiguous: its meaning when written can be interpreted according to the context in which it is used. What Gregg implies is that through this linguistic ambiguity Rachida consciously reinterprets what her womb means to her as a person and as a woman. She shifted the womb’s connotation in her mind from being associated with (ritual) pollution, caused by her childhood experience, and reconnected it to the concept of God’s mercy, to which the word is linguistically related. This allows her to ‘redeem’ the cultural meaning of her womb (*rahim*)—the source of her negative self-image—by instead re-linking it with what she sees as the opposite, maternal qualities of God (merciful, *rahman*, and compassionate, *rahim*) (Gregg 1998:140).⁸ This has consequent pertinence on her self-interpretation. Because she associates her self-image with her womb, this reinterpretation allows her to change how she sees herself from being “dirty, foul-

⁸ As Gregg (1998: 140) says, *al rahman* (the Merciful) and *al rahim* (the Compassionate) are in Islam the most prominent of God’s 99 names, recited at the beginning of every *sura* in the Quran (but one) and at the beginning of every prayer, as well as before any undertaking. This is affirmed by my own childhood experience growing up in Indonesia, a country with a Muslim majority. Of personal interest, I also note that word *rahim* is also the Indonesian word for ‘womb’, obviously a loanword from the Arabic language, as is *rahmat*, an Indonesian word for ‘grace’.

smelling, worthless, unmannered, and lacking in self-control” to someone whose maternal qualities are reflective of God’s own (Gregg 1998).

I draw two useful insights from Gregg’s (1998) analysis of Rachida’s story and reflection. First, many of the symbols we use in interpreting our identities are cultural symbols, derived from the cultural and social values and ideas of our societies. The cultural symbols that Rachida uses in giving meaning to her identity—the words *rahim* and *rahman*, as well as the trilateral root word *r*h*m* on which they are based—are drawn from a cultural lexicon that she shares with others in her North African Muslim society (Gregg 1998). Her understanding of those words, not just in literal terms but also their deeper conceptual meanings in cultural-theological terms, are also taken from the culture of her society (Gregg 1998). Schema theorists say that our understanding of such cultural symbols is informed by cultural schemas result from our shared life experiences with others in or society (Strauss and Quinn 1997:7, 48, 82; D’Andrade 1995:130). This is how Rachida gained her cultural understanding of both the womb and God’s mercy as she was being socialized into the cultural ideas and values of her North African society. These cultural schemas then interact with her self-schemas, informing the way she perceives herself, whether as dirty and polluted or as one sharing in God’s merciful nature (Gregg 1998:140). In this way, how Rachida interprets herself is, to some extent, limited by her society’s shared lexicon of symbols.

Secondly, on the other hand, Gregg’s (1998) analysis of Rachida’s reflection also implies that her incorporation of cultural symbols into her self-interpretation is not automatic or statically predetermined by her culture or society. Rather, citing her own words, Gregg portrays her adaptation of cultural symbols in her cultural and social contexts as being reflexive and deliberate. Further, in the process he also

shows that the reason it is possible for Rachida to reinterpret cultural symbols is because the meanings of those symbols are also neither static nor fixed. This is what Gregg (1998) means by cultural symbols being “structurally ambiguous”; the cultural meanings of symbols such as the words ‘womb’, ‘pollution’ and ‘mercifulness’ are not inherently contained within the words themselves. Even if everyone in the community shares a similar awareness of what such words mean in their collective social and religious framework, what they mean for the use of the individual is open to reinterpretation. Rachida demonstrates this when she reinterprets the cultural–religious meaning of her womb as a symbolic object in the process of redefining her personal identity (Gregg 1998). Therefore, even though cultural symbols do inform an individual’s self-interpretation, how it informs the resulting identity is not predetermined, but unique, as it is filtered through each person’s reflexivity and idiosyncratic life experiences.

I have thus far discussed identity as self-interpretation, and how that interacts with the external social and cultural inputs. However, society does not exist apart from the *interactions* between persons, as Denzin (1992:28, my emphasis) has aptly pointed out. The structural—cultural and social—factors that inform self-interpretation are manifested in such interpersonal interactions in the forms of social behaviour, verbal exchanges and so on. How do they influence, and how are they influenced by, one’s individual interpretation of identities? In thinking about this, I make one final detour before returning to Pine View High—this time to Gilgit in northern Pakistan, where a wedding ceremony is about to take place.

A wedding misadventure: Social relationships, the multiplicity of identities and the role of actions in self-interpretation

In studying the intersection between social interaction and individual self-interpretation I draw much from the Martin Sokefeld's (1999, 2007) work on identity. Sokefeld's (1999) discussion on the subject is centred on an ethnographic account of a conflict involving his informant at a wedding ceremony. Ali Hassan, Sokefeld's informant, is a pious Shiite Muslim man from the northern Pakistani region of Gilgit. At the beginning of Sokefeld's (1999:419–22) narration, the man has been invited to the wedding of a relative's daughter, which, as a kinsman, he is expected to attend. However, his relatives are Sunni Muslims, traditionally enemies of the Shiites. This complicates the situation for Ali Hassan as he is a Sunni elder; it would not do for him to be seen fraternizing with Shiites. To further exacerbate matters, the man the bride is marrying is not of his family's own ethnic group but a Panjabi, giving Ali Hassan even more reason to disapprove of the union. Nevertheless, in spite of the obstacles that these religious and ethnic differences present, Ali Hassan evidently still puts much value on his relationship with his relatives as their kinsman, since he decides to attend. Declining to attend is an easy option he is not prepared to take. Ali Hassan is left with a dilemma. His fellow Shiites might interpret his attendance that as a betrayal of their religious community, especially since he is an elder. On the other hand, not attending would likely offend his relatives and cause his relationship with them to turn sour.

Sokefeld (1999:422) recounts that Ali Hassan attempts a compromise in order to negotiate his predicament. He decides to attend the reception while attempting to minimize socializing with his Sunni relatives to a level that he might consider acceptable. Seemingly as part of his ploy, Ali Hassan also takes to the wedding his

wife's cousin, Sher Khan, who is also a fellow Shiite community leader, along with their sons. Before lunch is served, however, Sher Khan suddenly announces that he has to attend a meeting and therefore has to leave with Ali Hassan and their sons. Sokefeld (1999:422) implies that this is why Ali Hassan has brought the man with him in the first place: to provide pretext for limiting his association with the Sunnis.

The fact that Sher Khan has to leave before lunch is served allows Ali Hassan to leave the reception without having to share a meal with the Sunnis, something that would have suggested a closer relationship than he is prepared to display. This is confirmed by Ali Hassan's own later admission after the wedding, when he tells Sokefeld (1999:422) that had he stayed, he would not have minded having soup but not meat with the bride's father, Malik Amman, who belongs to the more 'tolerable' Hanafi subsect of Sunni Islam. He adds, however, that he would never eat meat with a Tablighi or a Wahabi, and Malik's brother Sadiq happens to be both. Having given this explanation, though, Ali Hassan maintains to Sokefeld that Sher Khan's meeting was still real reason for his having to leave before lunch. Regardless, if taking Sher Khan along has indeed been his strategy to both fulfill his kinship obligation and avoid being perceived as betraying his Shiite community, it seems to have failed. Ali Hassan's premature departure is still met with protest from the bride's family. They clearly see through his ruse, for as he makes his exit, one of them makes a final, desperate emotional appeal, asking Ali Hassan earnestly, "Are we contractors of a religion or are we relatives?" (Sokefeld 1999:422).

There are a few insights to be gained from Sokefeld's (1999) discussion of this ethnographic account. First, Sokefeld suggests that the meaning of identity is not

fixed, paralleling Gregg's (1998) argument regarding the structural ambiguity of the cultural symbols that we incorporate into our self-interpretation. Sokefeld (1999:424) also suggests that this "ambiguity is not a threat but a great resource", which Gregg's (1998) informant Rachida evidently takes advantage of. One aspect of identity interpretation Sokefeld (1999) focuses on that Gregg (1998) has not elaborated on is the role of interpersonal relationships in our definition of who we are and what we are.

Sokefeld borrows Derrida's (1982) idea of *différance* in presenting identity interpretation as being mediated by a constant process where meanings are perpetually created and recreated (Sokefeld 1999:423). Derrida (1982:7) says that *différance* refers to the way words and signs can never convey meanings by themselves but have to be signified by other signs. This supports the idea that the meanings of symbolic objects are not inherent in the objects themselves. Rather, it is defined by its relationships with other things—whose meanings are defined by *their* relationships with other objects, and so on. In this way, Derrida (1982) says, the meaning of things are constantly 'deferred'. Sokefeld's (1999:423) insight is in applying this rationale to his conceptualization of how personal identities are interpreted. According to him, *différance* implies that identity is also not fixed but in a perpetual state of transformation, as its meaning is not inherent in a person but is defined by social or interpersonal relationships with other people.

In Ali Hassan's case, his identity or self-interpretation is informed by his relationships with both his relatives and his co-religionists. As he prematurely departs from the wedding ceremony, Ali Hassan is challenged to decide whether he defines himself as the "contractor of a religion" or a relative of the bride's family, the questioner implying that the answer would determine whether it is

right for him to depart (Sokefeld 1999:422). The implication is that his identity can be interpreted in at least two ways: according to a framework of religion and according to kin relationship. This is revealed in that particular incident by the conflict between the two identity interpretations. It highlights that Ali Hassan's identity is ambiguous and not fixed, and that how it is defined depends on the social context in which it is framed.

A main point in Sokefeld's (1999) analysis that he illustrates with Ali Hassan's story is that people are always engaged in multiple social relationships. If each relationship provides a basis for self-interpretation, it entails that our identities can always be interpreted in various ways at one time, producing multiple identities. This is also suggested by Stryker (2008:19–20, see also Markus 1977), an interactionist, who suggests that a major reason our identities can be interpreted in multiple ways is because we have manifold social relationships on which those identities are defined. Ali Hassan's relationships with both his Shiite religious community and his Sunni relatives serve as an example. The dilemma that he faces demonstrates how closely his self-interpretations are intertwined with those relationships. In particular, Sokefeld's (1999:433) point in using Ali Hassan's story is to show how people "negotiate [these] multiple, often conflicting, identities". In his account, Sokefeld (1999) only highlights two of the Pakistani man's relationships. Clearly there are other relationships in his life that are related to other identities he holds. There is, for example, his identity as a friend of Sher Khan. Finally, there is also the relationship between Ali Hassan and Sokefeld himself, to which the anthropologist makes no allusion.

Sokefeld (1999:423) also speaks of the "intersectionality" of identities. He implies that the direct cause for Ali Hassan's dilemma is not his relationships with the

Shiite community or with his relatives. It is also not even because he belongs to both groups. Ali Hassan's dilemma arises not only because his identity interpretation is contextual but also because it can be interpreted in different ways in the *same* physical situation. To use Sokefeld's (1999:423) term, in that particular situation at the reception, his disparate identities 'intersect' with each other. Had he not encountered the kind of circumstance as the one at the wedding reception, it would have been possible for Ali Hassan to separately occupy both his identity as a Shiite elder and as a relative of a Sunni family without any conflict. When he is only among his Sunni kinsmen he likely can first and foremost be a kinsman, and when only among his fellow Shiite he can primarily be a Shiite. What caused a dilemma during the wedding ceremony, however, is that in that particular situation, the two social contexts on which he interprets his identities overlap. Consequently, the identities associated with those contexts not only meet and exist in the same person and situation, but also conflict with each other.

What entails is that only *one* of those relationship contexts can be the primary basis for his identity at that time. This is why Ali Hassan attempts a compromise. If this were not the case, he would not have had to enlist Sher Khan's help in an attempt to resolve the dilemma resulting from his conflicting allegiances, because that dilemma would not have existed in the first place. Rather, as Michael Verkuyten (1997) has also empirically demonstrated, people rarely occupy only one social context a time, and so they generally have to commit to multiple fluctuating relationships at the same time. Howard (2000:372) similarly suggests that one's identity at any given time is not one-dimensional but multi-faceted.

That we ‘inhabit’—to use Foucault’s (1985) term⁹—more than one social relationship at the same time not only means that how our identities are to be interpreted is dependent on social context, but also the multiplicity of those contexts leads to a multiplicity of relationship-based self-interpretations.

Another significant point to be raised regarding Ali Hassan’s dilemma is that while it is brought about by the conflict between his multiple identities, that multiplicity of identity only becomes a conflict when it is acted out. This is another point of insight into the relational nature of self-interpretations that I draw from Sokefeld’s (1999) analysis: that identities are expressed and validated through observable actions, and it only matters in social terms when so manifested. Ultimately, Ali Hassan’s disagreement with his Sunni relatives is not about what he *is* but about what he *does* at the wedding. How he primarily defines his identity, at least in public, is only brought into question when he acts out his decision to leave with Sher Khan. Even though his relatives seem to be aware that Ali Hassan is a Shiite elder, it is only when he proceeds to depart that one of them challenges him to decide whether they are primarily “contractors of religion” or kinsmen (Sokefeld 1999:422).

We can only presume that had he stayed for lunch with his relatives, they would not have confronted him with such a question. In any case, the crux of Ali Hassan’s identity impasse is the conflict between the colliding *behavioural expectations* demanded by the social relationships on which his multiple self-interpretations are based. While the bride’s family and his other relatives would expect him to attend the wedding, his fellow Shiites would expect him to do the

⁹ The term ‘inhabit’ that Foucault (1985) uses is quite appropriate here in regards to identities as it better suggests long-term commitment compared to, say, ‘wear’, as one would wear different hats that can be easily taken on and off and replaced with another depending on whim and circumstance.

opposite.¹⁰ Central to his predicament is not only how he chooses to define his identities, but also, of more immediate concern, how he chooses to act based on that choice. Social behaviour or action, therefore, is a deciding factor in any conflict between an individual's identity interpretations, as well as how they negotiate that conflict, as Sokefeld (1999) has shown in his ethnographic parable. This insight is important for this thesis because it points to a direct link between a person's self-interpretation and their choice of social behaviour, an intersection that is the focus of this study's enquiry.

Symbolic interactionism, on which I primarily base my theoretical framework, highlights the important role that actions play in how the social-relational aspect of our identities are conceptualized. Goffman (1959), a key figure in symbolic interactionist thought, argues that it is through our actions that we express our social identities. Our social behaviour is the medium through which other people recognize how we interpret our identities. In some cases, that behaviour is also the means to obtain social validation for our self-interpretations. Denzin (1992:26) and Couch (1986) argue that those self-interpretations are, in fact, often defined by our interactional behaviour with each other. Howard (2000:371) even sees social identities as social constructions created through interactions, which have both social and material consequences. Therefore, as Blumer (1972:152, emphasis mine), another prominent symbolic interactionist, says, a study of people must be a study of "*acting units*".

¹⁰ It goes without saying that how each group that Ali Hassan belongs to expects him to behave is culturally prescribed. I have earlier discussed the input that culture has on an individual's self-interpretation, as mediated by cultural schemas (Strauss and Quinn 1997:82; D'Andrade 1995; Nishida 2005). I will not go here into a more detailed exploration of the cultural influences on how Ali Hassan is expected to act, choosing instead to focus on the interaction between his actions and his identities.

The common thread running through these scholars' arguments is that if identity is to be seen as relevant to lived human experience, the process of defining one's own identity cannot be conceptualized as a purely mental exercise. Instead, it should be seen as embodied in one's everyday interpersonal interaction with other human beings (Denzin 1992, Howard 2000). In this way, interactionists like Goffman (1959) and Hewitt (2007) conceptualize behaviour as a symbolic signifier of identity. This, of course, is in harmony with Sokefeld's (1999) adoption of Derrida's (1982) *différance* in conceptualizing identity: that our self meaning is not inherent in ourselves but is signified by other things, in this case by social behaviours that are relevant to who we interpret ourselves to be.

Because the behavioural expectations of intersecting identities are often incompatible with each other, Sokefeld (1999:423) suggests that it is often impossible for people to enact any single self-interpretation in a "pure" fashion. This is the reason behind Ali Hassan's need to affect a kind of compromise: he cannot enact his responsibility as a kinsman to his Sunni relatives fully without infracting on what is socially expected of him as an elder in the Shiite community. Ironically, the response he receives for his attempt at compromise only serves to underline his inability to fully act out his social identity as a kinsman. The evident refusal of one of his relatives to believe the genuineness of Ali Hassan's excuse demonstrates that despite his attempt to fulfil the behavioural expectations of both of his social identities, the Shiite elder is not able to do so to the satisfaction of at least one group with whom one of those identities is associated.

Ali Hassan's attempt to compromise does, however, illustrate what Sokefeld (1999:424), calls *identity management*. Like identity interpretation, it can be conceptualized primarily as a cognitive endeavour. Sokefeld (1999) uses this actual

term to refer to the process through which people negotiate the often-conflicting demands of their multiple relational identities, which are often culturally prescribed. This conceptual measure attempts to resolve not only the conflicts between socially produced behaviour expectations but also the internal contradictions between the various social self-interpretations underlying those expectations.

When Sokefeld (1999:422) meets with Ali Hassan the day after the wedding to discuss what has happened, the Shiite elder tells him that, given the circumstances, he believes he has handled the conflict between his social commitments well enough. Sokefeld (1999:425) seems to agree that his informant's "management of identities is far sighted and rather ingenious". In spite of his failure to fully convince his relatives of his commitments, Sokefeld (1999:425) argues that Ali Hassan's diplomatic cunning has allowed the incident to end with some measure of ambiguous uneasiness between the two parties instead of certain hostility. There is a parallel here between the Shiite elder's "management of identities" and Rachida's reinterpretation of the meaning of her womb in relation to her identity in Gregg's (1998:136–143) ethnography. Like Rachida, Ali Hassan takes advantage of what Gregg (1998) terms the "structural ambiguity" of symbols in framing his social identity. As it allows Rachida to reinterpret her self-interpretation, it also allows Ali Hassan to project an ambivalent social identity that enables him to avoid directly infracting on what is culturally expected of him as a kinsman. The main difference is that in the Shiite elder's case, what is structurally ambiguous is the social meaning of his action, an external facet of his self-interpretation, while in Rachida's case the ambiguity lies in what cultural symbols mean in the internal aspect of identity.

This study's theoretical framework is meant to provide a perspective serving as a bridge between conceptualizations of identity and behaviour, this thesis' central concern. At one end of this conceptual bridge has been the exploration of identity as self-interpretation, which I laid out at the beginning of this theory chapter. Adopting symbolic interactionism's conceptualization of understanding, I discussed how identity is a product of the process of symbolic interpretation (e.g. Mead 1932; Hewitt 1991, 2007). Just as one understands other things in the world by perceiving them as symbolic objects and, in so doing, interpreting their meanings, one interprets one's identity, and those of other people, the same way (e.g. Cooley 1972; Hewitt 1991, 2007). I discussed the various facets of this process of self-interpretation, including its contextuality (Hewitt 1991) and the internal factors driving that process, which I examined using schema theory (e.g. D'Andrade 1995; Strauss and Quinn 1997).

At the centre of the framework's conceptual 'bridge' is the junction between the internal process of self-interpretation and the external, structural factors informing that process, including social and cultural factors. My examination of this junction focused on the interaction between self-schema and cultural schemas (Strauss and Quinn 1997; Nishida 2005). Moving further in the direction of the socio-cultural facet of identity interpretation, I explored the way that cultural symbols are incorporated and adapted in the construction of self-meaning. I draw especially on Gregg's (1998) work in this discussion, finding his conceptualization of the role of cultural symbol's "structural ambiguity" in individual self-interpretation particularly useful. Then I proceeded to explore how social and cultural factors are manifested in social relationships, borrowing primarily from Sokefeld's (1999) ethnographic examination of the role that such relationships have in identity

construction. A key insight that I draw from Sokefeld's (1999) work is that social relationships, and their pertinence to individual self-interpretations, is largely mediated through social behaviour, which also agrees with the symbolic interactionist conjecture that action serves as a symbolic signifier of identity (Goffman 1959). This brings this theoretical framework to the other end of its conceptual 'bridge', the one that is concerned with behaviour, not to mention full circle back to the central propositions of symbolic interactionism. This framework will be this thesis' analytical 'motor' with which it will examine the focus of its ethnographic interest, which is the link between identity and behaviour in the lived experiences of students and teachers in a Western Australian school. In the chapters ahead I will, as needed and as appropriate, make references to what I have laid out in this chapter. However, before entering any analytical discussion, I dedicate the next chapter, a largely narrative account, to familiarizing the reader with key personalities and events during a one-year period of school life at Pine View High.

3

Among Adolescents: A Year at Pine View High

I knew I was running late. I also knew it was not a good idea to keep one's supervisor waiting. Especially when he had been generous enough to take the time to introduce me to the principal of the school where I might be doing my fieldwork. When I drove into Pine View High's visitor's car park, I found Martin waiting there leaning against his car. I quickly parked my vehicle, jumped out and apologized for being late. Martin responded graciously and suggested that we got down to business.

As we crossed the front yard towards the main entrance of the administration building, I pondered how quiet the place was for a school. It is to be expected: both the students and teachers were still on holiday that time of the year. Martin informed the receptionist that we had an appointment with Mr Barber, the principal. The wait was brief. A tall, middle-aged man with a receding hairline and a friendly smile emerged from the direction of the principal's office. Martin was the first to greet him before introducing me to the principal. "Pleased to meet you, Mr Barber," I said.

"*Les*, please," the tall man insisted. His tone was cordial but not overtly familiar. After the pleasantries, Les led us to his office down the hallway. For the next twenty minutes we talked about the project that I was about to undertake at Pine View. We discussed its purpose and scope, and the kind of participation that I

could expect from students and teachers. By the end of our meeting, the principal was happy with the way Martin and I had laid out the study. He gave me only one very clear restriction: no jeans. I was slightly disappointed, not because of some fashion concern but because I had hoped to dress as casually as possible to distance myself from the teachers. I was hoping I could gain the students' trust more easily that way. However, Martin and I ended the meeting feeling quite gratified that we did not have to look for another school for the fieldwork. We were also quite optimistic about the level of cooperation I would be getting at Pine View.

Before the school term began I met Les again in his office to clarify the practical details of how I would go about collecting data: in-class observation, interviews and so on. Having discovered that I had trained as a social studies teacher, he decided to place me with the school's Society and Environment department. He introduced me to the head of that department, a tall, white-haired veteran called Kent Lincoln. Both Les and Kent wanted to know what the teachers would be getting out of the project. I proposed at that time that the insights contained in the study's final conclusions would offer them analyses of their students' behaviour in the context of their relationships, both with their peers as well as with the teachers themselves. They seemed happy with that suggestion. They also wanted to know whether I would be a "fly on the wall" in the classrooms or whether I would be interacting with the students. I said that I would eventually interact with them when appropriate, but at first I would only be observing. Les reminded me that it would only be "good manners" to inform teachers of any planned interaction with students in their classroom, while Kent asked me to be "upfront" with the students regarding what I was doing among them.

Satisfied with my proposal, the head of department said that he would ask his teachers if I could be a “fly on the wall” in their classes. Originally, the scope of the project would only include students in Years 9 and 10, but following specific teachers meant that Year 8 classes, of which there were many, would inevitably be part of my observation. Kent then pointed out that the Year 10 classes would not have a single Society and Environment teacher. Instead, they would be rotated among three teachers over the year, each teaching a different module—history, geography and economics. This was to give them a taste of the three specific social studies subjects taught in Year 11. I said this was not a problem, as with each teacher’s permission, I would simply follow a single group of students as they went through the modules. He also asked if I was interested in observing one of the high-achieving classes belonging to the elite Academic Enrichment Program, whom he called the ‘computer nerds’. I said that I would be very interested. With Kent’s promise that he would look into the matter further, Martin and I departed from the school.

The Teachers

A few days later Kent called to inform me that one of his teachers was willing to participate in the study. The next day I went to Pine View to meet my first teacher-informant. I met Kent at the front reception and the head of department took me to his departmental office. It struck me as a rather cramped and cluttered place. Teachers’ desks were spread against the walls around the room and were crowded with numerous copies of textbooks and source books. The walls, especially above the desks, had little adornment except for teacher timetables, reminders, certificates and other teaching-related documents. There were only two computer

workstations in the room, situated next to each other, which the teachers had to share. There were no windows, and two large desks had been placed back to back in the middle of the room. Other than being an extra storage space for sundry books and papers, the desks also served as my workspace – except during the times when one of the teachers took on student teachers on teaching practicums, in which case I had to make do with one of the tables in the staff room.

The staff members that occupied this work space were mostly male, which, going by my experience at other schools until that point, seems a common enough makeup for Society and Environment departments. Most of the teachers were relatively young. Only one man, Paul Hawking, whose desk was next to Kent's, was slightly younger than the department head. I had very little interaction with this particular teacher but he seemed to be slightly more reserved compared to the other members of the department. He was always dressed in a semi-formal business jacket and shirt, though without a tie. He did not usually engage in idle banter or have the same irreverent sense of humour that some of the others had. Nevertheless, Paul was usually flashing a friendly smile whenever he saw me. The only female member of the Society and Environment department was Joanna Burgess, a woman in her thirties who left the school partway through Term 3 of the school year. Because she was usually out of the office when I was there, I also did not have the chance to speak much to her.

The member of the department that Kent was introducing me to that morning was Jay Schneider, a well dressed man in his thirties with a stocky build. Although it was his first year at Pine View, he had had around a decade of teaching experience under his belt. Jay had previously taught at another school with a reputation for

known for having many difficult students. He had also served in the Australian Army and spent some time travelling in Europe, life experiences that he occasionally recounted in his lessons. The man seemed rather aloof at first, although not unpleasant. Little did I know at that time that underneath that serious veneer was a great and slightly irreverent sense of humour, which he employed liberally in his interactions with his students.

In our introductory meeting Jay and I discussed which of his classes would be best for me to sit in. We talked about the extent of my participation in his lessons. Jay also briefly described his teaching style: he considered himself to be not too strict a teacher, but quite firm, insisting that students keep to the rules. He claimed to have personally found it a successful approach with students not only for himself but also for most of the twenty-three student teachers he had supervised so far. This seemed evident in the way he interacted with individual students, particularly those that the teachers found difficult. Interestingly, Jay further said he had a policy of not making too many rules, "so I don't break my own rules". Finally, he told me that he "don't talk *to* them, I talk *with* them." The way Jay dealt with Celine and Allen, both known as problematic students among the school staff, is particularly illustrative of his engagement of students on a personal basis as a part of how he managed the behaviour of his students. In both cases the teacher seemed to be able to manage a measure of control of the students' behaviour by reasoning with them.

As with the other teachers I observed, Jay usually adapted his teaching approach according to the general abilities and behaviour level of whichever class he happened to be teaching. For example, on one occasion Jay found that some of

the exercises on the worksheets he had prepared for his Year 8 class were slightly more difficult than he had thought. He had not planned to spend time in instruction, but realising this took the time to explain the students the subject matter and the kind of answers that were expected of them in response to the questions. Jay also often seemed to try to tailor his approaches to student behaviour management to the class he was teaching.

Jay's approach to students in the 'better' behaving classes, such as those in his higher-achieving Year 8 class, seemed less strict with regards to enforcing school rules. He occasionally chose to ignore minor infractions that did not cause disruptions to the teaching process, such as students wearing hats inside the classroom. For instance, during one cold day Jay found Abel, a student in the Year 8 class, wearing a non-uniform jacket in class. The teacher pointed out to him that according to school rules he should not have been wearing it in class, but just that time he would allow it "because it's a nice jacket". In other cases Jay might soften his words when dispensing admonitions for mild misbehaviour in the classroom, for example by responding to those that speak out of turn with sharp but humorous retorts meant to gently point out the foolishness of the students' mistake and discouraging them from repeating it. In fact, the students in that class seemed to like him as a teacher; one of the girls asked me to write in my 'book' that he was "a good teacher" and that it was their favourite subject.

When approaching groups he considered to be more prone to 'difficult' behaviour, however, like his Year 9 classes, Jay did not seem to be as lenient, opting for a stricter adherence to school rules. Rather than use humour to engage the students on an interpersonal level in those classes Jay seemed to prefer to use what might

be considered more 'traditional' methods of student behaviour management, such as moving them to a different desk or sending them out of the classroom. More than once Jay also implemented 'seating plans' for his Year 9 classes; each student was assigned a specific seat with the goal of breaking up cliques within the classroom that enabled them to socialise noisily during lessons.

Jay rarely raised his voice at a student, but there were some occasions when he did. The first time was when Roy, a boy in one of the Year 9 classes, repeatedly interrupted the teacher's explanation. Jay chastised him firmly but quietly, but Roy responded by muttering under his breath, which led Jay to shout, "Get out!" Roy walked out of the room, his teacher following behind to give him a 'talk-to'. I was not invited to listen in on this occasion, but Jay later told me about their conversation. During their 'talk' Roy had apparently been rude to the teacher but had maintained that Jay had the obligation to help him despite his rudeness. This had led Jay to instruct the boy to see him at the Society and Environment office at recess. I was there when Roy finally did turn up. By that time the student was less communicative. Jay began by asking why he thought he had been sent there.

Jay: "Why are you rude to me?"

Roy: "I dunno."

Jay: "Are you usually rude to teachers?"

Roy: "Sometimes."

Jay then asked Roy about his parents and discovered that he lived only with his mother, who he said was always busy at her business. After Roy left Jay and I discussed the possibility that Roy's attitude problem might have somehow been related to this fact. What I concluded from this episode was that even though Jay could be quite strict about problem behaviour, he was also willing to investigate the possible causes of that behaviour, in this case being connected to the student's family background.

During the first week of my observation, Kent told me that another teacher in his department was also willing to open his classes to me. He introduced me to Dan Chapel, a younger teacher—in fact, the youngest in the department—who was in the second year of his career. A man of slender build, he always kept his head closely shaved, perhaps because of his other job as a serving lieutenant in the Army Reserve. He usually dressed considerably more casually than Jay, who typically wore a business shirt and pants. By contrast, Dan was typically clad in a polo shirt, shorts and a pair of loafers.

Dan did not share with me his personal philosophy or style on teaching, but it was apparent from the way he interacted with his students that he, too, was not overtly strict even while keeping discipline in the classroom. His teaching style was markedly different than Jay's—less use of irreverent humour, for example. In some ways he was more relaxed in the way he interacted with students. Jay invariably demanded complete silence from his students before beginning his expositions, and would confiscate students' pens when they persisted in clicking them or tapping them against their desks. Dan, on the other hand, was usually quite prepared to give his explanations with a reasonable level of ambient noise coming from the students. This, unfortunately, resulted in a lot of clicked pens as he gave his instructions.

Dan also showed a willingness to try to understand difficult students while still taking steps to push them to do what they were supposed to do. He encouraged Karl, one of his students whose performance was lacking, by buying him a new school folder to replace his tattered old one, while he paid special attention to

Dennis, another similar difficult student, to make sure he understood what was being taught. When students did not do work, especially homework, as they had been instructed to, though, he did not let it slip. His most commonly used tool in these cases was the students' diaries. Instead of simply reprimanding them on the spot, Dan asked each student to present him with their diary, in which he would write a note to the students' parents informing them of their children's failure to meet expectations.

Unfortunately, the members of the Society and Environment department did not always get along with each other harmoniously. For example, few of them have levelled criticism at the final teacher I observed, Sonny Hughes, concerning the way he taught his classes. One of them said behind his back that he did not consider Sonny to be a good team player. On another occasion, Jay told me that that he felt sorry for the student teacher under Sonny's tutelage since the aspiring teacher did not seem to be getting the support he needed. To be fair, Sonny was not the only teacher whose colleagues complained about; the other teachers also occasionally express disapproval of each other, citing issues such as inattentiveness or laziness.

Pine View High's teachers and staff—Les, Jay, Dan and the others—were the first significant characters I encountered in this story of life at a suburban Perth public high school. However, the most influential figures in this unfolding drama were many years—if not decades—younger: the students.

Back to school: A world of blackboards, classrooms and schoolyards

Pine View High's classrooms were my starting point in observing students. The room that Jay used for most of his classes was on the second floor of the building that housed the Society and Environment department. To access the room one had to climb a set of stairs and enter through a door that was not immediately visible from the first floor landing. The door opened to the front of the classroom, on the opposite side of the blackboard from the teacher's desk. The left side of the room consisted of a row of large windows looking out onto the school's visitor car park, while on the right hand wall were posted various social studies-related maps and posters. Halfway through the year Jay decided to further decorate the room; he hung up flags of different countries above the posters and posted humorous cartoons on the back of chairs for students to look at when they had finished their work. Along the back were computer desks carrying older-model computers that were never used, since teachers usually booked one of the computer rooms for lessons involving information technology. Since no one ever used those desks, I adopted a chair attached to one of them, adjacent to the rearmost window, as 'my' spot in the classroom from which I would observe and take note of the goings on in Jay's classes. The spot also placed me within arm's reach of the rearmost row of students' chairs.

Some of the students in the back initially seemed quite uncomfortable having me constantly 'looking over their shoulders'. One of Jay's female students quipped to her teacher on one occasion, "Isn't the man in the back a bit too old for Year 8?" Many students would eventually warm to my presence, which I think was helped by my presence in the back, a position that allowed me to speak to the students

without distracting them during lessons. From my seat in the back of the room I observed four groups of students that Jay taught: one Year 8 class, two Year 9 classes (which I called 9A and 9B) and, for a while, the Year 10 class, which was eventually taken over by Sonny and then Dan as Kent had said. As the year progressed and as the students became more and more used to my being among them, in my judgment, I began to walk around the classroom when appropriate. This was usually when they were working independently on worksheets their teacher had given out. Some of them even seemed to begin to expect me to be in the classroom. I could not, unfortunately, interact with the students any time I wished during lessons. This difficulty was highlighted in a slightly humorous manner on one occasion, when I was half-jokingly reprimanded in front of an entire Year 8 class by a relief teacher for speaking to students when she was about to deliver an explanation.

The kinds of lessons that the teachers gave their students often varied. Most of the time it consisted of the 'traditional' format of the teacher presenting new information to the class, followed by giving them either a worksheet or textbooks to work on for the duration of the lesson. Students were also often given assignments to do, usually on their own or at times as a group. They usually had two or three weeks to complete these assignments. For instance, for one of their assignments the Year 8 classes had to create a fictional menu using what ingredients they believed would have been available in ancient Egypt. Another assignment required them to research various inventors throughout history.

I found that Jay had a more varied range of activities for his lessons. For the most part, Dan's lessons were usually based around 'traditional' show-and-tell and

bookwork. Sometimes this would be supplemented with a showing of relevant films or documentary videos. When the Year 8 classes were studying Australia's early history, for example, Dan played them a documentary film on the various European explorers of the continent's coastline. Aside from similar exercises and tasks, Jay also occasionally used additional activities that involved the entire class. For example, when the subject of a Year 9 lesson was politics and government, Jay held a mock election for class president. He asked volunteers to nominate themselves as candidates, who would then had to present a speech to the group on why they should vote for him or her. Finally, the class was asked to vote and the votes were counted, leading to one girl 'winning' the election. On another occasion, as part of his lessons on the Australian gold rush in the 19th century, Jay rearranged the desks in the classroom into groups before the students entered. When they came, the teacher distributed a bag of chocolate chip cookies and some toothpicks to each group. He said that they were to pretend that they were gold miners, and that the chocolate chips in the cookies were cookies, which they had to 'mine' with the toothpicks. Several of the students were picked out to become mining license inspectors, police constables and hired labourers. He allowed the 'constables' to do things such as take bribes and 'arrest' those without licenses. Through this role play Jay taught the class about life in the gold mines in an interactive way.

Sometimes lessons had to take place out of the classroom because of various reasons. On many occasions it was because the activities involved computer research, which required the class to be taken to one of Pine View's computer rooms. In other instances it was because they had to use many books, which meant that the students had to be taken to the library. One of the computer rooms

had two sections, which were divided by a wall with a large window. Both Jay and Dan used this room for their lessons at one point or another. One thing that was interesting about the room was that, I noticed, whenever a Year 8 class occupied that room, male students usually ended up congregating in one section of the room and female students in the other. This was interesting because it graphically showed to me the apparent tendency in the younger students to choose to choose peers from, and to socialise with, those of their own gender. This was one of the patterns that I paid attention to in my observations of the behaviour of Pine View's students. There were other patterns, many of which were connected to the adolescents' formation of self-interpretation. To properly investigate this connection, however, I had to look beyond just surface patterns in the general student population and at selected individual students.

Jay's Students

I found that each class had its own collective character depending on the various mixes of students' personalities and responses to their teacher, which were manifested in both attitude and behaviour. The teachers considered some groups to be more "switched on", as Kent the head of the Society and Environment department said, than others. From what teachers said and from my own observation it seemed clear that there was a correlation between each student's academic performance, as well as behaviour, and which class they had been placed.

Jay's Year 8 classes were comprised exclusively of students in the elite Academic Enrichment Program. There were roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in the group, and, as was apparently the case with virtually all Year 8 classes I observed at Pine View, students in that class seemed to prefer to sit with peers of the same gender. In terms of academic achievement, however, it was a special group of students. Those accepted into the Academic Enrichment Program were considered by the school to be higher achievers in subjects like mathematics, science and computers. It was, therefore, not surprising that the group carried the reputation for being 'nerds', as Kent had alluded to in our first meeting. It was a label that some of them seemed comfortable with or even embraced. Albert, a rather portly boy, frequently boasted about his computer skills, bragged about running his own computer game server and peppered his conversations with obscure references to science fiction franchises such as *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. But not all members of the group fitted as readily into such a stereotypical image of a 'nerd'. For instance, when asked to describe herself, Ally did not only use words such as "nerd" and "bookworm" but also "energetic" and "sporty", an image seemingly supported by her frequently wearing her sports uniform and carrying her hockey stick into the classroom.

At the other extreme were students that despised the 'nerd' label attached to the class. In the previous chapter I have already presented the case of one of these students: Celine, whom Alley confessed to disliking. She was very open and friendly towards me since the beginning of the year, often referring to me as her "friend" before her peers. She also enjoyed a relatively good relationship with her teacher Jay. However, Celine was apparently an unwilling member of the Year 8 group, only in the Academic Enrichment Program because of her mother's wishes.

As I recounted before, unfortunately, Celine left Jay's Society and Environment class sometime in the third term of school, as behaviour problems caused her teachers to drop her from the Program. They surmised that her conflict with her mother's desire was a key contributing factor. I maintained a good rapport with Celine; she remained friendly with me till the end of the year.

Jay's Year 9 classes were not elite groups and were comprised of a diverse collection of students. Both of them had an equal number of boys and girls. Most students in the class were what teachers considered to be 'average' in terms of academic capabilities and behaviour patterns. Some, however, I found, were considered to be low-achieving and/or difficult students not only by Jay but also by the other teachers. One of these students was Allen. Like Celine, he had a reputation among the teachers for problem behaviour. On my first encounter with Allen I noted:

[J]ust a little bit about Allen, who got told off for talking; Jay smacked the desk in front of him with a board ruler and told him to stand up. Allen appears to be a kid with a negative rep[utation]. Another teacher said that she called his parents about his behaviour—only to be told it wasn't the first call they had gotten from the school that day.

Offering his opinion on Allen, Kent the head of the Society and Environment department said that the boy was prone to "minor bullying", which he demonstrated by pulling at my name badge and tugging at another teacher's bag; a schoolground equivalent of Brian Burke.¹¹ Allen's own teacher Jay called him a "cowardly bully". Larger than other male students in his class, he was quite a dominant presence in the classroom. From time to time I did see him call the other boys around him derogatory names, which seemed to have earned him a

¹¹ A former premier of Western Australia who became a kingmaker and pro-business lobbyist using his political connections. He was jailed for seven months for false pretense regarding travel expenses.

reputation as a bully. His behaviour frequently warranted a rebuke from Jay, although Allen usually responded by coming up with some sort of excuse for why he had been acting that way. The two of them clashed a few times over the course of the year, with Allen alternating between eventually cooperating and insisting that he was not in the wrong. However, he was not without something of a softer side. On one occasion Jay held a mock-election for class president and Allen put his name forward as a candidate. Each 'candidate' had to present a speech.

Allen presented his speech with a loud voice, and although he obviously injected some humour into the text, he delivered it with more seriousness than he usually displayed when interacting with his classmates. Allen began by outlining issues that interested him in the classroom and what he would do about them. I recorded in my notes for that class that I thought that Allen's speech was "interesting. It was a mixture of good, serious stuff and cynical big talk. Mostly good, I'd say. Interestingly, [...] he said explicitly that he's 'not a bully'". His reputation as something of a bully, then, had apparently reached Allen's own ears, but however he usually felt about that for the purpose of the election, he did not wish to be seen in this light. The candidates also had to submit a short written statement in which they stated why they should be elected. Jay let me have these slips of paper after the lesson, and on his, Allen had written:

"Because I have never been a leader before in my life and I have been doing a workshop to improve my leading skill so i [sic] think i [sic] would be good. and [sic] world peace".

Jay said that, at least on this occasion, he was impressed with Allen. Generally speaking, however, the relationship between the two could be described as rather tumultuous. Allen's response to Jay's reprimand usually showed that the boy did

accept that the teacher had authority over him, but I would not consider him to be a compliant student by any means.

Jay did not encounter many problems with the Year 10 class that he took turns teaching with Dan and Sonny, except with regards to one student, Noon. The teacher clashed with Noon on multiple occasions. Jay frequently reprimanded the boy for speaking when Jay was presenting his explanations, or for making distracting noises by repeatedly and incessantly clicking his mechanical pen. What usually caused the conflict between student and teacher to escalate was that Noon often talked back and argued with Jay about whether he had been doing anything that deserved his rebuke. On more than one occasion Jay resorted to sending Noon out of the classroom for a talking-to. Jay also spoke to the year coordinator so that she could have a word with the boy. Jay and his other teachers contacted his mother a number of times to discuss his behaviour in the classroom, but according to them she always maintained that Noon was a “good boy” and refused to believe their reports.

It seemed that Noon’s negative reputation did not stop with his teachers; some of his classmates also disapproved of his behaviour. One of them was Hank, who had the following to say about Noon:

Hank: There’s a few others I don’t particularly know their names but they just act all stupid. They like cause trouble in class. They distract people, they don’t get on with their work. Just interrupt everything.

Me: Okay.

Hank: Noon would be one.

Me: Noon would be one?

Hank: Noon definitely.

Me: Have you known him for a long time?

Hank: Since Year 8. Oh, he starts a fight with *everyone*. And if you actually fight back... I actually *way* started on him. ‘Oh, you wanna fight?’ ‘Cause he picks on people he doesn’t think will fight back. If they actually do he’ll stop.

Me: I’m thinking of doing an interview with him.

Hank: Oh, dear God. [Laughs]

The final conflict between Noon and his teacher Jay took place during the Year 10 camp towards the end of the school year. On the second night of camp, Red Team, of which Noon was a member, got into trouble. While the teachers were meeting together to discuss the next day's activities, they repeatedly heard screaming from the direction of the girls' camping ground. Jay and another teacher went to investigate what was happening. They discovered the boys from the Red Team in the girls' area. The teachers took the Red Team boys to the meeting hall for a severe verbal reprimand. Afterwards, they were allowed to leave—except for Noon. Aside from his involvement with his team's invasion of the girls' area, he was apparently also in trouble for having hoarded Red Team's food for himself, which led to two of his teammates going hungry that night. Jay confronted him about this but Noon vehemently denied it. They argued for a while, with Noon close to tears, and despite chaplain Rick's attempt to intercede on the student's behalf, Jay finally decided that Noon would be taken back to school the next day. Jay asserted that Noon had "contradicted himself" and "lied". He also said that the "inappropriate and obscene" T-shirts that Noon had been wearing at the camp, which had been emblazoned with slogans such as "FBI—Female Body Inspector "and" Free Breast Massage", further reinforced his decision.

Having the task of fetching the students' lunch from school everyday, I left the campsite the next morning, but this time with Noon in tow. It was a long drive back to the school and I decided to try to discuss with the boy what had happened. He gave his version of events and said that he had not known that his teammates

were hungry. Regarding the girls screaming, Noon asserted that he had gone into the girls' campsite, but that was after he had heard them scream, not before. The implication was that he had not been involved in starting the previous night's intrusion. Our conversation flowed from what had happened then to the topic of his life in general. Noon said that he did not like Perth, where he was living with his mother and stepfather, and would prefer to go to Melbourne to live with his father, whom he had not seen for a year. He also said he disliked Pine View and wished he had been able to go to a school with a soccer program, since he loved the sport. He further asserted that he disliked the school for its teachers. Perhaps not surprisingly, Jay was among those that Noon resented the most because, according to him, the teacher most frequently singled him out and rebuked him without any clear reason.

The Academic Enrichment Year 8 class that Celine and Albert were part of was intended for high achievers, while another of Jay's Year 8 classes was designed for students with learning difficulties and developmental disorders. This was his Year 8 Education Support class. It was not held in his usual classroom but in a smaller room at the other end of the campus that had been set aside for the program. Each student in the program had their own pigeonhole where they could put their workbooks and other material. The lessons varied from one week to the next and, at least in the way Jay taught them, were generally kept simple. Most of the time the activities consisted of basic writing and reading exercises. In one lesson Jay read to them from the Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, while on another occasion he gave the students a hands-on cooking lesson. Students received star-shaped stickers for good performance and for good behaviour, which

they were allowed to stick next to their names on a chart that was hanging on a wall.

An important part of the Education Support lessons was the presence of education assistants (EAs), whose job seemed to be to help the students work on the activities while helping manage their behaviour. These non-teaching staff members assisted students in this group in diverse ways, ranging from helping them with reading difficulties to making sure that they got on with tasks assigned by their teachers. They also helped the teachers manage the behaviour of the students. Some students with the more severe learning difficulties, like Venny, were almost constantly assisted by an EA, while most Education Support students were only accompanied by education assistants in particular classes. Classes with quite a few students with learning or reading difficulties were usually helped by at least one or two education assistants. Unlike with teachers, students were allowed to address EAs by their first name, which seemed to help encourage them to respond to these non-teaching adults with a sense of trust. It was this that gave me the idea to insist that students address me the same way, since I realised that names did matter: as a symbolic object, its meanings framed the kind of relational identity in which the students placed me.

Jay's Year 8 Education Support group was a small class with only five or six students at one time; only four of them remained in the group throughout the year while a few others came and went throughout the year. One of those that remained in that class throughout the year was Jim, a short blonde boy known to many classmates and staff alike for his collection of old Jet Li VHS tapes, which he carried around in his bag at all times. He was certainly a fan of the Hong Kong

action star; the boy spoke about him on many occasions and demonstrated knowledge of many of his older films. When I suggested to Jim on one occasion that he replace the tapes with DVDs, he immediately seemed uncomfortable and began to mutter disapprovingly to himself at my suggestion. Jim's relationship with Jay was quite amicable. He frequently asked the teacher if he was happy with how he was doing. On a few occasions, when he made mistakes such as failing to finish the work that Jay had given him in time, he would ask the teacher whether they were still "friends". Usually Jay would respond in the affirmative with the condition that he continued to do his work, which normally satisfied Jim.

Jim also behaved the same way with me and with Simon, the only male education assistant at the school. He often came up to me and asked if I was okay and if I was still his friend. Not only because I didn't want to upset him but also because I actually liked Jim, I usually said that I was on both counts. On a number of occasions Jim approached me with a very serious look on his face, and said in an urgent tone, "Jonathan, I have to talk to you." I would then ask him what he needed to speak to me about, but then he invariably replied, "Oh, no, I forgot what it was," and continued talking about mundane things—like Jet Li.

Another long-term member of the special education group was Jordan. Unlike Jim, who always seemed eager to be in his teacher's 'good books', Jordan was known among teachers and education assistants for having behavioural problems. He generally kept away from Jim, Adrian, and Venny, the 'better' and more compliant students in the class, associating instead with other boys that had similar reputations as difficult students, such as Peter, who was only with the group for two months. Although he did interact with Jim, it was quite

superficial—such as to borrow pencils—or else to tease the other boy, which usually led to either Jay’s reprimand or one of the education assistants’ admonitions. On one occasion he quipped in front of Jim that Jet Li, the latter’s hero, had died of a heart attack. Thankfully, Jim failed to hear what Jordan had said; I had no doubt that had he heard what he had said he would have become very upset. Jordan was promptly reprimanded by one of the education assistants, who heard what he had said. Jordan’s refusal to associate with the ‘better’ behaving students in the class was especially apparent on another occasion when Jay decided to take the Education Support group for a walk around the school grounds. As the teacher explained the different parts of the school to the students, Jordan walked a few meters away from the group. Jay noticed this and asked him to join the group, which Jordan declined to do. He only participated in the activity after a considerable amount of time had passed.

The member of this group that I followed most closely, and the only one I interviewed, was Adrian, an Indonesian boy. Another mainstay in the Year 8 class, Adrian, was actually old enough to be in Year 10. In fact, he spent most of his recess and lunch times not with others in his year group but with those his own age. I became interested in this, and I asked him about it. He did not look comfortable when I questioned him but eventually admitted that the school did not find him to be suitable for Year 10, where his biological age would have placed him. Speaking to his mother, I also discovered that his parents were also ashamed of this. It seemed that it was to compensate that he chose to associate and socialise with middle- and upper-school students. One Year 10 group did, in fact, accept him as one of their own, and one of them, Edward, even said that Adrian was “pretty cool”. I will discuss and analyse Adrian’s peer choice and

interactions, especially in relation to his self-perception, in more detail in Chapter 7.

Based on my observation and comparison with his classmates, I would consider Adrian to be in least need of special education support. Jay, too, seemed to agree with me. More than once the teachers said that, “I don’t think he [Adrian] really needs to be here.” Perhaps this might be a slight exaggeration considering that the boy still needed a lot of help in understanding the slightly more complex schoolwork questions, for example, to do with investigating the motivations of a literary character. I knew this first hand as I often attempted to assist him with developing his literary skills. Still, his mother told me that Adrian’s biggest problem was not so much intellectual but with his fine motor skills. The boy loved to play basketball at school with his friends, but his parents had banned him from doing subjects such as woodwork because they were worried he might injure himself or others due to difficulties with his hand-eye coordination.

The last permanent member of the group was a girl of Indian descent called Venny, who was the only female member of the class. She joined Jim, Adrian and Jordan around the third week of the school year. Of all the students in Jay’s Year 8 Education Support class, Venny seemed to be the one that needed the most help in doing her work. It seemed that she had quite a severe learning disability and was almost invariably accompanied by Sandra, an education assistant, who helped her with even the simplest task in the basic workbook Jay had given everyone. Venny was also very quiet. Most of the time she only talked with Sandra and had very little interaction with others in the group, except for Jordan, who occasionally teased her, or when Jay asked her direct questions. I did notice, however, that

during break times she often joined a group of two or three other girls in the same year group, all white Australian, who were not in Special Education.

There were a few other students in the Education Support class that came and went as the year progressed. One of them was Peter, with whom Jordan often sat with in class and ‘hung out’ with outside of the classroom. Most of these students were not in the group—or, in some cases, even in the school—long enough for me to make sustained observation of their behaviour and motivations. There was one boy, however, whose behaviour I found striking enough to be of special interest. His name was Billy. He had been diagnosed with what was then known as Asperger syndrome,¹² among other things, which, as Jay, the EAs and I discovered, was conspicuously manifested in his behaviour and responses towards staff and other students. Although I considered Adrian to be the least needing of education support, Billy was, according to Jay, the ‘smartest’ of everyone in the class. From what I could see from his schoolwork and from what he said during his more communicative moments, Billy obviously loved science and computer programming, and knew a lot about those subjects.

His problem, however, was his frequent mood swings, and when he did not feel like working it took much effort on the education assistants’ part to persuade him to do something productive. He told me that he had a “problem with his brain”, which distressed him greatly. At one time Jay was summoned to the education support room after the EA’s found Billy curled up in a ball under a desk. Depending on his condition on that particular day, the education assistants

¹² What was known as Asperger syndrome has recently been combined with autism and reclassified as ‘Autism Spectrum Disorder’. It is characterized by social interaction and nonverbal communication difficulties.

sometimes allowed him to do whatever he wanted as long as it did not harm him or others. I could also sense Billy's cynicism in the way he spoke. During class conversations he talked about death a few times, and when I tried to ask him how he was doing, he replied, "I don't know why you asked. I'm probably going to die someday anyway". This made approaching Billy and forming a rapport with him very difficult. Unfortunately, he left Pine View sometime before the end of the semester and I never saw him again.

Dan's Students

Dan's regular classroom was located on the periphery of the school grounds but a short walk away from the Society Environment office in a 'demountable', or portable, classroom. Aside from being a supposedly temporary structure, it looked and felt like any other classrooms on the premises. On either side were large windows, which gave the room plenty of sunlight. One set of windows allowed one a glimpse of the car park while the other looked out onto a small courtyard, across which was another demountable that was usually used by Lydia, a mathematics teacher. The entrance was in the back of the room, leading on to the courtyard. As in Jay's classroom, I preferred a seat in the back of the room, near the door, which allowed me a good view of everyone at once. I did sit among the students on many occasions, to be closer to the action.

Dan's classes had similar compositions as Jay's in terms of the students' gender ratio, overall academic capabilities and behaviour patterns. Students were free to sit wherever they liked and, as with Jay's Academic Enrichment Program class,

most students in Dan's Year 8 classes seemed to prefer to sit and socialise with peers of the same gender. I found in these classes peer groups of mixed ethnicities. One peer group in one corner of the room, for example, consisted of a Chinese boy, a Kurdish boy and Aboriginal boy. In Dan's other class there were two Indonesian girls. Despite a common nationality and ethnic background, however, they did not sit together, choosing to place themselves in separate, ethnically mixed, peer groups. This was the first indication that, at least in that Year 8 class, ethnicity was not the main driving force in the students' choice of friends, while gender was a much stronger influence.

I also found in Dan's classes a few students of interest, especially in his Year 8 classes. The first was Harry, a Year 8 student, who had tried but failed to enter the Academic Enrichment Program. Despite his failure to join the program, however, he was evidently an intelligent—or perhaps, rather, knowledgeable—student. This was apparent in how frequently he put his hand up to answer the question that Dan threw to the class, as well as give information that the teacher did *not* ask for. On more than one occasion, as the class was watching some educational videos, Harry would raise his hand and volunteer some bits of information to the teacher without being asked, much to the annoyance to his classmates who found it distracting. When I asked him to describe himself in our interview, among the ways Harry described himself was that he

“like[d] knowledge, knowing everything, read lots of books, news. Most of my knowledge hasn't come from school. School is just an expression of my knowledge.”

I also asked him what he felt his strengths were, to which he responded that it was “knowledge. When I get a job I can use it,” and he felt that “I can work harder than most people.” However, he also admitted that he did not think he was good

enough for the Academic Enrichment Program. This led me to wonder whether his frequent and deliberate display of knowledge was somehow a way to compensate for this failure to make it into the program.

Another student of Dan's in whom I took special interest was Karl, who was in Dan's other Year 8 class. Usually found at the back of the room, I noticed early on that he seemed unmotivated to do his schoolwork. Initially I thought him to be a rebellious and disrespectful student. Sitting in the back row, I frequently saw him talking and joking around with the boy next to him instead of paying attention to the lesson at hand or doing classwork. However, after speaking to Dan, I discovered that Karl was struggling with depression and was regularly seeing the school psychologist. One of the teaching assistants even told me he had been put on suicide watch. I decided that the way Dan approached Karl and attempted to motivate him bore closer examination. Instead of harshly reprimanding Karl for his lack of work, Dan seemed to take the 'softer' approach without tolerating it altogether. It was clear that the teacher saw the worth in trying to use 'positive reinforcement' in trying to encourage Karl to improve his performance and behaviour at school. When Karl turned up in class with a school folder that had been torn apart, for example, instead of chastising him for not having proper equipment, Dan purchased a new folder for the student.

I decided to take a similar approach in attempting to build rapport with him. I often found him walking alone at break time in the hallways and quads, face turned towards the ground, and I would try to engage him in conversation. Our exchange normally began quite placidly, with him not really responding to my questions as to his well being, or responding half-heartedly with answers such as

“Yeah, it’s all right.” He usually lit up, though, when the conversation turned to video games, a shared hobby of ours. Being an avid gamer, Karl often ended up recommending this or that game to me. His other passion was soccer, which he also talked about with much excitement, even though I did not know much about the sport. In this way I eventually was able to gain his trust until he was able to open up to me about his various life issues.

Another of Dan’s students that he said had a similar issue with being motivated was Dennis, the only Aboriginal student in the teacher’s other Year 8 class. When I first met him I at first noticed that he did not seem to be doing any work. Yet he was also not speaking to anyone and indeed was sitting alone. He spent most of the time in class gazing out the window. I decided to sit next to Dennis and to try to get to know him. I was surprised that Dennis had finished working on his worksheet. I was gratified that Dennis was not reluctant to talk to me. He quietly introduced himself and what he did. He said he lived around the area with his mother. When I raised the subject, Dennis told me that he had been to the Aboriginal student program that Rick the school chaplain organised on Friday afternoons, and said that he enjoyed it. I then asked if I could read his work and he willingly showed me his worksheet. I noticed that, in spite of several grammatical mistakes, his command of written English was quite good, better than that of other students in the group. I also thought he had good handwriting.

After the lesson I spoke to Dan about Dennis. The teacher was of the opinion that the student was a good boy, and, despite his occasional lack of motivation, “just needs a bit of a kick” to get working. He had apparently related to Dennis quite well since he did manage to get the student to do a sufficient amount of work for

that lesson. Dan's opinion of the boy was also reinforced by my own subsequent interaction with Dennis. Not long after this discussion, I decided to sit next to the student again. The class was learning how to read maps, and Dennis was having some difficulty understanding how it is done. I asked him if I could help him, and he accepted my offer. With some help, Dennis did complete the task. Unfortunately, though, the boy did not remain in Dan's class for very long, and neither did reports of his behaviour remain positive.

A few days after I helped Dennis with his mapping exercise, I saw him with a group of other lower school Aboriginal boys at the football oval during recess. Nearby were three education assistants sitting on a bench, supervising [or keeping an eye on] the students. I realised that the EAs were talking about Dennis and his friends when one of them pointed at the group. "They're a bunch of trouble, those guys," she said, "They should be put in a separate class." Having previously seen and been impressed by Dennis' behaviour and performance in class, I was rather taken aback to hear this, but this was apparently the opinion that some staff members had regarding his peer group. It seemed that Dennis' own reported behaviour also changed over time. I had by then lost contact with him since he was no longer in Dan's class, but the education assistants reported that Dennis had walked out of his music class with some other boys after swearing at his teacher. It was for this reason, among others, that a meeting was called between his teachers and his mother—a meeting that, as I noted earlier, never eventuated.

Among the most interesting student peer interactions I observed at Pine View was that between two Year 8 girls who were Karl's classmates. These girls were not

only classmates but also sisters. In fact, Jackie and Kate were twin sisters. Despite being twins, however, the girls could not be any more different. If it had not been for Dan informing me of the nature of their relation, I would not have known that they were related at all. They were physically quite different. Not only were their non-identical in facial features, Jackie was shorter while Kate was at least a head taller. Jackie was light haired while Kate's hair was dark. They also seemed to be quite distinct in personalities, attitudes towards schoolwork, in-class behaviour, academic performance and social interactions with their peers. They almost never interacted with each other and almost invariably sat apart; Jackie by the window with a group of three other girls while Kate sat in the back a few rows away, either alone or with one other girl.

Jackie always completed her work and had no record of behaviour problem, while Kate constantly needed to be 'pushed' by her teacher to do work and was frequently admonished for speaking with her friend when Dan was explaining the lesson. Needless to say, the other students were not unaware of how different the Twins were from each other. During one lesson I decided to position myself at the desk next to Cindy, an Indonesian girl sitting next to Jackie. After conversing with me about what I was doing in the classroom and about her family background and other things, Cindy suddenly pointed to Jackie next to her. "Did you know that her," she said and then turned her finger towards Kate behind us, "and her are twins?" I nodded. "But they're different," Cindy pointed out. I told her that I had indeed noticed the difference between the two twins. It was the lack of visible interaction between twins Jackie and Kate, except for the odd occasion, which made the relationship between them seem interesting. If it were the case that Jackie did distance herself from her sister because she did not want to be identified

with Kate, this would be an example of students' self-interpretation and/or self-representation being acted out in their social interactions with their peers. Furthermore, that the twins did not only look different but also had different attitudes towards school and peers also seems to lend support to the suggestion that students' behaviour is not merely the product of family backgrounds or upbringing, which Jackie and Kate obviously shared.

As Kent had described, the Year 10 Society and Environment classes were rotated throughout the year between Jay, Dan and Sonny in order to give them a taste of the three specialized social studies subjects taught in Year 11. Jay would introduce them to study of history, Dan to geography, while Sonny acquainted them with the principles of economics. The Year 10 group I followed was the one that started with Jay at the beginning of the year. It was a mixed group. Unlike Year 8 and 9 classes, Year 10 classes included students who were part of the Academic Enrichment Program and those who were not. The academic performance of the members of that class therefore varied. Similarly, there was also a wide range of behavioural patterns in that group; some of the students there never seemed to get in trouble with the teachers, while others appeared to find themselves being reprimanded quite frequently for 'misbehaviour' such as persistently speaking when they were not supposed to, and so on.

One of the students in that Year 10 group that seemed to frequently incur the teachers' reprimand was Cole. Although he was not a dominant presence in the room, and was never loud like Year 9 student Allen was, he was considered to be an unrepentant rule-breaker by some of his teachers. Sonny, who had previously taught him in Year 8, said described him as someone that would "make a good

con man. He's got the charm, the smile, but the evil attitude". I tried to approach Cole. He would always call me 'Sir' and I would insist that he refrained from doing it as I did not wish to be identified with the teachers. Yet he insisted in doing so. In Chapter 5 I use this interaction between Cole and myself in discussing students' capacity to reflexively define the nature of their teachers' relevance to themselves on the personal level.

While my attempt to gain Cole's confidence did not succeed, some other students in his class were, after some time, comfortable enough to speak to me as they would a friend or, at least an acquaintance, almost from the outset. One of those students was Edward, a member of the Year 10 class, as well as the Academic Enrichment Program. I noted Edward's ability to express himself in a witty and humorous way, which occasionally did get him into trouble with teachers. He had what can be called an intermittent—or "on-again, off-again—romantic relationship with Jess, a classmate he had known since they started high school. They usually sat together in the Society and Environment class, and together with two other girls formed a clique in that Year 10 class. I interviewed Edward not once but twice, wherein he not only talked about his own life and relationships, including that with Jess, but also about what he thought of adolescent friendships and romance in general. Regarding this subject, I also noticed an interesting pattern in student peer relationships. Older students like Edward and Jess seemed to be more likely to form friendships across gender lines, while mixed-gender cliques were virtually absent in the Year 8 classes that I observed. I think this bears further investigation as it might give insight into the link between friendship choices and students' self-perceptions. Chapter 6 is dedicated to a discussion on this subject.

I have offered brief descriptions of Dan and Jay's classes and, more importantly, some of the members thereof to give an idea of the kinds of students that are the focus of this study. It is impossible to analyse the behaviour of all of the two teachers' students, or even all of those that have been mentioned here, due to space constraints. However, in the following chapters many of these students, their behaviour and their interactions with others at school, teachers and peers alike, will be referred to as case studies in my investigation of the nature of the link between student self-interpretation and behaviour in general.

Relief teachers

There were times throughout the study period when Jay and Dan were not able to come to work for various reasons, personal or otherwise. In these instances place was taken by a relief teacher for the duration of their absence.¹³ Students' interaction with relief teachers was of interest to me because I had worked as one. It was also highly relevant to my research questions as I found these occasions to be good opportunities for studying the nature of the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. To begin with, many students responded to relief teachers with a marked difference compared to how they interacted with their regular teachers like Jay and Dan. Some of Jay's students, like Allen and Noon, I could not exactly call model students or even compliant, nevertheless they always seemed to defer to Jay's authority, even if begrudgingly. Towards relief teachers, however, they responded quite differently. Even the most firm effort to assert authority on the part of these substitute teachers were often met with open

¹³ Also variously known in other parts of the world as substitute teachers, supply teachers or casual teachers.

defiance by those with a reputation for being difficult students. The question to be investigated, therefore, is why many students responded differently to relief teachers compared to their regular teachers, when both clearly represented the school's hierarchy and therefore carried the same formal authority as staff members.

The first relief teacher I met at Pine View was Michael, who was taking Jay's Year 10 class when I arrived at the classroom one day. I could hear the difference between how students responded to Michael compared to their usual response to Jay even before I entered the classroom. While I was still outside the door I could hear the noise they were making spilling out into the staircase. It was of a level that would have invited strong reproach from Jay had the regular teacher been in the room. When I entered the classroom I found Michael, a man younger than Jay, at the head of the classroom. After explaining to Michael what I was doing there I went to my usual spot in the back and out of his way.

The first thing I noticed was that most of the students were no longer sitting according to the seating plan that Jay had assigned during the previous lesson. Some of the students, mostly boys, were walking around the room and/or talking loudly and laughing together with friends at the desks behind them. Michael firmly told one of the boys to cease what he was doing and return to his seat, but the boy simply ignored him. I was surprised when the relief teacher took little further action to control the student and watched him instead. Michael seemed to know some of those in the class as he referred to them by name. From personal experience, and from what other teachers had told me, I knew that showing students that one knew their names was often important for relief teachers; it

indicated to the adolescents that they could not get away with defying instructions without consequences, such as detention. It was, therefore, a surprise to me that despite Michael's familiarity with some of the students his attempt to exercise authority as a teacher was nevertheless repeatedly ignored by more than one student there. Some of the boys were also wearing their hats in the classroom against school rules. Had Jay been in the room he would have told the students concerned to take off the hats before long.

, at one point during the lesson the relief teacher asked me if I was at the school to watch teachers as well as students. I did not know if he asked this because he was afraid of appearing bad in my notes, but I said that I was watching both. Michael then said that he was relatively relaxed with keeping the rules because, "I kind of have to be Jay here. I've known the kids for a while." While I understood what he was saying—that he had to take the position of authority in the class in lieu of their regular teacher—the students' response to the relief teacher's authority was quite clearly distinct from that they would have demonstrated towards Jay. A further illustration of this did not take long to present itself. Michael proceeded to instruct one of the male students who was walking around the classroom to resume his seat. When the boy ignored him, Michael repeated his instruction a few times with increasing firmness. After about the fifth time, the boy turned to the relief teacher and sharply said, "What?" Michael, who was clearly exasperated at that stage told the student to move to the front, informing him, "This is your last chance." The boy finally did, begrudgingly, move to the front but did not refrain from continuing to speak. Meanwhile, two other boys were also moved to seats in the back, but they kept talking loudly and Michael took no further action to reprimand them.

Observing the Year 10 lesson with Michael suggested to me that a relief teacher's approach to students could be an influential factor in how the adolescents behaved in class. I suspected that in trying to "be Jay"—to assume the position of the regular teacher—Michael might have become even more lenient in his approach to students' misbehaviour than Jay himself would have been. I considered that this might have led them to think that the relief teacher either did not have the authority to take them to task for their behaviour or was not prepared or willing to use that authority. Another relief teacher's encounter with that class, however, compelled me to consider that perhaps there are other factors at play that cause the discrepancy between many students' responses to substitute teachers and how they usually interacted with their regular teachers.

Lucy was one of Pine View's relief teachers that I only met once at the school. Like Michael, she was not new to some of the students in the Year 10 class. But unlike Michael, Lucy was firmly insistent that they follow school rules while in the classroom. She gave them firm and ample warnings for them to correct their behaviour. These warnings, however, were not taken seriously by some of the students, especially by some of the boys. As she was cautioning them, they chuckled and responded by making cheeky comments about what she was saying. The first part of the lesson consisted of her reading to the group, which she had to stop a few times as the class was being repeatedly distracted by what she called "a small group of people that are consistently being ridiculous." She then wrote "Lunch Time Detention" on the board and listed a few of the students' name underneath. One of the names she included was that of Noon. Seeing this, Noon immediately strode up to the blackboard and erased his name with his hand. Lucy

was outraged. “That’s an instant report!” she cried as she watched the boy walk back to his seat.

Lucy seemed to be losing control of class by this time. With a loud voice, the relief teacher told the class in general to return to their seats and be quiet. When many of the boys did not comply, she repeated her instruction even more loudly. Yet this did nothing to change the students’ behaviour and they ignored her, continuing to be out of their seats and loudly joking around with each other. Apparently as a last resort, Lucy threatened to hold the class back from lunch if they did not start complying with how she wanted them to behave, a commonly used student behaviour management strategy. However, in this case it did not seem to be working. Lucy stood up in front of the class and raised her voice over those of the students. “That’s absolutely it!” Some of the students, laughed at her. “That is not funny!” she responded, but one of the boys said that they got told that a lot. When the class finally quieted down, Lucy began to speak again. “Being called ‘rude’ and ‘disgusting’ is not something to wear as a badge of pride,” she said. Yet from the way students responded to the relief teacher’s rebuke I suspected that it was precisely how they perceived such labels—that the more they could provoke the teacher into being angry, the prouder they were. If nothing else, the Year 10 students’ response to Lucy’s attempt to assert authority as a teacher seemed to suggest that a firm hand would not necessarily cause students to accept a relief teacher as the head of the group in the same way they would accept their regular teachers.

Another relief teacher that took the Year 10 class was Annie, an older woman who, I discovered, had actually been my classmate during my training as a teacher

at university. In her case, since Jay was away for a week due to personal reasons, Annie had more time to spend with the group than either Michael or Lucy did. This did seem to result in the behaviour of some of the students becoming more cooperative as the week went on, but it was still not on the same level that they usually gave their regular teacher. Like Lucy, and unlike Michael, Annie also took a much stricter approach to managing the students' behaviour. She was stringent in regards to their adherence to school rules such as taking hats off in class, not chewing gum during class, and not making noises during exposition time. Like Michael, Annie already knew most of the students in that class and called them by their names. This seemed to remind them that she could take them to task for any difficult behaviour on their part. Unlike Michael, Annie invariably insisted on waiting until everyone was quiet before proceeding with the lesson. In this her approach was similar to Jay's. Like the regular teacher, she also told one of the students who was persistently misbehaving to leave the classroom.

Nevertheless, it still seemed to me that the students did not take Annie or her authority as a teacher seriously, at least during the first lesson with her. For example, when a couple of the boys in the back started making distracting noises with coins, which everyone could clearly hear, Annie told them to stop what they were doing. They then denied that there were any coins in their hands. They started talking during discussions, and Annie waited for them to be quiet. The chatter did eventually die down, but it took longer than it would had been Jay at the helm. "Somebody," she had to say loudly by way of reprimand, "is being rude, even when I'm talking."

The next day, Annie made the students line up on the staircase landing outside the classroom before they could enter. She said this was so that they would do so in a more orderly fashion. As the lesson went on it became apparent that the group was not going to be as quiet and orderly as Annie might have hoped. As Lucy had done, she wrote names of those that she deemed to be the most disruptive both as a warning; if they persisted in behaving the same way, they would then be instructed to go to lunchtime detention. She also sent one of the boys out of the class room.

Midway through the lesson Annie talked to them for a while about rudeness, after which the class quieted down slightly. This did seem to have some effect on productivity as most of the class proceeded to do work on the worksheet that she had handed out to them. Even though many still talked, Annie said that she was pleased at that level of diligence that she was witnessing. “You’re getting better,” she announced to the class. But the list of names Annie put on the board seemed to be telling a different story as it was getting longer as the lesson progressed. Most of the names belonged to the boys, but there were some of the girls’ names too. One of the names I saw belonged to Hank, who was one of the most respectful and diligent students in the room. (He even insisted on calling me ‘Sir’ because “that’s the way I was raised.”) It was curious, therefore, that Annie decided to include his name in the list, considering that the relief teacher displayed some familiarity with the students in the class. It was possible that Hank was one of those she had not previously met.

Despite the relative firmness of her approach, her obvious familiarity with the students and, more importantly, the longer time she had with the students, it was

apparent that they still did not take Annie as seriously as they did their regular teacher. In fact, one male student's response to her reprimand illustrated the suggestion that students did not consider Annie in the same light as Jay. The boy in question was not working on the worksheet that Annie had given the class but was doing work for another subject instead. When Annie confronted him, he argued that Jay wanted him to do that work. His invocation of the regular teacher as a higher authority would seem to indicate that he—and perhaps others there—did not perceive the relief teacher's authority as equal to Jay's. What, then, might be the key factor that enabled most regular teachers to have authority of the class the way that most relief teachers could not do? In Chapter 4 I investigate this question as part of my interrogation of the broader nature of student-teacher relationships.

Outside the Classrooms

While classrooms were the most informative setting for observing students' interactions with teachers, it was in the schoolyards—or 'quads', short for quadrangles—that I could observe students interacting most freely with each other. I spent most of my recesses and lunchtimes either observing one particular quad, usually the Year 8 or Year 9 quad, or walking around the different parts of the grounds where students 'hung around' during these moments of lull in their school day. The school's main quadrangles were divided into four parts, each dedicated to a particular year group, with Years 11 and 12 students sharing the same quad adjacent to the canteen area. This did not mean that students were restricted only to their own year group's quad. While they were officially meant to restrict their movements within their own year group's quad, many students

frequently crossed over to quads designated for other year groups. This allowed a number of students, like Adrian, to make friends in other year groups.

Observations and interactions with students outside the classroom setting allowed a different kind of insight into their school life. Free from having to do school work, less restricted by teachers constantly watching them and able to move freely around the school, they were able to socialise with a much greater degree of freedom. I initially limited myself only to observations of students during recess and lunch times, particularly in the Year 9 quads. At this stage none of the students seemed to pay attention to my presence there. It was likely many had thought me one of the education assistants. This allowed me to pick out patterns of interactions among students without interruption.

I spent most of my break time throughout the year in the Year 8 and Year 9 quads, which were adjacent to each other. The spot provided the best vantage point of the greatest number of student groups that I was familiar with. Even within that relatively small space I saw that various cliques quite invariably occupied the same parts of the quads every break time. Members of the Academic Enrichment Program would gather around under a tree, near the hallway leading to the staff room. Not far from the tree was a picnic bench where one could often find some of students with learning disabilities, those with the Education Support program, often accompanied by a teaching assistant or two. Meanwhile, a small group of girls would always be sitting around on a raised platform outside the performing arts room across the quad. As far as I could see, the consistency with which student groups occupied a particular spot in the school grounds also extended to most other cliques.

I noticed that many peer groups among the younger students, usually formed along gender lines, similar to their seating pattern in the classroom. I had sought signs of peer groups based on common 'subculture' or shared interests, much like the 'footballers' and the 'handballers' in Walker's (1988) ethnography, or peer groups formed around ethnic lines like the 'Greeks' in the same study. Most of the groups I saw in the Year 8 and Year 9 quads (which were adjacent to each other) did not seem to have been formed around any particular subcultures. However, when I ventured out into the oval (football field) I did often see roughly the same group of students playing soccer. One group of Year 10 students, for example, was described by one of their own, Edward, as a "mongrel" group because he was aware that his friends were quite diverse in personality types and personal interests. Where ethnicity was concerned, most peer groups that I saw congregating in the Year 8 and Year 9 quads seemed to be ethnically mixed. Most of the members Year 8 AEP group, for instance, were White Australian (e.g. Albert), but there were also boys from Indonesian (Budi), Japanese (Hoshi) and Indian (Rajiv) backgrounds. The only single-ethnic peer group I found at Pine View was a group of male Aboriginal students, whose members came and went throughout the year, numbering no more than ten boys at a time.

Early on in the year, whenever I was making my observations in the quads I made it a point to take note of patterns in students' choice of fashion. I took notes on students' colour preferences in choosing bags, hats, shoes and other accessories, for example. I believed that this might be an expression of their self- and group-identities. I saw that boys tended to choose black, while girls often opted for blue, black or pink. Aside from this kind of observation, however, a more detailed

analysis of students' fashion styles was difficult because students were required to wear a uniform. Uniforms could be modified and supplementary accessories could be worn. The wearing of bracelets, hats, and even thumb drives on a lanyard as a necklace could be seen as an expression of personal identity. Those in the hockey program often wore their hat constantly, emblazoned with the logo of the program's corporate sponsor, for example. Albert, the Year 8 student, proudly wore his multiple thumb drives around his neck like a piece of jewellery, admitting that it was to show that he was a "nerd". However, I consider these expressions of identity to be in need of a deeper probing that can be reasonably done here. As the central issue of this study is students' social relationships I decided to focus more on their interactions with each other, which I think are more amenable to interpretation as a mode of social identity expression.

Some days, instead of spending lunch or recess with the students in the quads I opted to remain with the teachers—usually Jay—either in the Society and Environment office or in the staff room. All teachers were required to meet in the staff room nearly every recess. During this time announcements relevant to staff were made and topics such as the upcoming upper school ball or river cruise would be discussed. It was also during this time that I had the opportunity to discover more about staff members' work; early on in the term it was during recess in the staff room that I got to know Rick, the school chaplain, and first discussed with him the nature and challenges of his job at Pine View.

During these recess times in the staff room, teachers from different departments might raise issues about certain students. When teachers were concerned enough about certain students' behaviour or performance, though, they organised special

meetings in which they could discuss the issue and attempt to formulate responses. This was the case with Celine, whose behaviour apparently overwhelmed her female teachers. Students and students' parents were not the only topics that teachers talked about during recess and lunch. They also quite frequently talked about each other. Sometimes I obtained this kind of information simply through joining one of the tables in the staff room at recess and listening in on the conversations between staff members at that table. In any case, most staff members seemed to feel at ease with my presence among them, even when they were expressing disapproval with one of their own colleagues.

The fly evolved: From participant observer to observing participant

Pine View's principal Les Barber, wanted to make sure that I did nothing to obstruct his teachers' work. As I have said, I spent much of my time in both Jay and Dan's classrooms in the back observing students' interactions with teachers and peers. Initially students' responses to my attempt to interact with them were quite limited. Sometimes they seemed to respond with as few words as possible, and on a few occasions they even ignored me when I asked them questions about themselves. It was possible that at that time they did not know what to make of me, this adult in the classroom who nevertheless claimed to be neither a teacher nor an EA. But as I became more familiar to the teachers and especially to their students, they seemed to begin to consider me part of the group.

At times the teachers even asked me to participate in the lesson, which I usually did with a degree of care. On one occasion Jay asked me to watch over his class

while he left the room to take care of some urgent matter. Unfortunately, he made it known to the students that I would be supervising them in his absence. I later explained to him that it was not a position I was comfortable with, since I wanted the students to trust me, not see me as one of the teachers. He understood my concern, and even though he still involved me in class activities from time to time, it was never again to be in a supervisory role. During some lessons Jay deliberately left his classes with the express intention of letting me see if they behaved differently in his absence. Almost every time he did this, his suspicion was confirmed and the level of noise and socialising in the room increased drastically, only to drop just as drastically the moment he stepped back into the room. The only time his departure did not produce any effect was in his Year 8 Academic Enrichment class, which he considered to be his 'good' class.

The most common question that the students asked me in the classroom was usually something along the lines of 'What are you doing here?' The following, a conversation in the Year 10 class, represents a typical short conversation with one or two students of this sort:

Student 1: "Are you learning to be a teacher?"

Me: "No."

Student 2: "What *exactly* do you do?"

Me: "I'm writing a book."

Student 2: "About?"

Me: "About *you!*" [Pointing at him and the rest of the class]

Student 1: [Looking a little bit taken aback and slightly incredulous] "Why would you want to write about us?"

Other than asking me similar questions, most of the students initially made little or no contact with me. As they became accustomed to having me with them, however, some began to greet me in the classroom and in the hallways. Celine from Year 8 frequently came up to me and held her hand up to me for a 'high five' before telling her friends that I was her "friend". She asked me if I remembered

her, “the loud one” and “the smart one”, alluding to what I had said to her about her intelligence. In the classroom, too, she sometimes asked me to help her with the task she was working on or to find the books she needed at the library. Once she also asked me what an anthropologist was. I said that we studied people, which led to more questions from her about the nature of what did.

On a number of occasions, Year 9 student Max said “Hi” and waved his hand at me. He also asked me once if I had some “quality notes”, showing some interest in what I was doing at the school, while his friend showed me his school folder, which was decorated with a hand-drawn picture of a horned woman. “That’s a teacher,” he said, but when I asked who it was he would not tell, leading Max to tell me that it was their mathematics teacher, causing his friend to look panicked. At another time one of the boys from his group came up to me and asked if I was watching them. I replied by saying that I was watching everybody. Some older boys then approached me and asked if I was all right, and if I wanted to sit at their bench, saying that it was “quite comfortable”. Before long, some of the students I became more acquainted with started to become friendlier towards me, but since I was an adult in the school setting, it was not surprising that most began by calling me “Sir”. I usually responded by telling the students that I preferred that they did not, that I was not a teacher and would therefore rather be addressed by my first name. The habit, however, persisted, suggesting that it had somehow become imbedded in their practice and being as students.

As the year progressed, my observations were influencing the development of my research questions. At the same time, my role as a researcher conducting participant observation in the school was undergoing a similarly subtle but

consistent transformation. The 'participant' part of that role was gradually becoming just as prominent, and sometimes even more so, than its 'observation' component. As I became more acquainted with many of the students, I became increasingly involved in their lives at school even though I had not taken on a formal role there. While going around the classroom during lessons to meet the students they sometimes asked me for help in doing their schoolwork. When the occasion permitted, and with some gentle prodding on my part, they would tell me about their lives outside of school, about their hobbies and friends.

With increasing familiarity, some of the students also seemed to gain more and more confidence in me. Whereas at the beginning of the year most appeared to view me with suspicion, and even Hank, one of the well-behaving students in Year 10, insisted on calling me 'Sir', by the middle of the year some of the interpersonal barriers between a number of the adolescents and myself seemed to have dissolved. This was illustrated by a short conversation I had with Noah, one of Hank's classmates. On that day the whole school was having an athletics carnival. I was catching up on my field notes in the quad on the edge of the football oval where the activities were taking place. Noah and two other boys walked up to where I was sitting and asked me what I was doing. They then said that they were bored because athletics was not "real sport", and that they were going to go home. Noah said that they had notes from their parents but the teachers would not let them leave. Noah then asked if I was going to tell the teachers. After a second's deliberation I told him that I was not. Satisfied with my answer, Noah and his friends left. To me this indicated a change in how some students perceived who I was in that school. Before, they, including Noah, had been calling me 'Sir' out of habit, grouping me with the teachers. But now, at least he and his friends no

longer identified me with that group of adults, which enabled them to trust me not to tell the teachers about their premature departure. Of course, not all students changed the way they identified me; Cole, for instance, refused to believe until the end of the year that I was not a teacher and insisted on referring to me as “Sir”, which I will discuss further in a later chapter.

Much of the increase in my participation at Pine View could be attributed to my contact with Rick Winfield, Pine View’s school chaplain. It began one recess early in the year when I caught up with him in the staff room and introduced myself and explained what I was doing at the school. Rick in turn gave me a brief overview of his job as chaplain at the school. He said that he had “two parts to balance”. The first part of his work was to provide one-on-one counselling and spiritual guidance to students. He also helped students whose personal problems apparently affected their academic performance and behaviour at school. The second part was to organize and run certain extracurricular programs and events throughout the year. These include Healthy Choice Week, Multicultural Day, and a program for Aboriginal students every Friday afternoon designed to encourage school attendance among Indigenous students. Regarding that last program, Rick said that it was born out of the school’s recognition that Aboriginal students had a “higher attendance problem” compared to the rest of the student population. Only those that had a high enough attendance rate (85 percent) were allowed to attend the program. He also had another program for “waggers” (truants), and yet another for students who had lost their parents. He told me that it was important that he did not overfocus on either the pastoral carer or the event organiser aspect of his work.

Rick asked if I was interested in helping him with the programs and events he would be organising. I reasoned that participating in this way would not necessarily identify me as one of the teachers would place me into direct contact with the students. I therefore welcomed the opportunity and accepted his offer. I began by attending most sessions of the Aboriginal program on Friday afternoons, which Rick organised with Jasmine, the school's Aboriginal student liaison officer. Unfortunately, in this program I had to be more of an observer than a participant as there was not much for me to do there: every part of its running was conducted either by Rick or by the expert instructors he brought in. It nevertheless gave me the opportunity to observe Rick's interaction with the students, providing an illustration for the two levels of relationships between students and staff discussed in Chapter 5.

With other events and programs that Rick had invited me to participate in, I was able to be much more involved with the students. An example was Harmony Day, midway through the first term of school, in which I was asked to look after a map of Australia. My assigned task was to assist students in posting their photograph onto the map at recess and lunchtime, with the original intention to allow them to display their sense of belonging to the same nation and community. The purpose of the exercise was to encourage a sense of unity; that regardless of who students were, what they looked like and so on, they were part of the same nation and community, symbolised by the large map of Australia that I was looking after. Ironically, many of the students subverted this meaning when they posted their photographs. They did this by insisting that their photograph be placed next to those of their friends or peer groups they identified with. What this produced was the formation of clusters of faces on the map. The activity became to the students

an opportunity to exhibit their sense of belonging to their small group of peers instead of community, as had been Rick's original intention. Instead of showing unity, the resulting map ended up displaying the various groups and cliques into which Pine View's student body were divided.

Remembering our initial meeting with the principal, Les, I had been deliberately careful that he would not have reason to disapprove of my increasing participation in his students' school life. But my concern may have proved unfounded. A week after Harmony Day, Les called me into his office to discuss the progress of my research. During our conversation he showed me the school newsletter, in which there was an article on that day's activities, complete with a photograph of me in front of the map of Australia, surrounded by students. Les then remarked that both students and teachers seemed to have become used to having me around, and that I had indeed become "part of the furniture" at the school. Joining his thumb and index finger to form a circle in front of his face, the principal told me there was "nil problem" with me being there, and congratulated me.

By end of the academic year, I was no longer simply a "fly on the wall". I had become part of the some of the students' social lives despite my lack of a formal role at the school. I think it safe to say that what I was doing as researcher had shifted from participation observation to what Wacquant (2004:6) has termed "observer participation" in referring to his hands-on ethnographic approach, although I did not go to the extent that he did.¹⁵ I had become part of Pine View's unfolding drama. Les called for one final meeting with me at the end of the year

¹⁵ See also Kaminski (2004) for a similar approach, which he similarly labels "observing participation". Here the ethnographer is a member of the group that he or she examines, which, by implication, usually makes such a study an auto-ethnography.

before I left the school. There he, too, made an observation of how my role among the students and staff there had changed. As an example, he cited what he had seen at the school gym a few days before, when a group from the Reptile Centre had visited the school to educate the students about the different lizards and snakes in their region. The Centre's staff had brought in live reptiles, which they had allowed the students to handle with care. I had been there at the gym, sitting next to Jim, Jay's year 8 student, when a blue-tongued lizard was being passed around the circle of students. Jim had been very hesitant at accepting the animal when it was offered to him. "I saw how you were encouraging the students to have a go at the reptiles," Les now recalled at our meeting, "almost like an EA." The principal said he did not mind my larger-than-planned involvement in his school's life and was in fact quite pleased with it. I was grateful that he said, "You've given an added value to the school."

4

“Teachers Aren’t Friends!”: Students’ perceptions of adult identities

Celine was in trouble again. While everyone else in her Year 8 Society and Environment class was doing work, she was joking around with her friends. Normally, Jay would give any other student in the same type of situation a stern warning. If the student persisted in behaving the same way, he would send them out and give them a harsh ‘talking-to’ regarding the consequences of their actions. On this occasion, too, he decided to call Celine to a spot just outside the classroom door for a ‘talking-to’.

Jay discreetly motioned to me to follow them outside so I could listen in to their conversation. With my pen and notebook in hand, I followed behind Celine as she walked to the door and out of the classroom. I did not want the girl to feel threatened or surrounded, so I sat down nearby, at the top of the stairs leading to the classroom. I made sure not to look at either Jay or Celine. Instead, I opened my book and started scribbling, pretending to not be listening when I was actually eavesdropping and taking notes.

Jay began by explaining to Celine that she was at risk of getting kicked out of the Academic Enrichment Program. The teacher then asked her to think carefully

about what happened should she be dropped from the program. Celine was quiet for a while, seemingly at loss for words. “I want to help you, but you have to work with me,” her teacher then said, before continuing, “It sucks to have no friends.”

This got Celine’s attention. “I have friends,” she said, sounding defensive.

Jay shook his head, indicating to her that she had understood what he meant, and then said, “Yes, but you need friends among teachers, too.”

“*Teachers aren’t friends!*” Celine replied with a look of mild shock on her face.

Jay was then quick to further clarify that he did not mean “play friends”, and pointed out that what he meant by ‘friends’ was people one works with. As an example, he asked whether Jay and I were play friends.

“No,” Celine replied, apparently starting to grasp what her teacher was trying to tell her. To clarify his point further, Jay asked whether she and I were play friends. Again she said, “No”. The teacher then pointed out that we all nevertheless worked together in the school. He told Celine that *that* was the kind of ‘friends’ she needed among the teachers. She needed someone among the staff that would be her ally, someone that would work with her. By now Celine seemed to understand completely the point her teacher was trying to get across. She went back inside the classroom and refrained from causing any more problems for the remainder of the lesson. Not long after that conversation, Jay spoke to her other teachers and volunteered to be the girl’s mentor.

“Please don’t call me *Sir*”, Part I: Schema and students’ interpretation of teachers’ identities

Celine’s conversation with Jay highlights the two facets of students’ identity interpretations I alluded to in Chapter 2: the external social and cultural factors informing self-interpretation and that internal cognitive process of symbolic interpretation itself. Celine was not signifying her interpretation of her own identity but her definition of who Jay and her other teachers were in relation to herself. When she said that “Teachers aren’t friends!”, she expressed not so much her perception of herself but that of the adults and what their relevance to her life as persons, which will be the primary concern of this chapter.

How did Celine come to the conclusion that teachers are not friends—or at least not *her* friends? This question points to the first step in exploring the nature of student–teacher interactions and relationships. In answering it I examine the external and internal aspects of how she and her fellow students interpret identities. I first examine several external sociocultural factors that inform how students interpret not only their own self-meanings but also those of others at school, like teachers. First, students’ perceptions of teachers are undoubtedly culturally informed. One way to understand how culture influences individual identity interpretations is by looking at cultural symbols. I have said in Chapter 2 that culture informs personal self-perception through the cultural symbols that become part of how we interpret who we are. I cited Gregg’s (1998) argument that many symbols objects we incorporate into our self-interpretation—words, concepts, myths and imageries—are drawn from our society’s cultural lexicon. This is seen in Gregg’s accounts of the different ways that his North African

informants reflexively adopt cultural ideas and stories into their self-understanding. The same can be said of high school students' interpretation of their teachers' relational identity and relevance to their own lives. As Britzman (2011) has also suggested, drawing from her experience as an educator, cultural myths work together in teachers' personal histories in their teaching practices.

This conception that Celine and many other students have that teachers are not to be perceived as their friends would, therefore, be grounded to any extent in the cultural values that they have incorporated into their perceptions of various people and the nature of their relationships with them. Like 'womb' and 'mercy' in Gregg's (1998) ethnography, the words 'friend' and 'teacher' are cultural symbols. Conceptualizing them as such is an important part of understanding how cultural factor informing Celine's adverse reaction to her teacher's suggestion that 'teachers' can be 'friends'. The meanings given to such cultural symbols are, to any extent, informed by the cultural lexicon from which they are drawn (Gregg 1998). The way those words are understood and applied in interpreting others' identities, of course, would be influenced the same way. It follows, therefore, to examine that cultural 'encyclopedia' from which Celine drew her understanding of the cultural symbols with which she constructed her interpretation of what teachers were or were not. Burbank (2006:7) has suggested that 'impersonality' is a "focal characteristic" of formal Western institutions such as the school. Sergiovanni (1994a) has observed that cultural perceptions in Western societies lean more towards viewing schools primarily as institutional organisations than as communities in the informal sense.

It is from this type of cultural matrix that Celine drew her understanding of the

relevance of teachers to her person and in her life. Hence it is safe to say that, at least at that early stage in their student–teacher relationship, Celine mainly perceived Jay in the light of this institutional impersonality, a polar opposite to how she would understand ‘friend’, a concept characterized more by informal and interpersonal connection. This is further coupled with the perception of persons primarily as part of institutions, “which do not exist apart from them” (Burbank 2006:7). What this entails is that, at least at that time, in the absence of any interpersonal relationship with the teacher, she had no basis on which to interpret Jay’s identity other than that provided by the institutional context in which they encountered each other. Again, this basis is impersonal and therefore incompatible with how she understood the concept of ‘friend’.

It is not surprising, therefore, that at least for Celine, the cultural meaning of the term ‘friend’ did not seem naturally attuned with her understanding of who and what a teacher was supposed to be. ‘Teacher’ and ‘friend’ are cultural symbols whose shared meanings are not generally seen as mutually compatible, at least in the social context of the formal institution of schooling. Celine’s response to being told that she needed friends among teachers certainly indicated that she did not see the two words, or the concepts associated therewith, to be mutually associated. One can assume that this perception has been culturally derived. But as I have put forward in Chapter 2, following Gregg (1998), such cultural symbols are ‘structurally ambiguous’ and their meaning can be reinterpreted. It seems that it was this ambiguity that allowed Jay to redefine and use the concept of ‘friend’ to gain Celine’s cooperation.

Fischer (1982:288), in his study of the meaning of friendship, argues that the

ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the term ‘friend’ “creates problems in trying to interpret reports of friendships and therefore in trying to explain it or to use it as an indicator of social involvement”. Theoretical discussions often treat the term as though its meaning were fixed and obvious, and research studies take for granted how it is understood by the subjects. However, Fischer (1982) points out, formal efforts to define the term reveal that the concept is more ambiguous than often thought, and that definitions of the word itself often conflict with each other, and thereby “do not facilitate operationalization” (Fischer 1982:288). As is the case with the root word *r*h*m* in Gregg’s (1998) ethnography, this ambiguous meaning allows the meaning of the term ‘friend’ to be redefined or reinterpreted. This is especially so with terms such as ‘friend’, which is probably so ambiguous because it is a label for a human relationship, and human relationships are, as a general rule, complex. In the case of the conversation between Jay and Celine, the girl had originally understood the meaning of the word ‘friend’ solely in terms of what her teacher called ‘play friend’. By the end of their talk, however, he seemed to have been able to suggest to her that there was another interpretation of the concept of ‘friend’, and one that could also be applied to teachers—namely someone with whom one worked, together or as an ally, and this was how he wanted Celine to see him.

Whatever its form or source, cultural influence on students’ interpretation of teachers’ identities operate on a number of levels. I have discussed the symbolic aspect of this influence, and will investigate its other facets by examining the ways students use another commonly found word at school: ‘Sir’. On one occasion, I asked Jay for his thoughts on Pine View’s students in general. He began his response by comparing the behaviour of the students there to how those at his previous schools had behaved. Jay said that one of those schools, Percival Parks

High, was rife with uncontrollable behavioural problems that would have made Pine View's worst pale in comparison. Compared to those students, he said, the ones he was currently teaching at Pine View were quite well behaved and well mannered. As an example, Jay said, "at least here they still call me *Sir*". I thought nothing of that remark at the time. However, as I subsequently observed the different ways that students use the word 'Sir', it became evident that, in its actual use, the term was employed with various intents and meanings. Jay evidently saw students' use of the term 'Sir' as a sign of respect, but my observation and first-hand experience with it gave reason to question this assumption.

First, it seems that most student use 'respectful' terms like 'Sir' and 'Miss' when addressing teachers more out of habit than out of genuine respect.¹⁶ I noted this not only from my observation of the exchanges between students and teachers but also through my own first-hand interactions with the adolescents. Upon commencement of my participant observation, I asked teachers Jay and Dan to introduce me to their students as 'Jonathan'.¹⁷ The rationale behind this was to discourage the students from perceiving me as one of the teachers, which I was not, and at the same time encourage them to have confidence and be more open with me than they might have been with a teacher. Likewise, as I began to interact with individual students, I often asked them not to call me 'Sir' or 'Mr Tay' because I was neither a teacher nor studying to be a teacher at the school. However, in spite of both their teachers' introduction and my own personal request, at least during the first few months of school many of the students persisted in calling me 'Sir', the notable exceptions being those in Jay's Year 8

¹⁶ I noticed that most students in most circumstances preferred 'Miss', pronounced as such, when addressing a female teacher or staff member without invoking her name, regardless of the teacher's age or marital status.

¹⁷ I chose to be known by this, my baptismal name, at Pine View because past experience shows that most people find it easier to pronounce, as well as to spell and to remember than 'Ciawy'.

classes, who caught on to calling me by my first name early on in the year.

Most of the students I personally talked to seemed to eventually understand who I was. From my conversation with Hank, a Year 10 student:

Ciawy (T): “Do you have any problems in this school?”

Hank (H): “Uhm... there are a few morons in this school that are, like, just annoy me. I’ve never been in serious fights or anything like that. But there are a few people that annoy me. But apart from that, no, not really. [Silent] How about you?”

T: “*Me?* [Think] Not really. This school has been pretty good.”

H: “[Laughs][...] You don’t know this school well enough!”

T: “[Laugh] I’m noticing, I’m noticing. Yeah... I’m noticing...”

H: “You’re all right. You’ll get through this school. Everyone likes you, because you’re not a teacher.”

T: “That’s good to know [...].”

At the same time, there was also the tendency to group me with the teachers, presumably because I was an adult in the school environment. From the same conversation with James:

T: “Any favourite teacher?”

H: “Uh... I got a few. There’s Mr Blunt, because he’s funny. Mr Vincent, he’s still here, and like Santa Claus now. Mr Bullock, outdoor ed teacher. He’s a really kind person. Mr Peterson, uh, he’s a good man. Mr Jakes calls me a freak. He’s like seven foot tall, and I’ve got bigger shoes than him, so I’m like, ‘stop being so tall [...].’ Ms Grohns, she’s all right. Mr Banes, he’s a funny person. Mr Barber the principal. He’s not one of my teachers, but he calls me dog boy.” [Laughs]

T: [Laugh] “Why is that?”

H: “Because there’s been three stray dogs running to the school, everytime they run in I’m the only one that goes out and catches them, so he calls me dog boy. [...] *Oh, and you.* [emphasis added]”

T: “But I’m not a teacher.”

H: “No, but you’re cool.”

T: “Thank you.”

It is clear from this that, at least at that point in our acquaintance, Hank classified me as a teacher together with the others, most likely simply because I was an adult in the school setting just like they were. Like most students, James addressed me as ‘Sir’ since we first met, even after it was evident that he understood who I was and what I was doing. I said that he did not have to. But since I was an adult, he insisted on it because “that’s the way I was raised.” This, of course, is a clear

example of the way socially reproduced cultural values directly informs students' perception of adults at school and how they are to be interacted with. In James' case, it was through his upbringing.

The perceived connection between being an adult and being a person in authority also seemed to extend beyond terms of address to students' expectations of what I or other adults should and should not do. After Hank called me 'cool', he then asked if he could borrow a pen. I found one in my pocket that I had found in the staff room earlier at recess. Micah, who was sitting next to Hank, then took the pen and asked if he could throw it out of the window. I then said that I did not particularly care, since it was not mine. At that, both Hank and Micah seemed shocked. "But you're a teacher! You shouldn't be stealing things!" Micah cried. Just as Celine had evidently been taken aback by the suggestion that teachers could be 'friends', the two boys also seemed surprised. No doubt my 'stealing' the pen ran contrary to what they had expected of a teacher. Also like Celine's, their expectations of what teachers should or should not do were culturally derived, and it seemed that this expectations they projected onto me simply because I was an adult in the school setting, just like Mr. Schneider and the other teachers.

For some, my adult age alone was sufficient to set me apart from them and presumably in the same social category as their teachers. For example, this can be seen in what Karl said to me before we developed an interpersonal connection:

At lunch I met Karl. He was just walking around looking [depressed] as usual. I followed him, tried to get him to loosen up. He said he was "so bored", there was no one to talk to. I told him he could talk to me. He said "*But you're an adult!*" I said [I was] not [an adult] in my heart and laughed. But he didn't find it funny. So I let him go. Later I found him near the demountables with another kid, kicking some plastic object on the ground. I left him alone as he found a companion.

Even some of those who *agreed* not to call me ‘Sir’ might find it awkward or uncomfortable to call an adult male in the school context by his given name. Noah, a student in the Year 10 class, was one of them. I often spoke to Noah during lessons and it did not take long before he seemed to become comfortable speaking to me, which also led to an interview. From what interaction we had throughout the year led me to conclude that Noah did not necessarily perceive me as a teacher, and even displayed a measure of confidence in me. This is indicated by the conversation we had during an athletics festival at the school, which I already recounted in Chapter 3. Here I recount it again from my field notes:

Noah and his friend came over to me in the quad. They asked what I was doing. I said I was putting thoughts down on paper. They asked if I was bored. They said they were. Noah said it sucked that they’d gotten letters from their parents to be let to go out for lunch [b]ut the school wouldn’t allow it. So they’re pretty pissed off. [Noah’s] friend said he didn’t mind “real” sports (whatever that means), and Noah said if it was [sic] tug-of-war it was okay, but this is athletics sports and it’s boring. Yet they were told they had to participate and weren’t allowed to go. [...] [T]hey asked me whether I was going to tell the teachers about them leaving. I told them I wouldn’t—wasn’t allowed to.

It was evident that despite his apparent suspicion, Noah did not perceive me as one of the students’ collective Other, the teachers. Otherwise, I presume, he would not have told me about his intention to leave the school grounds without permission in the first place. Nevertheless, ever since our first encounter, Noah constantly and habitually called me as ‘Sir’. While he made no objection about addressing me by my first name, he evidently found it unnatural to do so, as if it contradicted his natural tendencies. Each time he did so, I would remind him to call me ‘Jonathan’, at which point he would promptly apologise for having mistakenly called me ‘Sir’. Noah’s constant use of that term-of address when speaking to me—and his apology for doing so—would seem to run contrary to Jay’s view that students use such terms of address as an intentional sign of respect. Rather, like Noah, many of them seem to do so habitually, a practice resulting

from the process of enculturation in the school's values and practices.

Others, such as Wacquant (2004) and Mahmood (2001) have turned to *habitus*, as popularised by Bourdieu (1977), in explaining how institutional practices become part of one's individual practice, or habit, even at the subconscious level¹⁹. Here, however, I instead turn to schema theory, which I think serves as a more adequate theoretical framework in investigating the input of culture in personal actions. It is a more sophisticated means for interrogating the "psychological content", as Burbank (2006:17) puts it, of how cultural practices such as calling adults at school 'Sir' become a routine part of students' everyday behaviour. Of particular pertinence here are cultural schemas and role schemas. I have discussed cultural schemas in the previous chapter and will only present a brief review here. These schemas are formed through the shared experiences of individuals in a society, producing common "general patterns" or similarities in how people understand certain things in the world (Strauss and Quinn 1997:49, 82; also Garro 2000:285, Nishida 2005:402). Some cultural schemas are linked to self-schemas, resulting in a degree of shared-ness in how people perceive or interpret some dimensions of identities (Markus 1977, Howard 2000). This helps us understand how students learn the habits influencing their interactions with the adults. For instance, it is useful in thinking about the means through which students like Noah adopt certain practices peculiar to schooling, such as the habit of addressing adults in the school environment as 'Sir'.

¹⁹ Wacquant (2004) employs *habitus* in studying the incorporation of boxing conventions and practices into individual boxers' habits in their training and competition, using his own experience as a case study. Mahmood (2001) similarly utilizes *habitus* in her study of how the ritual practice of *ṣalât*, Muslim prayer, can become ingrained in the body of adherents even to the extent of becoming close to a physiological need.

The other type of schemas pertinent to the interpretation of identities is role schemas. These are the schemas “organiz[ing] one’s knowledge about the typical or appropriate behaviour occupying a given position” (Ashforth 2001:249, citing Fiske and Taylor 1991). They connect our understanding of our various roles in society with culturally propagated values such as those associated with concepts of authority and hierarchy. These role schemas inform and link students’ understanding of their role relations with those teachers and other adults with how they are to relate behaviourally to those adults. Such behaviour includes addressing them as ‘Sir’ or ‘Miss’ and not their given names. It can be seen as the means by which students’ symbolic interpretations of teachers’ identities are connected to their social behaviour towards the adults. Moreover, in this way role schema also becomes the means by which adolescents acquire habitus, in particular, in this case, in relevance to interaction with teachers and other adults at school. This would explain why some students like Noah found it so difficult to call me by my first name; doing so would contradict the practice that had been ingrained into their being as students through role schema connections.

A further evidence of the schema connection’s role in shaping students’ perceptions of teachers and other adults can be found in an interesting trend I noted in my interaction with students of different ages and year groups. Older Year 10 students other than Noah also seemed to find it harder to get into the habit of addressing me by my given name than their younger Year 8 schoolmates. Year 8 students like Karl, Celine and Adrian, not to mention almost everyone else in their respective classes, seemed to slip into the habit of calling me Jonathan quite easily. By contrast, some Year 10 students, like Noah, seemed to find it difficult to not habitually or instinctively call me ‘Sir’.

Given what has been said about habitus, it is reasonable to suggest that the longer students are immersed in a cultural environment where exists certain “objective conditions”, as Bourdieu (1977) calls them, the more those conditions become part of their being and part of their practice. But it is difficult to speculate why the habitus of using terms like ‘Sir’ and ‘Miss’ seems more entrenched in older students without first understanding the means by which habitus is ingrained into students’ minds in the first place. Again we turn to schema theory to provide an account for this cognitive process.

As with all schemas, role schemas are reinforced by further experience within the subculture where these schemas are produced (Lord and Foti 1986, Walsh 1995). This is how students like Noah acquire the ‘knowledge’ of the practice of how to interact with their teachers. Strauss and Quinn (1997:83) note the same influence that subcultural experience has in how American college students come to ‘know’ how to address and relate to their professors. Compared to their younger schoolmates, Pine View’s Year 10 students have been longer socialized into the values and ideas of the school as an institution of formal education. As a result, they have been exposed to and have internalized for longer the cultural schemas imbedded in that culture’s values and ideas.

This longer exposure entails that older students like Noah have a stronger schematic connection between adults’ role-identity and the formal authority contained in the meaning of ‘Sir’ as a cultural symbol. On the other hand, Celine and her Year 8 classmates were more comfortable calling me by my given name because of their relative newness to the subcultural experience of the high school.

This entails that their schematic association between the role of adults and the formal authority represented by ‘Sir’ were not yet as reinforced. This would explain why, for younger students like those in the Year 8 classes, addressing me by my first name did not seem as contradictory to their habit (or habitus) as it was for older students like Noah. This difference between how entrenched such habitus is in older and younger students agrees with what schema theory says about the nature of the strength of schema connections. In fact, the idea that schema connections are strengthened by the length of cultural experience provides a useful framework for understanding how habitus is embodied in students’ actions. In this way culture influences the adolescents’ perceptions of, and interactions with, teachers on the cognitive level.

I have discussed how culture informs students’ interpretations of teachers’ identities by supplying and framing the symbolic components for that process of interpretation. Culture also influences students’ interaction with the adults through habitus. Finally, schema theory shows the psychological content of how this takes place. However, as I have already outlined in the previous chapter, cultural factors do not predetermine the way people understand things, including self-interpretations. Instead, I follow scholars like Sokefeld (1999) in conceptualizing identity interpretation as a deliberate process that operates consciously by the individual self as “the agent that puts into play a given identity at a given moment” (Burbank 2011:106). Socio-cultural factors supply students with symbols that become components of their understanding of their teachers. But the process of identity interpretation itself is conducted by each individual student, which is the focus of the next discussion.

“Please don’t call me *Sir*”, Part II: Identity’s structural ambiguity and students’ interpretation of adult figures at school

Cole was a student in the same Year 10 class as Noah. However, the two classmates were not friends. I never saw them sit together or even speak to each other. Instead they had their own circle of friends in that class. Noah was always with the two boys that left with him from the sports festival, while Cole always sat with a group of three other boys in the Society and Environment class. Noah was occasionally reprimanded for doing things he was not supposed to do, such as writing when Jay when speaking, for which he had his pen temporarily confiscated. However, he was not known as a difficult student. By contrast, both Jay and Sonny, who took turns teaching the Year 10 class, marked Cole as someone with a reputation for behavioural problems.

Sonny told me that he had previously taught Cole Year 8. On that particular occasion, his class was being taught by Ted, a young student teacher he was supervising. This allowed Sonny some time to quietly observe the students with me. He took the opportunity to give me his opinion of Cole, which I recorded in my field notes:

Sonny told me a bit about [Cole]. Told me he is the kind of kid that will make a good con man—he’s got the charm, the smile, but the evil attitude. Sonny told me he had been “fucking around” [so far throughout that lesson]. When Sonny said to him that he hadn’t done anything all this time he said “Good for me, hey?” The attitude Sonny just mentioned [seemed to be] there. But [Cole] was also asking Ted how to do the assignment. Anyway, Sonny told me his mum was a “wimp”, didn’t know what to do with him in Year 8, and so didn’t discipline him. How’s he to handle discipline here?

Later during that same lesson, both Ted and Sonny, who usually took a back seat to the student teacher, reprimanded Cole for talking too much while not having done enough work. “You’ve been told off four times,” Ted said to the student with a stern voice, “what’s going on here? Your page is still empty.” Cole responded by asking Ted how to do the task, which the latter obliged by explaining to him how to do what he was supposed to do. But this was possibly just a delaying tactic; as soon as the young teacher moved on, Cole stopped working and continued to talk with the boy next to him. After a while Ted told him to move to another desk closer to the front of the class. But Cole refused to move. His friend defended him by asking the student teacher, “For what?” It was finally this second boy that was moved to the desk at the front instead. Now sitting alone, it did not take Cole long to fill up his page with work. That was far from the only time that Cole was told to move due to excessive socialising and insufficient work. On another occasion Sonny physically moved both his desk and file closer to where he and I were in the back of the room so that he could keep a closer eye on the boy.

Some of Cole’s classmates, too, had a similar opinion of the boy. When I asked him about people in his class, Hank said:

Hank: “They’re all right. There are a few idiots. And the way they’re acting they’re not gonna get anywhere in life, but it’s uh... what I want, and if I wanna get somewhere in life, it’s my effort, not theirs, so... if they choose to be like that, so...”

Me: “Who are they?”

Hank: “Harold, Wilson’s starting to settle down. Then you got *Cole* [emphasis added], you got Dario [...] There’s a few others I don’t particularly know their names but they just act all stupid. They like cause trouble in class. They distract people, they don’t get on with their work. Just interrupt everything.”

It was clear, therefore, the negative perception regarding Cole’s behaviour and attitude was not only held by teachers but also by some of his peers. There were

moments when Cole did his work, and after Sonny moved closer to us he actually offered some good answers to Ted's questions. What was quite evident, though, is that Cole was a different kind of student compared to Noah and Hank. While their teachers saw Hank as a model student, Cole had a reputation as a difficult student, with Noah somewhere in between the two. My separate interactions with the three Year 10 boys had one thing in common, though: all of them, for different and sometimes opposite reasons, persisted in calling me 'Sir'. Like his two classmates, Cole, too, persisted in using the formal term in speaking, albeit with a different meaning, in a different context and presumably for a different reason.

Since the first time I talked to Cole, he started addressing me as 'Sir'. I asked him not to do that, and to call me 'Jonathan', since I was not a teacher. However, he persisted. While for Noah the persistence in addressing me using that term seemed to have come out of an ingrained habit, this did not appear to be the case with Cole. Despite my repeated request, and in spite of my having told him that I disliked being referred to as 'Sir', Cole insisted on doing so. In fact, it seemed to me that it was precisely *because* I did not like it that he addressed me as such. I wanted students to call me by my given name because I wanted to dissolve the barrier of formality and establish informal relationship with them, in order to gain their confidence. It seems likely that, whether consciously or otherwise, Cole insisted on calling me 'Sir' to resist my attempt at crossing this line between formality and informality with him. That his mind was made up regarding who I was—that I was one of 'the teachers'—was most clearly indicated on one occasion. Noisily socialising in the midst of a lesson, he came closer to me and referred to me as "the teacher" in speaking with his friends. Not for the first time, I

told him, “Cole, I’m not a teacher.” Clearly not believing what I had told him, Cold replied sarcastically, “Yeah, right,” and continued to speak loudly with his friend until Sonny reprimanded all of them. This told me that Cole clearly framed me as one of the teachers, one of his social Others, despite my insistence to the contrary. Like Noah and Hank, Cole persisted in calling me ‘Sir’. When I told them not to do so, each of the boys responded differently: Noah repeatedly did so out of habit and apologised each time, saying he would try to remember not to do it again; Hank insisted because he said he had been raised to address older men in that manner; and Cole persisted because he refused to believe my claim that I was not a teacher. Each of the boys persisted in calling me ‘Sir’ for different reasons. Each case, too, points to a different facet of the student-teacher interaction.

I portrayed Noah’s use of ‘Sir’ in addressing me as an illustration of culture’s influence on the interaction between students and adults at school, which I analysed through the lens of schema theory. I pointed to Hank’s use of the same term on me as an example of how deliberately reproduced cultural values directly informs that interaction. In both cases we see culture impacting the way cultural symbols such as the word ‘Sir’ is used in perceiving and/or defining another’s identity and in interacting with them. This is apparent in the apparent motivation from which he insisted on referring to me as ‘Sir’ despite my protestations.

To be sure, students might have used terms such as ‘Sir’ and ‘Miss’ as a way to not have to remember the names of teachers and other adults at school.²⁰ In Cole’s case, this suggestion must be discounted since he persisted in calling me ‘Sir’

²⁰ I encountered an example of something similar during one lesson taught by Annie, a relief teacher. One of the students, apparently not bothering to either remember or wanting to use her name, simply called her “Mrs. Teacher”.

despite my having repeatedly reminded him to call me 'Jonathan'. Rather, in the boy's insistent use of 'Sir' I see another facet of identity construction: one that highlights the reflexivity with which people not only utilize culturally-derived symbols in defining identities but also actively reinterprets them in the way they employ those symbols. This is the same aspect of identity interpretation that is underlined in the model of identity presented by Sokefeld's (1999), in which the self is given "analytic priority" (Burbank 2011:106). I recounted Sokefeld's discussion of that model in detail in the previous chapter. The same focus on the analytic self in conceptualizing identities is also similarly demonstrated in Gregg's (1998) analysis of how each of his North African subjects idiosyncratically utilize and reframe different aspects of their cultural-religious concepts in forming their self-interpretation.

In the case of this study, what this reflexive or deliberate aspect of identity interpretation suggests is that while many aspects of how students relate to the adults at school, such calling them 'Sir' or 'Miss', might have been internalized as part of their being as students through habitus or schema connections, it does not mean that they are robots whose actions are programmed by cultural conventions or past experience. Labels like 'Sir' are symbols with culturally defined meanings. The word and how it is generally understood by people is drawn from what Gregg (1998) would call the "cultural lexicon", not only of formal education but also of the English-speaking world. In that cultural lexicon, the term 'Sir' is usually meant to convey respect, which was how Jay implicitly understood the word. However, as I have suggested using examples from Sokefeld's (1999) and Gregg's (1998) ethnographies, the interpretation of identities as symbolic objects is a process involving an element of proactive, often conscious, choice on the part of the

interpreter (see Chapter 2). Even scholars that point to the strong influence of habitus in shaping human behaviour allow for—and even underline—such individual flexibility (Hilgers 2009, citing Wacquant 2004) and conscious intention (Mahmood 2001).

When the Jay said to me that, at least, students at Pine View still called him ‘Sir’, he was clearly taking for granted that the word was used out of respect and politeness. I suggest, however, that in Cole’s case, the student used this ‘polite’ word for just the opposite purpose. This suggestion is supported by findings offered by Braun (1988) in his sociolinguistic study of terms of address. In that study, Braun (1988:47) refers to what he calls the “ambiguity of politeness”, which enables terms of address usually perceived as polite to be used in less-than-polite ways. He give the example of the use of the normally polite Spanish word *usted* (you) in a way devoid of politeness, such as by a father strictly admonishing his child (Marin 1972:902, cited in Braun 1988). Polite terms can have impolite meanings, Braun says, when used to emphasise “authority on the speaker’s part” instead of deference and in an “unfavourable atmosphere” instead of one of amity. They may also be used as “markers of irony, scorn, and disdain between speakers” (Braun 1988:47).

Braun’s suggestion certainly resonates with Cole’s persistent use of ‘Sir’ in addressing me. From the context of our interactions, I noted that the normally polite ‘Sir’ was clearly used by the student with such “unfavourable atmosphere”, or maybe even out of “irony, scorn, and disdain”. That Cole apparently use the term to emphasise the distinction between himself as a student and myself as a

'teacher' could also mean that he did so to assert some sort of "authority" over the distinctions between our social identities.

More importantly, the 'ambiguity of politeness' surrounding terms of address such as the Spanish '*usted*' or the English 'Sir' echoes Gregg's (1998) proposition that cultural symbols—of which these words are certainly examples—are 'structurally ambiguous'. As I noted in Chapter 2, Gregg (1998) showcases a conscious reinterpretation of cultural symbols in relating his informant Rachida's struggle with her self-interpretation (see Chapter 3 for details). He suggests that she takes advantage what he calls the "structural ambiguity" of the cultural symbols in reframing of the meaning of her womb, and therefore, of her self (Gregg 1998:129). In particular, she uses the linguistic malleability of how root words can be read according to context. Rachida connects the word 'womb', which in her mind is linked with impurity, to divine 'mercy', with which it shared the same trilateral root word, and this way she reinterprets how she understands her self-image. In another example, a similar utilization of cultural symbol's 'structural ambiguity' can also be seen in the use of the term 'nigger' among young African Americans, which has given the word a new meaning where identity is concerned. The word has been perceived as a strongly racist term with a derogatory meaning. Yet, as sociolinguist Spears (2007) and law sociologist Calavita (2007) point out, the past few decades have seen many younger African Americans reappropriating, modifying (into 'nigga') and reframing the cultural meaning of the slur as an in-group term of collective identity to be used among themselves.²¹

²¹ It should be noted that the use of the term remains controversial within the larger African American community, with some leaders proposing that it should be banned (Kennedy 2003). Further, some have made distinction between the word 'nigger', which is derogatory, and 'nigga', which is seen as having a more positive connotation of affection and community (Kennedy 1999–2000). For example, the late rapper Tupac Shakur famously said that "niggers was [sic] the ones on

The same dynamic seems to be at work in the way Cole used the word ‘Sir’ in speaking to me. If, as Gregg (1998) implies, words as a form of cultural symbol are ‘structurally ambiguous’, then the meanings of words like ‘Sir’ are not set in stone or rigidly predetermined by culture. Rather, as demonstrated by Gregg’s account of Rachida’s story, and by Spears’ (2007) and Calavita’s (2007) conjectures regarding how ‘nigga’ is understood, what words mean can be reinterpreted according to the context of their application. Therefore, while ‘Sir’ in its usual use is culturally connected to respect, as Jay suggested, Cole’s application to his interpretation of my identity gave it a different meaning..²² This underlines that students are active agents in the deliberate and reflexive process of self-interpretation, whether it concerns their own identities or those of others.

Towards the end of the year, by the middle of the third term of school, Cole’s response to me seemed to have softened. Once, as he was sitting next to me after having again been told to move as punishment, Cole even told me that he thought it was “shit” that I was doing what I was doing without getting paid. At another time, as Cole was entering the classroom, he noticed that I was sending text messages on my phone. He then jokingly warned me, “No phones in class!”—to which I responded by playfully placing my finger on my lips before saying, “Shh... don’t tell.” His jest might even indicate that he no longer saw me as a teacher, since it was students that were not allowed to use mobile phone in class. Most

the rope, hanging off the thing; *niggas* is [sic] the ones with gold ropes, hanging out at clubs” (Guest 2007). Other interpretations of how the word ‘nigga’ is used portrays it not so much a term indicating blackness but rather one that symbolizes state of life and living conditions, being “a product of the post-industrial ghetto” (Baldwin 2004:166).

²² Compare this with Victor Klemperer’s (1957, 2006) observation that the Nazi policy of imposing on Jews middle names perceived as overtly Jewish—most notably, Israel for men and Sarah for women—is part of the official policy to socially isolate them from larger German community. While Cole’s appropriation of term ‘Sir’ for his own purposes is, of course, in defiance of official policy, in both cases the meanings of labels are reinterpreted for the purpose of socially isolating another party, not only in terms of identity definition but also in terms of practical interaction.

notably, on yet another occasion, he called me “Mr. Jonathan”, before jokingly adding “I mean ‘Sir’”, after which we shared a laugh. Even if he was not yet willing to simply call me ‘Jonathan’, I saw Cole’s ironic reference to his past insistence on calling me ‘Sir’ as an indication that he was at least willing to go beyond the formal barrier that had characterised our relationship up to that point. It was a welcome change for me on a personal level. While I was not a teacher, conceptualizing his actions this manner helps us to understand students’ perception of teachers and the resulting behavioural response. This also brings my discussion to the topic of the next section: the social relationships serving as the contexts for identity interpretations.

The chaplain’s dilemma: Formal role relations and interpersonal relationships as contextual bases for students’ interpretations of adult identities

In Chapter 2 I suggested that, following symbolic interactionist thought, identity can be conceptualized as self-meaning. As with other symbolic objects in the world, our understanding of self-meaning is the product of the process of interpretation (Cooley 1912, 1972; Linger 2005, Hewitt 2007). This is why I have conceptualized identity as symbolic self-interpretation. The implication is that because our interpretation of symbolic meanings is generally tempered by the contexts of those symbols, so is our interpretation of identities contextual (Blumer 1972, Obeyesekere 1981, Hewitt 2007). As exemplified by my conclusions regarding my interaction with Cole, the nature and dimensions of students’ relationship with adults at school can be a key context for their interpretation of the relational identities and personal relevance of their teachers.

I suggested that Cole insisted on calling me 'Sir' to ground our interaction on the formal level and resist my attempt to bring it into the informal. The formal and the informal were the two contextual planes for how he could understand both who I was and the nature of my relationship with him. In persisting to use the term in addressing me, I said, the student interpreted my identity and who I was in relation to him in a way that emphasized the formal context of our interaction over the informal.

The conversation between Celine and Jay that I recounted earlier also allude to these formal and informal social contexts in the student–teacher interactions on which students base their interpretation of teachers' relational identity and personal relevance. The formal interactional context is based on relations between the respective roles of students and teachers in the school hierarchy; any observer of a classroom can easily see that teachers hold and assert formal authority over their students. On this level of relationship, the interaction between a student and a teacher is not so much one between individual persons but between the formal roles that they occupied (Flannery and Wester 2004). In Jay and Celine's exchange, this facet of student–teacher relationship, or at least a perception thereof, is represented in the girl's response that "Teachers aren't friends!" From her remark one can infer that Celine perceived herself and her fellow students as belonging to opposite, and sometimes opposing, ends of the school's hierarchical structure from their teachers. This perception, which seems to be an influential part in students' perception of teachers, would explain why Celine seemed to find the suggestion of a teacher being a 'friend' surprising, if not absurd.

The other level or dimension to the relationships between students and adults at school might not often be as obviously observable in their interaction.

Nevertheless, this plane of relationship can also serve to contextually frame the adolescents' interpretation of students' identity and relevance. In Jay and Celine's exchange, this informal level of relationship seems to be what the teacher was alluding to when he said that the girl needed a 'friend' among her teachers. It is reasonable to say he did not mean that the formal distinction between their respective standings as teacher and student should be ignored, or that she should disregard the social and institutional expectation to show him due respect. What Jay was implying, however, was that it would be to Celine's benefit to have him as an ally among the teachers on the informal level of relationship. For a while he did become her mentor, during which time, as far as I could observe, Celine became more compliant and cooperative towards Jay. On the formal level, of course, the nature of their relationship as student and teacher remained constant. On the informal level, however, as the interpersonal relationship between student and teacher developed, in also translated into a change in Celine's perception of, and therefore response to, her teacher.

The duality in students' relationships with the adults at school is perhaps no better illustrated by the dilemma faced by Rick Winfield, Pine View's school chaplain.²⁴ Rick's duties, according to the Department of Education's official description, include providing "general religious, personal advice and comfort to students and staff" and giving "support and guidance about ethics, values, relationships and spiritual issues together with the provision of pastoral care and enhancing student engagement with the broader community" (Department of Education 2012). The non-profit body organizing the work of chaplains at Western Australian public

²⁴ The Australian public school system has a federally funded National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program (formerly known as the National School Chaplaincy Program) (Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations 2012), which in Western Australia is organized by a non-governmental organization called YouthCARE (YouthCARE 2012). Where there are minimum qualifications, chaplains do not have to be ordained clergy. Rick had had theological and pastoral training but at that time he was not a full-time minister.

schools, YouthCARE, similarly give his duties as “[b]uilding relationships with students, families and staff”, “[o]ffering pastoral care”, “[b]eing a mentor” and “[p]roviding a link between schools and local communities” (YouthCARE 2010). Note that both YouthCARE and the Department of Education present the duties of school chaplains as having both a personal, one-on-one component as well as a broader community engagement.

The first time I met him, Rick spoke to me about his role at Pine View, as recorded in my field notes:

[During recess] I spoke to Rick. He discussed with me what he does, how many kids he has to look after personally and so on. Dealing with problem kids. If kids misbehave they often get sent to him. Or they just rock up to him without announcement. There are two parts to his job, it seems, which he has to balance. On the one hand he deals with kids one-on-one (voluntarily or otherwise on their part). On the other hand he organizes events and activities. Like Harmony Day. And he can't overfocus on either.

Rick also organizes a few programs for the school. There's a program for Aboriginal kids, who he said have higher attendance problems—to get them involved in school. There's a program for wagggers,²⁵ to which I've been given permission to come, but it only starts next term. There's also a program for kids that have lost parents. I imagine it's a hard one to do. I've been invited to participate in the Aboriginal program, at the very least this Friday. They have had little experience in doing this. [...]

I volunteered my help to Rick while I'm here and he asked me to help with Harmony Day activities, overseeing the distribution of oranges and such. This should be cool. I hope I'm not viewed as an authority figure but as “big bro” of sort (the friendly kind) through [...] my association with student support people.

Other events and programs that Rick organized included Healthy Choice Week, which he conducted with the aid of Christian non-profit organization Youth With A Mission, and the Year 10 camp, which he ran together with Jay.

As an example of the counselling side of his job, I mentioned earlier the guidance Rick was giving Celine through her problems with her mother and teachers. Karl, whom I have also spoken about, was another student he similarly helped. While

²⁵ That is, students who ‘wagged’, or skipped classes or school altogether.

this aspect of Rick's job seemed similar to Alicia's, the school psychologist, the chaplain's approach was unsurprisingly more pastoral, appropriate to a minister or priest. Compared to Alicia's more clinical methods, Rick had a greater need to rely on interpersonal rapport with students. To be able to connect with students on an informal, personal and emotional level—for them to see him as a confidant, a 'friend' among the staff—was an integral part of this part of the chaplain's work. On occasion it was the students' trust in him as a person that allowed Rick to mediate between students and teachers.

One aspect of Rick's role made this one-on-one part of his job relatively easier. As a counsellor, he did not have to deal with thirty or so students simultaneously the way most teachers do. This enabled him to approach each case individually and to take approaches that can be considered 'softer' than what is prescribed for teachers in the school's student behaviour management policies. Instead of resorting to punishment to make such students comply with school expectations, Rick could counsel them and seek underlying reasons for problems that they might have caused at school. In this part of his job, the chaplain's interactions with individual students were grounded primarily on the informal dimension of his relationships with students, which he cultivated over time. Being their 'ally' instead of yet another adult or staff member seemed to allow him more personal credibility with students than relying on formal rules and authority. In this way Rick managed to gain the trust and even friendship of many of the students at Pine View, including a number that were not on good terms with the teachers.

However, this aspect of Rick's work that depended heavily on his personal relationships with students occasionally conflicted with his duty as an organiser of school programs. His role as an organizer leaned much more towards supervising

students than towards being their trusted confidant, making it closer to that of a teacher than a counsellor. This was a distinction that Rick himself was only too aware of. For the most part, the chaplain managed to simultaneously occupy both roles that his job entailed without any complications vis-à-vis the students he dealt with. They seemed to understand who he was and what his role was in the school. Hence, on Harmony Day and Healthy Choice Week, for example, Rick was able to act as member of the school staff in organizing the events without compromising the students' confidence in him as someone they could trust on a one-on-one basis. Most of the events Rick organised were 'fun' events that did not involve learning activities like those that they encountered in the classroom. This meant that in the case of these events the chaplain did not have to act in supervisory role that teachers found themselves in on a daily basis. It might have also helped that Rick usually only had to run the proceedings while teachers and teaching assistants supervised the students. This meant that in these contexts he did not have to directly deal with managing students' behaviour. Sometime towards the end of the school year, however, Rick told me that he had been finding it difficult to negotiate the conflict between his personal relationships with students and having to supervise them. He said this in particular relation to his involvement in the Aboriginal student program, which was at the crux of the chaplain's dilemma.

Held most Friday afternoons, the Aboriginal student program was intended to both provide incentive for Pine View's Indigenous students to attend classes regularly and reward those who were already doing so.²⁶ It was only open to students of Aboriginal descent and being eligible for the extracurricular program exempted them from mainstream Friday afternoon classes. Rick explained the

²⁶ The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably in Australia.

rules for the program to the participating students. First of all, they had to participate in whatever activity the chaplain had organised for the afternoon whether they liked it or not. Second, to be eligible for the program in the first place, they had to have a school attendance rate of 85% or above. Rick made a point to tell everyone that, at that time, the attendance rule meant that only five of everyone present qualified. This rule, therefore, was a way to encourage them to come to school more often.

The actual activities varied each week. On the few Fridays when Rick had planned nothing special for the participants, he simply brought the students to the school gym to play basketball, like on the day he explained the program to them. On most occasions, though, the chaplain brought in expert instructors from outside the school, most of also Aboriginal descent, who introduced students to new activities they might not have the chance to do otherwise. One of them taught students how to do circus acts like unicycle riding and juggling, which the boys particularly were enthusiastic about. On another occasion Rick brought in a didgeridoo player, who taught them how to play the traditional music instrument, while the girls learned traditional dancing from performers from the Yirra Yaakin Aboriginal theatre company. On most weeks, Rick was assisted by a man from his church called Dave, who was also a very talented didgeridoo player. Like Rick himself, Dave was not of Aboriginal descent but White.

Rick had originally designed the program in conjunction with Jenny, Pine View High's Aboriginal liaison officer, who was also an Indigenous person. The chaplain, though, was the only person actually running it on the week-by-week basis, not counting Dave and the visiting instructors. Sometime around the middle of the year, Jenny left the school, leaving Rick to manage the Aboriginal student

program on his own. The liaison officer's departure, though, was not the only reason why he eventually found the program to be difficult. Rick confessed that his role in the Friday program complicated his relationship with the Aboriginal students on a personal and informal basis. Since most of the time the actual instruction was conducted by experts the chaplain had brought in, the only role that Rick was relegated to was to keep the students' behaviour at a level where the visiting expert could teach without disruption. This often meant keeping them in line and reprimanding them if necessary. Whenever one of the students acted persistently in a manner seen as disruptive, they were sent to their regular Friday afternoon class as punishment. In the absence of any teacher or other regular staff member, the task of dispensing this penalty fell to the chaplain.

Any attempt on Rick's part to connect on a personal level with the students would be further complicated by the fact that, unlike with the chaplain's counselling duty, the number of participants involved in the Friday program made it impossible for him to deal with each instance of misbehaviour on a one-on-one basis. He simply did not have time to reason with every misbehaving student, or to address the 'root causes' of their actions. In telling me how he felt about his part in the Aboriginal student program, Rick said that this made him feel like he had to occupy the same role as a teacher would in the classroom. He was unable to rely solely on his interpersonal relationships with the students to keep them under control. Instead, the chaplain had to utilize his formal authority as a member of the school staff.

In one of our last conversations, Rick related that he had become quite uncomfortable with the conflict between his pastoral and supervisory roles as chaplain, at least where the Friday afternoon program was concerned. He felt

strongly enough about this that he decided not to run the program again the following year. One reason was the general frustration and exhaustion that came out of organizing and facilitating such a program virtually single-handedly on a weekly basis. In addition to arranging for any guest speakers or instructor visit, he had to keep track of which students were actually eligible for the program: whether they had attended classes sufficiently and even, in at least one case, whether they were actually Aboriginal.

His exhaustion notwithstanding, the main reason behind Rick's decision to discontinue the program had more to do with the role conflict he had found himself in, trying to relate to the Aboriginal students. Unlike his involvement in the other school-wide programs and events that he had organised, the chaplain felt that what he had to do in the Aboriginal students program was interfering with his pastoral role as chaplain. In a tone of voice that indicated frustration, Rick told me that he did not like being in such a position where part of his job was to police students and "tell them off" for their misbehaviour, even if he felt it had been necessary to do so. Being in a position where he had to rely on his formal authority instead of interpersonal relationship with students caused Rick to worry that students were beginning to see him just as they saw the teachers, as one of 'Them'. Being perceived in this manner would likely create an interpersonal gap hindering the one-on-one pastoral aspect of his work by causing students to frame their understanding of the chaplain's personal relevance to them not primarily in the light of informal relationship but in the frame of his institutional and formal role in the school.

The dilemma that Rick faced showcases the two relational contexts on which students can base their interpretation of the identity and personal relevance of the

adults at school: the formal and the informal. To be certain, these contexts are not necessarily paralleled in a direct fashion by the chaplain's two roles in the school as organizer and counsellor respectively. In acting out both his roles, Rick interacted with students on both levels of relationship at the same time. Accordingly, students' interpretation of what the chaplain's relevance was in their lives could, at any time, be based on either his formal or informal relationship with them, whether he was counselling someone or directing the Harmony Week proceedings. In the case of the Aboriginal student program, it was not so much the chaplain's simultaneous occupation of both formal and informal identities that caused him to face a dilemma, but the requirement to emphasize his formal role at the expense of his informal role.

In that regard, Rick's predicament seems similar to what was encountered by Sokefeld's (1999) informant Ali Hassan at his relative's wedding (see Chapter 2). Both men's social identities can be interpreted differently according to social contexts. For Ali Hassan, those contexts are his kinship and his religious community affiliation, while for Rick they were his personal relationship with students and his role as a representative of the school as a formal institution. Both men were presented with a situation in which those multiple identities were brought to a conflict: the wedding for Ali Hassan and the Friday afternoon program for the chaplain. Hence, what conclusions can be drawn from Sokefeld's (1999) story of Ali Hassan can also be drawn from the chaplain's story. Like the Shiite elder, Rick's identity vis-à-vis the Aboriginal students can be interpreted in multiple ways according to social or relational context. Also like him, the chaplain occupied those multiple identities simultaneously; he did not wear a different 'hat' depending on what part of his job he was doing. Finally, the insight regarding the

role of actions in the interpretations of social identities that we have drawn from Sokefeld's account is also applicable to Rick. What caused his dilemma to come to a head was that, being the only school staff member present, it fell on him to *act* in response to some of the Friday program's participants disruptive behaviour. Had the chaplain been able to ignore what they were doing, he would not have had to worry about the students perceiving him in a similar manner to a teacher. In Rick's dilemma, therefore, we see not only the contextual dimension of students' interpretations of adults' identities, but we also note part of the link between those identity interpretations and adolescents' interaction with those adults.

Tönnies in the classroom: *Gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* dichotomy in the student–teacher relationship

One way to conceptualize the two contextual dimensions of student–teacher relationships—the informal and the formal—is by relating them to them to Tönnies' *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* dichotomy (Tönnies 1957, 2001; also Christenson 1984; Sergiovanni 1994a, 1994b; Mellow 2005). The formal level of the student–teacher relationship is akin to Tönnies' (1957, 2001) *gesellschaft*, which is defined primarily by formal and impersonal association, in this case the school's hierarchical and institutional structure. The informal the relationships between students and teachers can be conceptualized as the *gemeinschaft* aspect of school life, an association framed more by informal relationship and emotional connection. Sergiovanni (1994a) has previously applied this dichotomy on schooling. He argues along Tönnies' line of thinking that the school can be defined as both an organization and a community. While Sergionvanni (1994a) suggests

that schools are more dominantly viewed as organizations, he also recognizes—and in fact advocates for—a viewing them as communities that are defined “by ideas and relationships” (Sergiovanni 1994a:223, also Sergiovanni 1994b).

I now translate this Tönnian perspective of the school into the interpersonal level of the student–teacher relationship. I specifically note Sergiovanni’s (1994a) assertion that schools are prevailingly perceived in public discourse first and foremost as a formal institution. This suggestion has significance because it helps makes sense of students’ perceptions of the nature of their personal relationships with teachers. Recall what I discussed earlier regarding Jay’s conversation outside his classroom with Celine, the Year 8 girl in his Academic Enrichment Program class. As I recounted, when he told her that she needed a friend among the teachers, her emphatic reply was that “Teachers aren’t friends”. Also recall my conclusion regarding Cole, the student in the Year 10 student who insisted in calling me ‘Sir’ despite the fact that I did not have a formal role at the school. I suggested that he did so to keep our relationship framed on the formal level of interaction.

Celine’s and Cole’s actions hold something in common: both allude to the commonly held perception that it is inherent for students and adults to occupy separate, and sometimes opposing, social camps in the school context. This view implicitly expressed by the two students is, I think, connected to what Sergiovanni (1994a) has observed of the public discourse on schools, which sees them primarily as *gesellschaft*, or formal institutions, characterized, among other things, by hierarchical distinctions among its members: students and teachers. I discussed earlier the influence of culture on individual interpretations of personal identities, mediated through habitus and cultural schemas. Through these means students

internalize the cultural perception operating in Western societies regarding the primacy of the school's formal and institutional dimension that Sergiovanni (1994a) speaks of.

A logical implication of this is that students' initial interpretation of their teachers' relevance to their lives would be based on the formal level of interaction. It is therefore unsurprising that Celine would regard with confusion Jay's suggestion that teachers can be 'friends', especially at that early stage in their acquaintance. It is only after teachers establish interpersonal relationships with students—or 'rapport' in education circles—that the adolescents have an informal social context on which to interpret their personal relationship with individual adults. After Jay had become her mentor, I saw Celine's behaviour becoming much more cooperative. The teacher, too, said that her behaviour in his class, if not in other teachers', became much more acceptable. She responded more acceptingly to the Jay's admonitions on the subsequent occasions that she misbehaved in his class. This change of attitude may be seen as the product of a shift in Celine's understanding of her relationship with Jay: from being framed only by the relation between their respective formal roles as students and teachers to also being characterized by their informal personal connection. This did not mean that the informal replaced the formal.. But it did mean that the student now also had an additional informal basis for interpreting Jay's identity as a person. Some time after Jay began mentoring her, Celine referred to him as the "top teacher". Her recognition of him as a teacher remained. She did not become cooperative towards Jay because she saw him as her buddy. However, the girl's improved response to him evidently indicated that she had come to accept the teacher's suggestion that it was possible for at least some teachers to be a kind of 'friend'.

'Friends' or authority figures?: The influence of formal role in students' understanding of adult identities at school

What is the significance of each of the relational contexts on which students base their interpretation of teachers' identities? Is it necessary for teachers to engage students on both formal and informal levels of interaction? To answer questions such as these, it is necessary to explore how a teacher's relationship with students on each level of interaction informs the adolescents' perceptions of, and responses to the adult. First I will discuss the importance of formal role relations in the student-teacher interaction. In the next section I will turn to the significance of informal personal relationships in the same.

In examining the part that formal role relations has in the adolescents' interpretation of adults' relevance to their own persons, I focus on a group of adults in the school that did not have the same type and extent of formal authority that teachers have: teaching assistants. In theory, the official role and duties of teaching assistants in the school's structure, as well as their daily duties, are quite clear. In practice, however, the actual interactions between these student support staff members and the students they work with appear to be marked by a certain degree of relational ambiguity. Every teaching assistant seemed to approach and/or respond to individual students a little differently.

This ambiguity in the working relationship between teaching assistants and students might partly be due to a variance between the perception and the actual definition of what exactly falls within the scope of their role and under their job description, not only at Pine View but also at schools in general. For example,

Clayton (1993) provides an overview of such a change in the British context.²⁸ He suggests that while teaching assistants had previously been relegated to care of students and to classroom housekeeping duties, today they are taking a more active part in the teaching–learning process itself. In their British study, Moyles and Suschitzky (1997) report that the teaching assistants they have observed appear to have little in terms of specific job descriptions; their duties are defined on the job, as the needs arise. They also suggest that the role of these assistants often involves something of an ‘unresolved dilemma’; their presence is often necessary in helping some students learn, but they lack specialized expertise in specific subjects possessed by teachers or the sufficient job descriptions from which to work (Moyles and Suschitzky 1997).

What has been said by these scholars is reflected in the same kind of spontaneity that seemingly characterizing the work of Pine View’s teaching assistants. They, too, tended to ‘play by ear’ and to emphasize different aspects of their job in dealing with different students. At the school they worked most closely, and almost exclusively, with students in the Education Support program. As a result, most of my observation of teaching assistants’ interactions with the students took place in a specialized Education Support class for Year 8 students that Jay taught. Members of this class were students that had been identified as having learning difficulties, or other ‘special needs’. These include mild learning difficulties, as exemplified by Jim and Adrian, who could usually do work without assistance, to those who need constant guidance, like their classmate Venny. Others in the class, like Jack, had been diagnosed with disorders such as ADHD and Asperger Syndrome (now known as Autism Spectrum Syndrome), like Billy. In this regard,

²⁸ While there have been a number of studies done on teaching assistants set in Britain and the United States, there seems to be a something of a shortage of research on the subject done in Australia.

the term “students’ assistants” is perhaps a more accurate label with which to describe these student support staff members.

There was a standing cadre of teaching assistants at Pine View, and throughout the year I noticed some additions to their number. The teaching assistants that helped Jay with his Year 8 Education Support class, too, were not constant. Sometimes there was only one of them present, and at other times two. They were also not always the same people. What the teaching assistants actually did in the classroom, as has been said, varied depending on what was required of them during the course of each lesson. In the Education Support classroom itself they could usually be found in the back of the room or next to students that required constant supervision, somewhat ‘in the background’, at least until they were needed by students.

The types of assistance they provided can be classified in several categories, as I will exemplify using excerpts from my field notes. First, they helped look after special needs students’ physical and emotional well-being. A veteran teaching assistant, Missy, for example, told me her dealing with Billy, the student with the Autism Spectrum Syndrome:

Missy, one of the assistants, pulled me aside. She told me a bit about Billy. Apparently just before lunch (or at lunch) Billy freaked her out by being suicidal (he’d tried once), asking for a knife or an icepick and asking to be “put out of his misery”. It seems his climax today was when he banged his table, and that was why they let him do whatever he wanted. By the end of the lesson, though, he’d become relaxed, calmed down, joking around a bit. [...] Interestingly, [Missy] said Billy is—among other Ed Support kids—the one that is aware of his condition, and that he has to live with it his whole life. And it affects him psychologically and emotionally.

During a lesson in which Jay had told the class to work on a word sleuth:

Jim went outside for “some air” with [Melanie, the teaching] assistant. Apparently he’s not feeling well. He had his Jet Li videos out. He seems to have a large number of the video [tapes] in his bag. [Melanie] said he’ll break his new bag if he keeps

doing it. Both she and Joy told him that he shouldn't bring so many—just bring one each day. He said it's hard to pick. It's a security blanket, as [Mr Lincoln had] said [to me].

As I said, one of the teaching assistants' tasks in the classroom was to help students that required help with their schoolwork. Although, as Moyles and Suschitzky (1997) have also pointed out, the teaching assistants lacked the specialized subject knowledge possessed by teachers, this was not a problem in the Education Support class, since the lessons consisted only of basic reading and writing activities. Venny, the only girl in the group, was the student apparently most needing help with understanding and completing work. A teaching assistant also frequently accompanied her in the mainstream classes she attended. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, she did not always warm to them immediately. During one lesson in the Education Support class, Jay told the group a story that was slightly gruesome. The boys were interested, but the teacher was unsure about Venny:

Jay asked [Venny] if she'd be okay with this. She said she was tired. When they got to writing, Jay asked [Albert] a new [teaching] assistant, a tall European man, to help Venny. Strangely, Venny ended up crying briefly. [...] I've never sen her like this. She doesn't seem to take the assistant well. She kept asking Jay for help, not the assistant right next to her. [...] Eventually, Venny seemed to get used to the new assistant. She talked to him eventually about the movie she watched.

Venny was also in Dan's mainstream Year 8 Society and Environment class, where Albert was again accompanying her. She was not used to being accompanied by the male teaching assistant, though. When I was in that class she continuously asked me to help her even though she already had Albert to assist her.

The last type of duty that teaching assistants were tasked with was to help teachers keep students in line, at least in the Education Support classes. This was perhaps the kind of work that came with the most ambiguity in terms of the adults' formal role and authority.

[During a class] Everyone was told [by Jay] to go up the back. Billy got up and started sprinkling water out of his water bottle. He then tried to read this [field] note. I prevented him. He asked why I'm here. [Before I could say anything] the [teaching] assistant told him to put the water bottle in the fridge and he did.

Billy was a difficult student to control, not only for the teaching assistants but also for his teacher, Jay. He was not the kind of student who talked back but he frequently ignored commands and warnings from the adults. On a few occasions he simply walked out of the classroom with no discernible reason. In the particular instance I had just described he evidently did decide to do what the teaching assistant had instructed him to do.

However, I suspect this was at least partly because Jay was present and nearby. Students did not always comply when non-teaching staff members such as EAs and the youth worker reprimanded them for their behaviour. That this group of adults, unlike teachers, did not seem to have the direct formal authority to punish them might have contributed to this. On a different occasion, Jay was not present and a relief teacher was teaching the class. Missy, one of Pine View's senior teaching assistants was also there:

[The students] are doing work from an atlas [...] Billy would not stop whistling. The assistant gave him a talking-to. After a bit, then he stopped, before continuing soon after. Apparently, she said, Billy wanted to do [the lesson] with Jay, he wants to do English, not geography. [...] Jordan turned an eyelid inside out. To the dismay of Missy.

To be fair, students also often ignored admonitions dispensed by relief teachers, presumably for the same reason—the diminished authorities of that group of teachers—as I discuss elsewhere in this chapter. The non-teaching status of EAs was not the only factor in many students' tendency to not take their authority seriously. Similar disregard for the teaching assistant's reproach was displayed in Jay's absence by Jordan, another student in the same class who also had a reputation for difficult behaviour:

Jordan kept leaning back and scaring Venny. He was told by Missy to stop doing it but he went “smart” and said he hadn’t been doing anything. Then he moved around in between his colouring. He asked if he could go out when he’d finished work. [...]

Some students even treated teaching assistants in a manner that they would be much less likely to direct towards a teacher. An example is Jack, a Year 9 Education Support student who was on this particular occasion in being placed in Jay’s Year 8 class. The students had been allowed to the computers at the back of the room during that session. Jay was present this time, as was Melanie, a teaching assistant. The following happened at the end of the lesson:

Jack, with [everyone else] was told to log off by Jay, and then he was told [to do so] again by a [teaching] assistant. But Jack started objecting, cursing, saying things [to Melanie] like “What the fuck is wrong with you?” and “Shut up!” he was pretty much verbally abusing the assistant. I had heard from another assistant why he does this. But mental [disorder] or not, he must’ve gotten that mode of speech, all the cursing, from somewhere—family, friends, media? [Might be] all of them, especially knowing his background, as the male assistant told me the other day. [...]

At the end the [teaching] assistant and Jay caught up with him again in the courtyard and gave him a good talk[ing]-to. He still objected. Despite the official hard rule against profanity, the assistant decided not to do him in to the year coord[inator] (so [as not to get him] suspended again—as he ‘s still under [probationary] agreement) [...]

One of the most common but nevertheless revealing aspects of students’ interactions with teaching assistants was the way the adolescents addressed the adults. I noticed immediately ,within the first week of school, that students called education assistants more often by their first name than they addressed them as Mr. or Miss. That they were not corrected indicates that they were allowed to do so. This also seemed to contribute to the openness that some students, like Jack, had in their response and relationship with particular EAs. This helps demonstrate that teaching assistants largely operate on the informal level of interaction in dealing with students. As I said before in reference to my interaction with Year 10 student Cole, “Sir” is a formal term that represents the formal level of engagement between students and the adults at school. Conversely, the use of an adult’s given name signifies that their interaction has also entered the

informal level. In fact, it was this observation that led me to decide to ask students to call me by my first name.

The extent of teaching assistants' formal authority over students was further shown in their relative powerlessness to sanction behaviour they considered unacceptable. There was an exchange between two teaching assistants, Melanie and Robert, and two students, Jordan and Lucas, the latter having joined the class late in the year. The two boys started to speak loudly using obscene language, "I smell pussy", in a singsong manner when Jay went outside the room. Melanie, who disapproved of their behaviour, challenged the boys to do the same in front of Jay when the teacher returned. It seemed that while it was their duty to help keep the students in line, and they were to certain extent given with the power to do so, teaching assistants did not have the same authority as teachers to dispense punishments. If they had, it was likely that Melanie would have reprimanded and/or punished Jordan and Lucas herself—perhaps giving the detention—instead of appealing to Jay's higher authority.

Most significant here is the fact that, in reprimanding Lucas for using obscene language, Melanie did not invoke any authority she has to punish him but instead appealed to his fear, if not respect, of his regular teacher, Jay. To be sure, teaching assistants had the authority to tell students off, as was part of their duty to help teachers control student misbehaviour. I saw Melanie and other teaching assistants do this numerous times. However, unlike teachers, it did not seem to be within the scope of their authority to dispensing of punishment as the consequence of said misbehaviour. Otherwise, on this particular occasion, Melanie would likely not have needed to invoke Jay's authority in warning Lucas.

This is different from the extent of formal authority that teachers like Jay have, which enabled them to dispense punishment themselves. This seemed to result in a higher likelihood that most students would comply. Unlike his disregard of the warnings issued by Melanie and other teaching assistants, Jordan responded to Jay's assertion of authority more seriously, even if begrudgingly. On one occasion he started talking while Jay was explaining, despite having been warned before about the rule that when the teacher was speaking, no one else was allowed to:

Jordan was sent outside [Jay said] "to remember there's no talking at the moment" as long as it takes. [...] The boy put up no resistance, though. I think despite his misbehavior Jordan has come to consider Jay as his Boss. [...] He is also eager to give answers. [...] [After having been let in for a while] Jordan was sent out again for talking out of turn. He, again, put neither objection nor resistance.

Like teachers, teaching assistants were members of staff and could therefore be seen as representatives of the school as a formal institution. However, they did not have the same role or authority as teachers. For example, unlike both regular teachers and relief teachers, teaching assistants could not make or enforce school rules using rewards and punishment. This relative lack of formal authority and their ambiguous role helped shape the nature of their relationships with students. To explain this, I will use what I have discussed regarding the dichotomous social contexts that serve as the basis for students' interpreting of the identities of adults at school. Aside from the relative 'emptiness' of teaching assistants' warnings due to their inability to directly dispense punishments, there is also another factor at play in why students like Jack, Jordan and Lucas did not respond to the adults' warnings as seriously as they did to Jay's. The reduced formal authority of teaching assistants, at least in so far as rewards and punishments are involved, entailed a lesser emphasis on the formal relational context on which to understand their relevance to their own persons on the formal level.

On the other hand, similar to Rick the chaplain, a lesser emphasis on formal authority seemed to have the converse effect of helping teaching assistants in establishing informal, personal relationships with students. Because they did not have the power to punish students, some of the adolescents evidently did not feel as restrained, in the negative sense, to behave more 'freely' before those adults. That Lucas and Jordan were brazen enough to use obscene language in Melanie and Robert's presence, but not in Jay's, exemplifies this. In the positive sense, this 'freedom' might also mean that they feel less restrained in responding to teaching assistants as persons instead of as collective representatives of the school. It might entail that in interacting with those non-teaching staff members, the adolescents were more likely to emphasize its interpersonal dimension of their relationship.

Some Education Support students were able to perceive some teaching assistants not only as staff members but also as confidants, or perhaps even 'friends'. During break times, I frequently catch Jim confiding to one of them, an older man named Howard, about his feelings on school and on his sickly mother. Even Jack, Education Support student who swore at Melanie, showed a particular attachment towards Shanae, one of the assistants who was also the school's youth worker. On a few occasions, I found Jack waiting outside the staff room door to the staff room asking if Shanae was in the room. In these cases, the relationships between adults and adolescents developed accordingly: the students listened to the teaching assistants, who were able to use that personal relationship to ensure that they complied with the teachers' instructions.

Temporary teachers: Relief teachers and the problem of interpersonal roles (or lack thereof) in the classroom

While students' understanding of teachers' formal role and authority is an important aspect in how they perceive the adults' relevance to their lives, it is not the only, or even the most influential, factor. Students' interactions with teachers also take place on the informal, or *gemeinschaft*, level that Sergiovanni (1994a) says he prefers to highlight. In the context of this interactional level is the adolescents' informal and personal relationship with the adults. To accentuate the important part of informal relationships in students' interpretation of teachers' identities, I turn to another group of adults at school who, despite having formal role and authority, often appear to have relatively little or no interpersonal connections with students: relief teachers. By comparing students' interactions with them to their interactions with regular teachers with whom they have informal relationships, I explore how those relationships inform students' perception of teachers and, consequently, their behaviour towards them.

In general, the classroom experiences of many relief teachers seem marked by difficulties in dealing with students. These are my observations of the first class taught by a relief teacher, named Michael, at Pine View:

I walked into the room and I was [surprised] to find that Jay wasn't in the room. Instead there was another male teacher [...] I asked him what's going on, and he told me he didn't know why Jay isn't there but he was asked to do this class.

There is a lot of noise and kids talking to each other there are kids working too but the noise was enough to make Jay silence them had he been here. Now they are just working from their tasks from the board. I do think they wouldn't have been so noisy if Jay had been here. There are also kids walking around, talking to the guys behind them, etc. These kids were told off but one of them kind of ignored the teacher, who [took] little further action but [only] watch[ed]. Perhaps either consciously or not they understand the guy's only here for the day and (they would think) would not take long-term actions to discipline them.

The relief teacher seems to know these kids, though—he calls them by name—but he is wearing a relief teacher’s tag, not a full time teacher’s tag. Perhaps it is also possible that the kids know this teacher to be somewhat “soft”?

The next day, when I came into that same Year 10 class, I discovered that Jay was still absent and was being substituted by Annie the relief teacher. I noted that her experience with that class was similar to that of the male teacher that had taken the class the day before:

The class was noisy. This relief teacher, though, is more strict than the man before. The boys in the back made noise with their...objects, and she told them off, told [them] not to play with their coins. They didn’t take her too seriously and told her there was no coin. [...] She told them to stop it anyway.

With the noise they’re making she waited till they’re quiet. Quite a few times. Then they had a discussion on having jobs. The kids seemed engaged, mostly, many sharing their own experiences. [...]

She knows these kids, too. She calls them by name. [...] Kids started talking about themselves and have to be told to quiet down and move on. Most listening then, though. [...]

I think her calling students by name is significant. Perhaps it shows she knows [them] and addresses their identities as a person rather than [...] nameless face[s].

Yet the kids keep talking among themselves and she keeps waiting for them. [...] One boy turns around and has to be told to turn back. The two girls talked [among] themselves briefly.

“Somebody,” [Annie] said, is being rude, even when she is talking. Clearly they are not taking her [as] seriously as [they did] Jay, despite her attempt at control. [...]

The relief teacher is “not the boss” of these kids. They do not put her in that identity, role, or whatever [...] as they do jay—despite the fact that she is also a teacher. Thus being a teacher is not sufficient to be the kids’ “Boss”. [...] and in this case their relation[ship] [among] themselves is stronger than their relationship with the relief teacher. [...]

One boy was told off for doing another [subject’s] work. That work was taken. He argued with the teacher, telling her that’s his work. When she said he was supposed to do the worksheet and took the work, he insisted Jay wanted him to do it and hand it in today, and that was why he was doing it.

Even though Jay was not always liked by his students, his students clearly considered his authority to be meaningful. In this case, the boy whose work was taken by Annie defended his actions by appealing to Jay’s authority as higher than

that of the relief teacher, regardless of the veracity of his claims. This supports my suggestion that unlike the formal identity of ‘teacher’ in the school, the informal identity of what I call the ‘Boss’ in the classroom had to be earned. As their regular teacher, who had spent considerable time with the students, Jay arguably had earned that position, while Annie had not.

Compared to Michael, it seemed that Annie enjoyed a limited degree of success in controlling the students. This appears to have been brought about by the combination of her familiarity with the students, which she displayed by calling their names without resorting to the call sheet, and her firmer exercise of formal authority, at least compared to the previous relief teacher. Nevertheless, she still did not have as high a degree of compliance and ‘fear’ or ‘respect’ as Jay normally did with the same class.

The relatively high degree of defiant behaviour was not limited to that Year 10 class, as I noted from my observation of Annie’s interaction with students in another class, this time one of Jay’s Year 9 classes:

Annie’s relief teacher again. This class certainly does not consider her the “Boss”. They kept talking very rowdily as she explained what to do. She kept having to tell the kids off. When kids got told off they acted quite wildly, often displaying deliberate defiance [...]

The most significant[ly defiant student] is Max. Usually relatively demure—despite his rather strong antagonistic attitude towards [Jay]—he was really acting up. When told off he shouted quite rudely. Totally unexpected. He was quite wild today. When the class was told to move to the computer lab, he and Allen were told to stay back and given a bit of talk[ing-to] by Annie.

It is safe to say that it was not necessarily Annie’s approach or personality that triggered the students’ defiant behaviour. After all, their regular teacher Jay often acted towards the same students’ misbehaviour with an equal measure of firmness, if not more so. Rather, it was her status as a relief teacher, which I demonstrate by

pointing to Max's exhibition of similar behaviour during a lesson taught by another relief teacher, Sarah:

Max shows sign of open [defiance], such as jestingly saying "No" to [the] teacher [when she was] telling off the class. Strangely he is very seldom told off [while others were] [...] Max kept yelling out. I asked him what's going on. He said he was just throwing paper balls and rubber bands. [...] Max shouted out and said "cocksucker", "fuck". His profanities are again ignored. [...] Max screamed "I'm trying not to yell".

I should note that, having observed Max for some time, it was difficult for me in that instance to imagine him engaging in these sorts of behaviour in Jay's presence. Indeed, in spite of being occasionally rebuked by the regular teacher, he never behaved as defiantly as that in Jay's presence.

Lucy, another relief teacher whose actions I described in Chapter 3, faced similar difficulties in dealing with the Year 10 class:

Noisy start. The teacher told them to be quiet. They kept on making noise. But she seems to be quite experienced. She told off interrupters and waited till everyone is quiet before she told the class what they would be doing. [...]

The teacher seems to be a rather strict one. She told off two boys that they were not paying attention. They were harshly warned. The others chuckled and such. Her warnings were not taken seriously enough, it seems—or not as seriously as they would have taken Jay's. [...]

The teacher wrote "Lunch time detention" on the board. Three names on the board, including Hank and Noon. Noon got up to the board and deleted his own name. The teacher said that was an instant report. [...] The teacher wrote Noon's name again on the board, and added "report" [next] to it. She wrote that the whole class [was held back for] 3 minute into lunch [as punishment]. [...]

The teacher got up and shouted that that was absolutely it. Some kids laughed and she said it wasn't funny. She told them that the class was the rudest she'd ever had. A boy said that they got told that a lot. [...] The teacher said being called "rude" and "disgusting" is not something to wear as a badge of pride.

Francine, teaching Jay's 'other' Year 9 class (not the one that Allen and Max were in):

In the first five minutes two kids were sent out for talking and using the phone. [...] As usual with relief teachers, [the students] didn't take her seriously, taking her warnings and threats as a joke. [...] This relief teacher is a Filipina. [In actual fact, I found later, she was Indonesian.] Hence the accent, which one of the kids imitated at one point, and another half jokingly told him off for being racist.

Francine then taught the Year 9 class that Allen was in. At that time Max had been temporarily put in another class at that time as a punishment for the previous day's misbehaviour:

Better start. Less noise. [...] Then the boys next to Bob started talking out loud about "penis" and "vagina". The teacher came up to them and asked Bob if he wanted to do work next to her. He said no. He "pretended" to be dumb, saying loudly that they were saying "naughty, naughty words". This prompted the teacher to go up to them again and have a long talk with them (quietly). That corner kept talking. And there's something about [...] emos. [...] Bob asked his friend if he looked Jewish or Turkish. And then they went on with [shouting] "penis" again. At this time the class went noisier again.

Much of the disruptive behaviour and defiant attitude exhibited by these in the presence of relief teachers were either rarely seen or did not seem as intense when regular teachers like Jay and Dan were supervising their own classes. This is quite evident in comparisons between how individual students responded to regular teachers to their responses to the temporary teachers. For example, I have spoken of the relatively positive response that Year 8 student Celine gave to Jay after he had volunteered to mentor her and help her resolve her problems with her other teachers. I recounted that while she was under his personal guidance, the student reacted compliantly even to Jay's reprimand by ceasing any behaviour that had caused his rebuke in the first place. Towards relief teachers, though, Celine behaved differently. The following was her interaction with Norma, a relief teacher that was substituting for Jay:

Celine is acting [defiantly] Calling out "Yes" when [other] kids' names are called at roll [call]. Kept interrupting the teacher when he spoke, saying she wanted to talk. Ran up to him. [...] Then Celine loudly asked the teacher why he's mean to them, to her. Then she said hi loudly to me and asked me to tell the teacher to get another job that doesn't [involve] tell[ing] people off [...]. He went up [to her] and talked to

her about it. She talked back. [...] She was eventually told to move outside. Wouldn't do it. So she was told to go next door to the other class.

A similar difference was also present in Year 9 student Max's response towards Jay's reprimand and towards that dispensed by Jean, a relief teacher. Max's disruptive behaviour during one particular lesson caused Jay to repeatedly censure him. I noted what happened between them towards and at the end of the lesson:

Bell went. They started packing. Jay told them off—said they must've thought they were kidding. They quieted down and listened. Bob and Max fooled around. Max bumped into me and was told Jay [would] see him after class. He actually stayed. He was told he's not suited to be in his class—he doesn't listen to rules—never. He doesn't seem [defiant], though, pretty “repentant”. Apparently he had been told off together with Allen. Max tried to defend himself, saying Bob started it when he tried to behave.

Max's reaction to Jay's reprimand was in sharp contrast to how he responded to an attempt to do the same thing by a relief teacher. The teacher in question, Jean, had been tasked with supervising the class Max in because Jay was ill. Sometime over the course of the lesson, Max got out of his seat and calling out to his friend. Jean reprimanded him, instructing him to sit down and be quiet. Max simply ignored her warning and resumed his conversation loudly. When the bell rang and the lesson drew to a close, Jean told him to stay back so she could speak to him about his misbehaviour. Once again, however, Max blatantly ignored her and left the room with everyone else.

The final example I present is the disparity between Allen's responses to Jay, his regular teacher, and his reaction to relief teachers. First, some indication of his behaviour when Jay was supervising his class:

Jay was giving an explanation of how the [British Australian] colonies were born. How Victoria separated from NSW. The kids seemed interested, quiet (some calling out that was told off).

Allen—when Jay asked if anyone knows something—shouted out “Me!” Then he made comments on Jay's explanations. [...] He [then] kept calling out, giving stupid answers someone else [has] given [...] At one point, though, Allen actually asked

good quality questions. Jay asked if anyone knows something he said again [sic]. Again, Allen raised his hand, said “Me again”. [...] Jay asked what’s different about the colonies. Allen raised his hand and gave a great answer: “Laws”. Jay praised him. This presumably is because his dad’s a lawyer. He’s actually doing pretty okay today—despite the rather obvious attention seeking behaviour.

He was also perceptive when Jay talked about the different railways of the colonies. I’m beginning to think perhaps Jay’s acceptance is important to him now[...]

On another occasion:

The [students] gave answers to the questions as Jay went through the questions—even Allen, though not that well—so they could mark the tests Bob gave good answers. It seems he’s studied it pretty okay. He got [answers] wrong too, though.

At one point Allen and Max got into a squabble (because Max was marking Allen’s test)—and Jay told them to behave. So since they were noisy, Jay decided he’d just give them the answers. [...]

The scores were taken. They had to call out their own marks. [...] Max said he got 80%. [...] Someone read Bob’s mark. He passed it 10/20. But just.

Allen’s response to Jay’s reprimand was different almost each time, with varying degrees of compliance. Regardless, for the most part he showed some measured deference to the teacher’s authority. This is well encapsulated in his interaction with Jay on one particular day. Both he and Max had come late that day. When Jay asked him why, Allen gave him excuses that the teacher clearly did not believe. Since he had to commence the lesson, Jay decided to wait for the right opportunity to address the issue, which came at the end of the period:

Allen was called outside to talk about [why he was late] today. He said it was Max that caused him to be late. But Jay said Max came two minutes earlier. Max was called out too and there was a discussion to piece together why Allen was late. Jay asked why Allen was lying about some Asian teacher having to do with [his] being late. Why he lied. Why he didn’t just tell the truth. Jay told him that every time Allen lied, it made teachers think he couldn’t be trusted. The problem was he was lying but it didn’t seem [...] wrong to him.

Jay said he ‘d thought Allen was improving before. But today it was just that he owned up [to his mistake] that was good. [...]

Jay told me afterwards [that] Allen came in [to the office]. Told [Jay] he agreed to 10 min[ute] detention for every lie and 5 min[utes] for every time he is late in the future. Great breakthrough.

From this we can infer Allen's various attitudes in reaction to Jay and his authority as a teacher. When he blamed Max for his lateness, we see him talking back to his teacher in a manner of speaking, although in a manner that suggests not so much a defiant attitude but a denial of responsibility. Allen did not deny the teacher's right to demand explanation but attempted to give one that would exculpate himself. Also, after further pressure, he owned up to his mistake and later even voluntarily suggested a way for Jay to keep him accountable.

Allen's interactions with substitute teachers were quite different. He exhibited a defiant attitude that seems to suggest a denial of their authority over him. For example, on one occasion I observed how Allen responded to Paul, a relief teacher:

When Allen walked in and he saw [Jay] wasn't teaching, he went looking for a place [other than his usual spot]. He settled for a place in front of Max. Allen was told, like everyone to take off his hat. First he said it was a beanie. Still told to take it off, he turned into a skullcap, and actually insisted that he was Jewish. The teacher asked [Allen] to tell to tell him things about the Jewish faith. He couldn't. Then he said he was cold. The teacher closed the window for him. He took off the beanie and opened the window again. [...]

The class read the texts together. It is read out in turns. Relatively quietly. A bit of disruption (from Allen mostly). [...] Allen was told off for playing with his coins. Then he shouted out "Penis!" He was called out to the front. He walked up then when the teacher opened the door, he turned around, saying [he knew the teacher] was going to make him wait out there. [...] The teacher insisted he wanted to talk to him outside and he [went out]. [...]

The teacher came to me and asked me to escort Allen to Mr. Lincoln [the head of Society and Environment department]. Then he said Allen wouldn't move so he asked me to get Mr. Lincoln. I did. Mr. Lincoln gave him a long talk.

In that case, Allen still showed some recognition of Paul's authority by attempting to make excuses for keeping his hat on, instead of blatantly declining. This recognition, though, seemed to have evaporated by the time the relief teacher was actually going to punish his repeated disruptive behaviour.

Even more distant from Allen's indicated deference to his regular teacher, Jay, was his interaction with Annie, as exemplified by their exchange during one particular lesson. One instance that I recorded exemplifies this:

Allen is [...] wearing his sunglasses. He was repeatedly told to take them off [...]. He took them off in the end. [...] These kids had met Annie before so she's not new to them [...] Allen is still [walking] around, growling, shouting threats. His phone "rang" [or rather, he pretended that it did]. Annie would take it from him but he put it in his pocket [before she could]. She told him if she heard or saw it again she would take it. [...]

Allen kept [walking] around. He claimed to have finished. Annie told him he could not do anything but don't stop people doing their work. He said he could've said so. He put on his sunglasses again, and talked loudly. He was then told to move to the desk at the front. He didn't move. And kept talking out loud. [...]

Allen kept playing with his sunglasses. Annie asked him for them. He wouldn't give them to her—he said he'd put them in his pocket. Annie said she'd write it in the report. He asked "For what? For wearing glasses?" [...]

Annie asked [the class a question], and Allen shouted out "grab the bull by the balls." [...] At the end of the class Allen was called by the teacher for a talk[ing]-to. He was told off but he talked back, argued. He said there was no rule against sunglasses, and that his noise wasn't affecting the kids at front, who were talking anyway. He wouldn't look at the teacher and kept his glasses on initially. The teacher told him off and he literally walked out on her right when she was telling him she'd be writing an incident report.

Both Jay and Annie asked Allen to stay back after the lesson for a 'talking-to' regarding his persistent disruptive behaviour. Also on both occasions Allen tried to use excuses, which proved ineffectual, to escape punishment. However, he did the opposite with Annie as he did with Jay. Allen cut short the relief teacher's effort to discipline him by simply walking out on her while she was still speaking. Allen was not above misbehaving, or even talking back, whenever his regular teacher, Jay, was present. However, no matter harshly his regular teacher disciplined him—even, on a few occasions, by sending him to Mr Lincoln—Allen never walked out on Jay as he did Annie.

What might account for this discrepancy between students' responses towards regular teachers and how they responded to relief teachers? After all, both groups of adults are teachers, formally endowed with authority over students by the school institutions they represent. Since at least the early twentieth century, scholars of education have recognized the challenges uniquely faced by relief teachers. Much literature exists on the subject (for example, Kirby 1933, Perkins 1959, Kraft 1980, Crittenden 1994, Abdal-Haqq 1997, Weems 2003, Lunay 2004, Lunay and Lock 2006). These scholars have presented various explanations for the difficulties that the temporary teachers have had to deal with. Weems (2003) suggests that relief teachers are often marginalized, perceived as, among other things, "deviant outsiders" and "third-class citizens" even by their more permanent colleagues. Lunay (2006) reports similar situations faced by relief teachers in Western Australian primary schools. Some scholars portray students as a key part of the reason. Some argue that relief teachers are often alienated by their more permanent colleagues where they are employed (e.g. Lunay and Lock 2006), while others suggest the need for administrative and structural changes (e.g. Abdal-Haqq 1997).

As this sampling of studies suggest, many of them tend to place such focus on the organizational culture, practices and policies that contribute to the difficulties faced by relief teachers. As is the case for studies on regular teachers, there seems little, if any, study on relief teachers that focuses on their interpersonal relationships with students as an important aspect of examining their work. Some, though, do directly examine the interaction between students and relief teachers. For example, Perkins (1959), a relief teacher herself, reports that the students "seem to take delight in seeing how far they can go in order to 'try' the teacher"

(Perkins 1959:57). Almost fifty years later this remark was echoed by Nancy, a relief teacher at Pine View High, after a particularly difficult session with one of Jay's Year 9 classes, who said that the students "want to know how far they can push us".

Other teachers had different opinions. Sonny, for example, complained about the "bad quality" of relief teachers at the school, even while acknowledging that they did not have as much power as regular teachers like himself. Meanwhile, Jean the relief teacher placed the blame neither on herself nor on the students but on the time of day that the lesson had taken place. Regarding Max's blatant disregard of her authority, she reasoned after the fact that the student was behaving to that extent because the class had been held at the end of the day, which meant that students were tired and had lost most of their concentration. I do not consider this explanation sufficient: I had seen Jay teach that same Year 9 class numerous times during the last period of the day, but on all those occasions the behaviour of the students, including Max, had not been as defiant or disruptive as it was when Jean took the lesson.

The explanations and opinions provided by those past studies of relief teachers, as well as by the relief teachers themselves, might be valid in many cases. The account of substituting teachers' experiences that I present here, though, is grounded on the main analytical concern of this thesis, which is students' interpretation of the identities of adults' at school. First, I draw from Freiberg's (1996) use of the metaphor of citizenship in his discussion of the role that students' sense of belonging has in their classroom participation. Freiberg argues that students would participate better in classroom activities if they were encouraged to

feel like ‘citizens’ of the classroom, and not just ‘tourists’. He suggests that teachers can do this by sharing leadership, responsibility, classroom management and even rule making with the adolescents. This would promote the feeling among students that they are part of a classroom community, endowed with a proactive part in its functioning. The end result, Freiberg concludes, is that they would participate and behave better in the classroom because they no longer see themselves as just being a subordinate part of an organizational hierarchy but an active part of an organic community.

Of note here is Freiberg’s (1996) allusion to the Tönnian dichotomy of the school that Sergiovanni (1994a) speaks of. Albeit focusing on the smaller scale of the classroom, like Sergiovanni, Freiberg points to two possible ways to conceptualize the school as a body of people: as a formal organization and as an informal community. His point is that to get students to participate in class, it is insufficient for them just be listed in the roll call as part the formal institution of the classroom; they must also be encouraged to perceive themselves as a member of the classroom’s informal community, with the teacher as its leader.

The focus of Freiberg’s (1996) thesis is on students’ sense of belonging in the classroom community, but the same logic can be applied to conceptualizing students’ perceptions of relief teachers’ part—or lack thereof—in their informal community. What if it is not themselves that they perceive as a ‘tourist’ but the teacher? I think this question is especially relevant in the case of the relief teacher. Like regular teachers, substitute teachers are endowed with formal authority over the students by virtue of their formal status as a member of the school staff, albeit a temporary one. Yet, as my empirical observations have indicated, students like

Allen, Celine and Max did not seem to acknowledge that authority the way they did regular teachers'. This might well be because the adolescents did not perceive them as 'citizens' of their informal group but as 'tourists'. As such, their formal authority was not informally recognized, at least by students like Max and Allen.

One explanation for this is that while regular teachers like Jay have sufficient time in which to build personal relationships with their students, relief teachers, because of the nature of their job, do not. As such, it is less likely for the latter to establish the informal and personal credibility needed to be a 'citizen' of the class group's informal community—an endeavour that has to develop over time—let alone its leader. This, I think, is at the core of the greater difficulty faced by relief teachers in relating to the students compared with their more permanent colleagues, at least where the adolescents' perception of adults' identities is concerned. In spite of the formal basis on which to understand the relevance of relief teachers' to their own persons, students lacked the informal basis that is only supplied through personal connection. This points to the important part that interpersonal human relationship has in students' interpretation of teachers' personal and relational identities, as well as in their recognition of their formal authority on the informal plane of interaction.

Formal and informal contexts of student interpretations of adult identities: A discussion of power relations

An additional way of understanding the role of students' perceptions of their teachers in the student–teacher relationships is in terms of power relations. In

conceptualizing this I especially draw from Jamieson and Thomas' (1974, also Erchul and Raven 1997) discussion on the various kinds of powers that teachers have in relation to their students. Citing French and Raven (1959), Raven (1965), and Collins and Raven (1969), Jamieson and Thomas suggest that there are four types of 'powers' that teachers might have in interacting with students: *reward*, *coercive*, *legitimate* and *referent*. I will briefly outline what they mean by these before applying them to theorizing the co-occurrence of the formal and informal relational contexts of the student–teacher interaction.

As their labels suggest, Jamieson and Thomas (1974) conceptualize teachers' *reward* and *coercive* powers as those based on their power to give reward or punishment as a way of compelling students to comply. Such powers, of course, are connected to teachers' formal authority: they are empowered by society and by their hierarchical position to reward or punish students as part of their job. *Legitimate* and *referent* powers, however, are not seen as being so unilaterally imposed, according to Jamieson and Thomas (1974). *Legitimate* power hinges on students' acknowledgement and internalization of the idea that teachers have the authority to regulate their behaviour at school. A teacher's *referent* power is based on students' identification of teachers as belonging to the social group as themselves, or as one of 'Us' (Jamieson and Thomas 1974:138).

These four powers also correspond to the formal and relational contexts that I have already laid out. *Reward* and *coercive* powers are, of course, formal powers, bestowed on teachers by the school as a formal institution. In exercising this power, therefore, teachers operate on the formal level of relationship. *Legitimate* and *referent* powers, however, are not so straightforward. To gain *referent* power over students, a teacher has to gain informal credibility based on their personal

relationship with students. As such, it is entrenched in the students' body as a community, not merely as a formal unit. Similarly, *legitimate* power takes it a step further by depending on the personal recognition given by students as an informal group to the teacher's formal authority. This does not only make the adult part of their *gemeinschaft*, but also its leader.

These powers can be inferred from students' interactions with the various adults that I have already described. First, this is seen in the distinction between students' responses to regular teachers, like Jay, and their responses to teaching assistants. Teaching assistants did not have formal role or authority over students, and for good reason; the informality of their relationship with students is what encouraged them to trust the adults. However, on occasions when they needed to control some students' disruptive behaviour, that lack of formal authority often made it harder for them to do so. Even though they might have *legitimate* power—they might have been accepted as part of the classroom community—they did not have the formal *reward* and *coercion* powers. When Jack swore at Melanie the teaching assistant, for example, she could not punish the student. Jay, the teacher, had to reprimand Jack on her behalf. Similarly, Melanie also invoked Jay's authority in warning Jordan and Lucas about using improper language.

Conversely, there is the comparison between regular teachers and relief teachers that I have already discussed. While teaching assistants lacked formal authority over students, relief teachers did not. They, too, were teachers bestowed with that authority. But as I have demonstrated, students often also did not respond as compliantly to them as they did to regular teachers. For example, while Max, Allen and Celine were, in spite of being known as difficult students, relatively

compliant towards their regular teacher, Jay, each of them were quite defiant towards relief teachers like Annie.

This is because even though relief teachers had *reward* and *coercive* powers, they did not have *legitimate* or *referent* powers. The short length of time they spent with the students meant that they did not have time to build personal relationships with the adolescents. As a result, they could not be and were not perceived as ‘citizens’ of the informal classroom community. Students perceived them mostly as visitors or, following Freiberg’s (1996) citizenship metaphor, ‘tourists’. They were not one of ‘Us’. Furthermore, not being perceived as part of the students’ informal social group also meant that they could not be the leader of that group. This is why relief teachers did not have *legitimate* and *referent* powers possessed by many regular teachers, who’d had the required time to establish personal relationships with their students.

The insight to be drawn here is that both the formal and informal levels of interactions are important to consider in conceptualizing students’ responses to teachers, as well as to other adult staff members. The formal level of interaction serves to provide the institutional parameters of the relationships between students and adults, as are represented manifested in teachers’ *reward* and *coercive* powers. That is to say, these powers serve as the legal backbone of teachers’ approach to students. As I said, this is also the initial basis for students’ understanding of their relationship with teachers and other staff members. The informal level of interaction serves as a platform for students’ responses to the school’s definition of their institutional identity. In a sense, it gives students a kind of power to determine part of the nature of their relationships with teachers and other adults. This is manifested in what Jamieson and Thomas (1974) call *legitimate* and *referent*

powers. They point to the reality that student–teacher relationships are, in fact, relationships between human beings.

‘He’s not bad, he’s *sad*’: Interpretation of identities in students’ responses to teachers

In discussing the various relationships between students and the adults at school, I noted that regular teachers like Jay often had more success than relief teachers or teaching assistants in dealing with the adolescents’ behaviour. Most recently I argued that this was because they were more likely to have not only formal (*reward* and *coercive*) powers given by the school as an organization but also informal (*referent* and *legitimate*) powers derived from the establishment of personal relationships with students. This does not mean, however, that regular teachers would always be successful in dealing with student behaviour. Also, this does not always mean that students would always recognize the adults as having not only formal but also informal authority over them. Consequently, this does not always mean that students would behaviourally respond to regular teachers as their ‘Boss’.

First, not all teachers employ the development of interpersonal relationships that would lend credibility to their formal authority as a pedagogical method. Secondly, I doubt that many teachers would be able to develop relationships with *all* students in their classes on the interpersonal level. Even Jay, the most experienced of the teachers I observed, had his share of persistently non-compliant students in each of his classes. While he managed to encourage some of his

students, such as Celine and Allen, to regard him not only as a teacher but also as an ally through building personal relationships with them, he did not seem able to connect with some of his other students beyond the level of formal role relation. Nevertheless, in general, how a teacher approaches their interpersonal relationship with their students is influential to how the adolescents perceive the adult and, therefore, how they respond to them.

I have already mentioned Jay's approach in dealing with Celine, which, I am certain, was instrumental to his relative success in dealing with her compared to her other teachers. A similar example can be found in comparing two teachers' interpersonal relationships (or, perhaps, lack thereof) with their students and the differences in the resulting behavioural responses they received: Dan and Lydia. The small demountable building that Dan regularly used for his classes was situated across a very small courtyard from another building Lydia used for her mathematics class. I did not observe Lydia's classes during my year at Pine View, but because of the buildings' large windows I could see her teaching from the back of Dan's class, where I would position myself. At times, I could hear her voice from that position. She had a reputation among both students and colleagues as a very firm teacher, some claiming that she had the tendency to be too harsh on her students in terms of marking and in her responses to minor instances of misbehaviour.

I only managed to speak with Lydia herself on one occasion, at a parent-teacher meeting. On that occasion she told me about how dissatisfied her students' parents had been with the low marks she had given their children, and how much that frustrated her. She complained that it was difficult for her to deal with the

students, that they were too difficult to control, and that parents were using that occasion to complain that she was being too strict in marking their children's work. Lydia's reputation is also indicated by this exchange between Jay and his Education Support student, Jordan:

[Jordan] asked why Jay keeps teaching. Jay asked if he doesn't enjoy his class. "Sometimes" Jordan reluctantly admitted. Jay told him they come because they enjoy the class and learn. [Then] he asked if he'd rather have Ms. Peng [Lydia]. It seems the teachers are aware of Ms Peng's reputation among students.

Based on what I could observe of her teaching practice, and the reports of some of her colleagues, it seems that Lydia's difficulty in dealing with students had much to do with her approach to managing their behaviour. On a number of occasions I could see and hear her from across the small courtyard as she shouted at her students. Although I do not know what the students had done to warrant such a response from the teacher, the way Lydia raised her voice indicated the intensity of her frustration. I also heard from one of the other teachers that she once gave a member of her Mathematics class detention just for eating a piece of candy in her classroom.

These observations led me to conclude that that Lydia's approach to managing her students' behaviour did not focus on, or perhaps even neglected, the informal aspect of her relationship with the adolescents. The strictness with which she dealt with the members of her classes, whether it was concerning assessment markings or punishment for eating in the classroom, might indicate that she relied on her formal authority as a teacher more than she did any personal relationship with the students. To use Jamieson and Thomas' (1974) four modes of influence that teachers have over students, Lydia mainly relied on her formal *coercive* power in relating with the adolescents in her classroom. I do not know if, or how much, she rewarded her students, and so I cannot say much of her exercise of the *reward*

power she had as a staff member. However, she seemed to lack *legitimate* and *referent* powers over the students since, to my knowledge, her students did not perceive her as a part, let alone leader, of their community. Despite her effort to coerce them into complying with her authority, Lydia's reliance on her formal authority likely encouraged her students to interpret her relevance to their persons only in terms of her formal role and not based on their interpersonal relationships with her, which was non-existent.

Lydia might have had the formal authority that is the basis for students' perception of teachers' identity and relevance on the formal level. She also had the time to gain interpersonal credibility as a 'citizen' in the class' informal community. However, her approach in dealing with student's behaviour likely prevented any development of personal and informal relationship between her and her students. As I said, I did not observe Lydia's classes directly. But based on what I could see of her teaching style and on what other teachers said, as well as what she said about her students, I find it difficult to imagine that her overtly strict and uncompromising approach to student performance and behaviour was conducive to the development of an interpersonal relationship.

I contrast Lydia's approach with that taken by Dan with the members of his classes. Illustrative of how Dan chose to interact with his students is his relationship with a student in his Year 8 class, Karl, whom I have previously mentioned. I began observing him very early in the year. Since he usually sat at the back of the room, he was not far from where I normally positioned myself. I noted how Karl often did not do his work, and spent a lot of time talking to the student next to him, even while the teacher was speaking to the class. From my

interview with Karl, as well from my conversation with Missy, one of the teaching assistants, I discovered that Karl's disruptive behaviour in the classroom was partly caused by the depression he was suffering from, for which he was seeing the school psychologist. I spoke to Dan about Karl, and he remarked about the student that "he's not bad; he's *sad*".

Dan's willingness to try to understand of what might lie behind Karl's behaviour problems also informed his approach towards the student. Instead of simply reprimanding or punishing him in an effort to change his behaviour, the teacher sought to understand the student as a person and the issues underlying his actions. For example, instead of merely admonishing Karl for being disorganised with his school material, the teacher sought to help Karl become more organized by buying him a new file when his old one broke. Dan even labelled it "Karl's File" for the student's benefit. Dan also did not take issue with minor transgressions that Karl did. Instead, when appropriate, he focused on making sure that the student had what he needed to do work. One one occasion, Karl came into the classroom late and took his seat next to me. When Dan asked the class to take out the question sheets he had given them, Karl failed to do so. But the teacher did not reprimand him for that; instead, he gave the boy another copy of the sheet. In choosing how to respond to Karl's misbehaviour, Dan might have taken on board the school psychologist's input. Regardless, he demonstrated a way for a teacher to relate to students, and to manage their behaviour, that goes beyond just utilizing *reward* and *coercion* powers based on formal role and authority and into the realm of human interpersonal connection.

Dan's approach to Karl's behaviour and underperformance can be seen as an

example of what has been called the “relationship” method (Kohn 1996, also Hickey and Schafer 2006) or “community building” method (Merk 2008) of classroom management. Kohn (1996) and Merk (2008) agree that such an approach works well because it goes beyond simple discipline; it does not conceptualize the classroom only as a hierarchical organization where teachers hold the power and students comply but as an organic community whose life is mediated by interpersonal relationships. This is in line with what I have asserted. In terms of identity interpretation, such a method encourages the adolescents to define their teachers not only in organizational (*gesellschaft*) terms but also in terms of relationship between members of the same community (*gemeinschaft*). As a method of classroom management in particular, which is the focus of Kohn’s (1996) and Merk’s (2008) discussions, it is effective because that perception of the teacher is translated into social behaviour in the form of students’ compliance to teachers’ personal authority.

I am certain that Dan’s adoption of such a method in addressing Karl’s misbehaviour and underperformance had much to do with the student’s relatively positive response to Dan compared to how he behaved, say, towards Annie the relief teachers. It encouraged him, I think, to define Dan’s identity and relevance to his life not only in formal terms of authority and hierarchy but also on the basis of an informal relationship. This is very similar to what I have already said regarding Celine’s response to her own teacher, Jay. Both teachers seem to have adopted approaches in dealing with their respective problematic students that was conducive to the development of interpersonal relationships, and which highlighted not their formal role but their informal identities vis-à-vis the adolescents. Finally, because interpretations of others’ identities are manifested in

social behaviour, those students' perception of their teachers' personal relevance—as human beings, not as embodiments of the school as institution—is also reflected in how they acted towards the adults.

Conclusion: Students' behavioural response to adults as a product of identity interpretation

In this chapter I interrogated the nature of the connection between students' interpretation of the identities of the adults they meet at school and their behaviour towards those adults. In doing so, I followed on from the conceptualisations regarding identity interpretation that I laid out in the previous chapter. Hence, I present students' understanding of adults' identity as both culturally informed and deliberately defined. I illustrated this by examining students' different uses of the term 'Sir'. I explored how the word as a cultural symbol and the concept it is generally seen to represent are absorbed into students' practices. At the same time, the meaning of the word in students' actual use is defined by the adolescents themselves. In the same way, I conceptualize the way students perceive the relevance of teachers and other adults at school to themselves.

Since identity is a symbolic object that is interpreted contextually, as I noted in Chapter 2, how students perceive the adults at school is also contextually defined. The context in question is that of social relationships. In thinking of the social contexts in operation in the school setting, I turned to a conceptualization of school as both a formal organization, maintained by institutional structures, and

an informal community, inhabited by human beings. These, then, serve as the bases for how the adolescents perceive teachers.

I highlighted the role of the formal plane of interaction in students' perception of adults' identities by comparing their interactions with teachers to their interactions with teaching assistants, who did not have formal roles on which the adolescent could base his or her identity interpretation. I similarly underlined the role that informal relationships between students and adults by contrasting students' responses to regular teachers to their responses to relief teachers, who also had formal roles and authority but lacked the luxury of establishing personal relationships with the adolescents. I argued, then, that both planes of relationships—formal and informal—are essential parts of students' understanding of the part that teachers and other adults have in their lives, and the natures of their interactions with them.

I discussed not only the symbolic facet of students' perception of teachers but also the individual process of interpretation through which they create the identities of those adults. I also cited my interaction with Cole, in which he reinterpreted the meaning of the word 'Sir', in order to define and maintain the formality of my relevance to, and interaction with, him. I suggested that in taking part in defining the nature of their relationships with teachers, at least on the interpersonal level, students also respond to the formal identity that is imposed on them by the school. I said early in this thesis that the meanings of both identities and behaviour are understood and interpreted symbolically. Therefore, as I have aimed to demonstrate in these two chapters, students' relationships with teachers and other adults in the school are mediated by their creation of the symbolic meanings. Understanding this would greatly assist our comprehension of student behaviour.

“People say I look better with them”: Students’ peer relationships as a symbolic component of identity interpretation

On the way out [of form class]³⁰ Dan talked to a girl who complained [...] about her eyes hurting because of her contacts. He asked why she wore them. She said it was because *people say she looks better with them than with glasses* [emphasis added]. [...] [The teacher] said at camp she was always seeking attention, complaining about [similar] things.

The attitude displayed by this girl, Julie, seems quite common among adolescents. Like many others, she evidently to considered her friends’ opinions enough that she was willing to endure physical pain simply to conform to her friends’ suggestions. In some cases the influence of friends even extend to personal preferences. Sometimes it is the only basis for what they liked or did not like, regardless of their actual experiences. What Year 8 student Adrian said about a subject he did not like is an example:

Adrian now kept saying for a while he didn’t like art. He said “John” also doesn’t like it; he said it “sucks”. [...] This “John” is his classmate, perhaps. Later I [asked] did he not like art just because his friend said it sucks. He said he didn’t like it because his friend said it.

Note that the direct source of Adrian’s dislike for art was not any bad experience in learning the subject but the opinion of his friend, as he clearly said. What Julie

³⁰ Also commonly known as ‘homeroom’ in the United States and ‘tutor group’ or ‘form’ in the United Kingdom, a form-class is a group that meets in a designated classroom for a short period for the purpose of checking attendance, giving announcements and other administrative matters. In the case of Pine View High, this session immediately preceded lunch break. It is also often the case that the form teacher is responsible for the supervising the overall academic and behavioural performance of the students in their form-class. As such, in cases of poor performance, the regular teacher would notify the form-class teacher that so-and-so is not doing well in class. Supervising a form-class is part of most teachers’ regular duties.

and Adrian said demonstrate the strong influence that a high school student's peers and peer culture has on how the adolescent perceives himself or herself and the world around themselves.

This observation is far from new, supported by a plethora of past studies conducted by a wide variety of scholars from various fields from psychology to anthropology and sociology to youth and education studies (see e.g. Erikson 1959, 1994; Marcia 1980; Hartup 1993, 1996; Bucholtz 2002; Kegan 1982, 1995; Kroger 2000, 2004, 2007; Vigil 2003). Erikson (1959, 1994), a prominent scholar of both youth and identity, notes that adolescence is a period when the orientation of a child's identification focuses more on their peers than on their families. Along the same line of argument but more recently, adolescent psychologist Jane Kroger (2004) likewise considers peer groups as an important part of how teenagers construct their identity as a form of self-meaning. Citing Kegan (1982, 1994), Kroger (2004:169) states that at this stage in adolescents' lives, their peer group becomes a source of respect and esteem that they incorporate into how they perceive themselves, more so in high school than during their time in primary or elementary school. Anthropologist and linguist Mary Bucholtz (2002:532) concurs with this point by pointing out the salience of peer groups in the development of teenagers' "search for identity". A case study illustrating the importance that peers have in young people's self-identity construction can be found in James Vigil's (2003) study on urban violence and street gangs. Vigil (2003:227) suggests that his adolescent subjects not only rely on their peer groups in navigating the uncertainties of their social identities and roles, but that youths also look to them as a source of guidance.

What this implies is that the peer group's values, ideas, morality, and so forth, become an important part of individual adolescent's personal values. Such group values would also have an influence on aspects of individual teenagers' self-perception that are related to those values. This seems to be a reasonable explanation for how peer opinions influence Julie and Adrian's attitude to things. For Adrian, it was preferential value: he did not like art as a subject of study not because he had had a negative experience in art class but because that was the value that his friend subscribed to. For Julie, it was aesthetic value: in her eyes, both figuratively and literally, her group's sense of aesthetics was more important to her than her physical comfort.

My observation of other students at Pine View High shows that like Julie, most students at the school similarly hold their peers and the values they hold in high regard. The notion is also confirmed by the comments interviewed students made about the importance of friends. I asked each interviewee what their friends meant to them. The answers varied. Some gave much weight to the emotional significance of friends. Year 8 student Budi, for example, replied, "They mean... friends are special". Jess, a student in the Year 10 class did not think long before answering,

"Everything. If there's anything wrong, I can count on them. They're the same age, more understanding. I trust them, they're fun."

It is interesting that when I asked her what her family meant to her, she took a few seconds to think about how to answer the question. Her classmate Hank's response had, again, a similar emotional bent,

"Oh, they mean a lot. Um... they listen to me... [...] My friends, uh... understanding. Probably a big one. And um... advice. Like they'll help me and I'll help them out."

Other students' responses regarding what their friends meant to them seemed to have more pragmatic or logical lines or reasoning. Year 8 student Harry replied that his friends were "company, keep me company, a lot to me", while Adrian said something similar about his friends, that they "mean everything. So I have someone to talk to". For Monica, Harry's classmate, her friends were primarily her "helpers at school", especially since she had come to Australia as a foreign student with no friends. Edward, about whom we will hear more in this chapter, offered that friends to him mean

"Uh... Fun. Usually... We rarely do the, rarely do the emotional girly stuff, like eat ice cream and bitch about other people, but it's usually just... fun."

To put the importance of friends in some perspective, I asked my interviewees whether they would choose between their friends and their family. Of the eleven students, one of them, Karl, claimed to have no friends and was unwilling to speak further about it. Of the remaining ten, Celine settled on "Equal", adding that "Yeah, I can't choose", while Edward said that "Emotionally, my family. Fun-wise, my friends". Only two students, Adrian and Jess, ultimately chose their friends over their family. However, of the remaining students that decided to choose their family over their friends, two did so with hesitation. As James said, "I'll have to [choose] my family, It would, like, absolutely kill me to let my friends go, but family first".

The important role of peers to adolescents' existence and to their formation of identity has been extensively studied (e.g. Erikson 1959, Brown et al. 1986, Walker 1988, Moore 1994, Cotterell 1996, Vigil 2003, Kroger 2007). Some sociologists of schools, such as Walker (1988), have also examined the role that peer groups have on student identities. He discusses in particular the link between

individual students' group-based identities, their relationships with each other, and their behaviour. I focus on how students' peer interactions inform, and are influenced by, their self-perception. I give particular attention to the symbolic significance of friendships and other interactions with peers in the formation of students' social and personal identities, as well as on social behaviour as the symbolic enactment of their relationships. Of course, as Walker (1988) points out, not everything that each adolescent does can be attributed to his or her membership in a single peer group. Nonetheless, throughout his ethnography he shows the strong influence that belonging in such a group has on how students choose to act and in their choice of friendships. In this chapter I will explore the link between students' interpretations of identities, both their own and those of their friends, and their friendship choices and interactions. Before discussing their conscious choices of friends, however, I first discuss the factors influencing the development of personal friendships among the adolescents.

Factors contributing to adolescent friendship choices at school

At this stage I will explore the factors that contribute to students' choices of friends. Adolescent peer groups are often perceived as having developed around some form of sameness or commonality among their members. In his ethnography, for example, Walker (1988) portrays some peer groups, such as the "Greeks" and the "Aussies" as having formed around common ethnicities, while others, like the "handballers" and the "footballers", formed around shared interests and activities. First, I address shared ethnicity as a factor in the formation of Pine View's peer groups. As far as I could see, there seemed to be almost no

single-race, single-nationality or single-ethnicity student groupings at Pine View High.³¹ I recorded my initial observation regarding the demographic patterns of the students' choice of friends:

I just noticed again that [...] ethnicity plays a relatively minor role in students' choice of peer group formation—at least visibly. An exception to this might be the Aboriginal kids. Even their group, or one that I have seen, contain white kids (the token white guy). In general I find peer groups to be more gender-based rather than ethnicity-based/race-based. Yet I realise I have come to this conclusion only from sitting in a corner and watching the kids at play from a distance. [...] Class, a [potential] peer group determining factor I hereto have been rather ignoring, doesn't seem to be immediately observable as such a factor. From my [observation] most of the kids seem to be of a middle class background.

Most of the 'minority' students at Pine View—by whom I mean the school's relatively few non-White and immigrant students—appeared quite well integrated into the different cliques that formed both within the classrooms and in the courtyards. For example, the Indonesian students there—including those I interviewed, Monica, Budi and Adrian—were each part of a mixed-ethnicity peer group composed of students from a single year group. Monica's group was predominantly White, as was Budi's, although his contained an Australian-born Japanese boy and an Indian boy. As I will elaborate on later, Adrian's clique was composed of older students, most of whom were Anglo-Saxon.

Far from being an anomaly, this heterogeneity in students' peer group choices echoes Willoughby's (2007a) observation in a school considered much more

³¹ Granted, it could be difficult and complicated to determine each student's nationality or ethnicity. For example, among the Indonesian students there were ethnic Chinese students such as Agnes and Adrian. Another Indonesian national, Budi, however, was not of Chinese but Javanese ethnicity. On the other hand, Agnes and Adrian might to a casual observer seem more similar to Malaysian Chinese students or even to Japanese such as Hoshi. It was often possible to determine this through asking the students or others that knew them where they or their family came from or even what ethnicity they were if necessary. Determining someone's 'race' was another matter; this was admittedly determined arbitrarily through observation alone. Another such grouping that could be observed was language groups, as exemplified by Edward's Chinese-speaking female acquaintances. It was not clear what nationality or ethnicity they belonged to except that they all spoke Chinese. In any case, this is all besides my point here, which is that a large majority of peer groups at Pine View were in some way—whether racially, ethnically or linguistically—diverse and heterogenous, which is in agreement with Willoughby's (2007) observation in another Australian school.

ethnically diverse than Pine View. In her study of a multi-ethnic school in Melbourne, she shows that perceived commonalities in race or ethnicity is not always a primary ground for students' choice of peer groups. Other factors such as gender or interests can be just as influential (Willoughby 2007a, Noble et al. 1999, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). "As such", Willoughby (2007a:1-2) notes, "even quite stridently ethnic peer groups generally have one or two members who are not of the 'correct' ethnicity, but have enough in common with group members in other areas to be happily accepted as one of the group". Common ethnicity, therefore, is not always necessarily the key elements influencing student choices of friendships.

On the other hand, shared interests were indeed a factor in the creation of peer groups at Pine View. Year 10 student Edward spoke about the nature of the different cliques that he had seen:

Edward: "We were a real mongrel group [...] I think our group was unusually mixed."

Me: "In what way is it mixed?"

Edward: "Most groups were pretty definable. Hockey. AEP [Academic Enrichment Program]. Girls that go clubbing."

Me: "That's an interesting category."

Edward: "Guys that vandalise shit."

Regarding his own friendships, he also said:

Me: "Did shared interests like IT [information technology] have anything to do with who you're friends with?"

Edward: "Yeah. Well, Lisa [his longtime friend] and I always kinda were the only people who could talk serious tech. But not really. You'd be amazed how form groups are really the biggest deciding fact for the developing years."

Me: "Really? How is that?"

Edward: "Yeah, like for at least the first two years, well at Pine View, at least with my form, we got all our classes together practically."

Me: "So, your class kind of decided who you're friends with?"

Edward: "A bit. I dunno. I started making friends outside of it in Year 9 and by Year 10, me and Ron were the only people in my group from the AEP [Academic Enrichment Program]. So I guess while I think it did, it probably didn't have the biggest [influence]. I kinda just got more social than academic. And people would, like, congregate to others who were at the same point in the social-academic spectrum as them."

What Edward said about the factors influencing the friends that he made highlights two factors informing who students become friends with. First, as already said, common interests are a factor. This is seen in what Edward said about he and Lisa being friends because they were “the only people who could talk serious tech”, by which he meant information technology. It is also shown in his reference to “social” and “academic” as categories into which he and his fellow students could be divided. According to Edward, he was more ‘academic’ while in Year 8, being a member of the Academic Enrichment Program, but he “got more social than academic” when he was in Year 10. This, he said, resulted in his being drawn to friends who were likewise more ‘social’ than ‘academic’.

Edward also mentioned a number of other categories of peer groups that he had seen at school: “cricket” (referring to students in the cricket program), “AEP kids” (or the ‘nerds’, those in the Academic Enrichment Program such as himself), “girls that go clubbing”, and even those he described as “guys that vandalise shit”.³² Like some of the groups Walker (1988) describes, the ‘handballers’ and the ‘footballers’, the groups categorize themselves based on shared common interests. This supports what has been said, for example, by Duck (1975, 1978) and Kandel (1978). In his psychological study of adolescent friendships, Duck (1975, 1978) concludes that adolescents have a tendency to choose friends with similar personalities. Kandel (1978) also argues from his own empirical evidence that there is a correlation

³² This last group of students was further described by Edward as “the kind of [people] who can’t really create so they destroy”. They had been known to sit in the back of the class burning things, and some even broke into the school at night before the last day of school and smeared the phrase “Leavers 2010” on the walls in fecal matter. Although I had left the school when it happened, I heard from Jay that the incident quite understandably caused quite a commotion and caused the school to be closed for a day.

between the degree of amicability between friends and similarities of attitudes, values and personality.

Another example of students united by common interests despite differing backgrounds was Year 8 student Karl's association with his classmate Harry, who was also his soccer buddy. The two were very different in cultural and family backgrounds, as well as in personality and in-class behaviour. Harry was the son of Chinese migrant parents, was known in the class as being very knowledgeable and well behaved. When I asked him to describe himself, he said that he was "positive, very positive. Like to exercise, like knowledge, know everything [...]" Most of my knowledge hasn't come from school. School is just an expression of my knowledge." The following excerpts from my notes give further indication of his personality and behaviour in the classroom:

Harry kept giving good answers. The teacher kept calling him a "good boy" and he seems very pleased to receive the praise, smiling and all. More like grinning. The teaching assistant told him no, he has to keep his head small, has to be able to get it through the window.

At lunch I had a little chat with Harry. I told him he reminded me of myself when I was his age. Asked him whether he reads a lot. He said yes. What kind? Science fiction, many kinds. [...] in this class the teacher asked questions. He raised his hand quite a few times. Tried to use big words like 'Hectopascals' and 'consistent', but nothing that hit the nail on the head—even when not asked a question.

This made him very different from Karl, a White Australian student from a single-parent family, who, as I have said, had a reputation for disruptive behaviour. In describing himself, he said was "tall, I'm funny, and I'm a bit stupid [...]" I do things different to other people [...] things that other people normally wouldn't do." His behaviour and personality might be inferred from the following excerpts:

Karl plodded in. He just asked for a seat, and so was told to get out and come in properly (knock, apologise, state reason for being late). He did so and was given a seat near the front. Earlier a teacher had come in to look for him. It looks like he's in trouble again. The teacher couldn't find him because he hadn't come yet.

Karl was told off. He played around with his sheet and it was grabbed from him. He was sharply told not to do it again. Then he [muttered] it was boring. The teacher said it wasn't boring. Another boy [...] told Karl it isn't. It seems this boy doesn't like Karl.

Karl is mucking around again with his friend, as he now sits with him again [...] Because Karl was moving around, Dan asked him what the 'eastings' are in a grid reference. He didn't really know at first. Harry turned around—and I think told him, or tried—and was told to turn back around. Karl actually got the answer right, and when was told that, raised his fists victoriously. "Yes!"

Yet, despite their different personalities, behaviour patterns and family backgrounds, they were united by soccer, a common interest. Several times at lunchtime when I was with Karl, Harry would come up to us and asked Karl if he was going to play soccer that lunchtime. Karl said that he would later on. I found it interesting that the two boys, who came from different backgrounds, had seemingly different personality types, different academic performance and behaviour records, would be brought together as friends by soccer. This was not just a common interest but, to a measure, a form of identification as well. When I asked Harry what his hobbies and interests were, he said, "I like soccer, I'm like Karl." Even though they were not close friends, they spent quite some time together playing the sport. The point here is that common interest can serve as the glue that binds students that are otherwise very different.

However, Edward also mentioned that his own group was a "mongrel group" that was "unusually mixed", unlike the others he had mentioned. Given the context surrounding his comment, he implied that the members of his group did not were not necessarily united by common interests or shared activities. This was also further corroborated by the description given by his on-again, off-again girlfriend Jess of the peer groups in Year 10. When I asked her how she felt about people in the school, Jess replied that, "I think with Years 8 and 9 you can tell the different cliques. With Year 10 we're just a big bunch of people." The implication seems to

be that not only was their group a 'mongrel' group, but according to Jess, peer groups in Year 10 student body had much more diversity compared to those in younger year groups. More importantly, this also means that shared interests alone might not be the only factor informing adolescents' choice of friends or choice of peer groups. Rather, peer groups can form and develop in different manners. To understand this, we must go beyond structural patterns and examine the actual process that connects each individual student to another as friends.

'Friendships are like trees': How students choose their friends

When I asked Edward whether he was drawn to his friends mostly due to shared interests, he marginally agreed, but then added, "You'd be amazed how form groups are really the biggest deciding fact [for who you are friends with] for the developing years" (see above). Here Edward alludes to another factor influencing who students become friends with that has to do less with their choices and more with chance, namely which class group the school administration had placed them in. Indeed, most of the students I interviewed said they met their friends in the classroom. I asked them how they met their friends. Harry's said that it was due to their personalities, but in addition he also said that they "sat next to each other, we talk". His classmate Mustafa offered a similar response: "Usually talk to someone and then start to know them better," while Albert, a Year 8 student in another class, said that, "I'm a friendly person. I meet them at school, then just started talking." The most candid response was given by Celine: "I went up and I went, 'Hi, I'm Celine.'" In this regard, shared interests or common personality types are not as much a deciding factor as being in the same classroom.

What the students' answers to my question also seem to suggest is the 'organic' nature of the formation of the adolescents' friendships at school. What I mean by 'organic' here is that students' friendship choices do not always seem to follow any particular pattern or formula but each instance of formation of friendship is uniquely idiosyncratic. Edward provides an imaginative description of the development of his own peer group that well captures this organic nature:

“If you think of making friends like a tree. You get the main log wood bit... stump? That's your form class and the branches of that are the people you meet. Some of those branches might bear fruit, and they might be your good friends. On the other hand, sometimes a branch comes out of that branch. And you could be better friends with that person's friend than you were with them. I met Emmy through Bill. Emmy's one of my best friends [now]. Bill isn't. [...] It's about choosing where the fruit grows.”

In the framework of this analogy, Edward considered his friendship with Emmy an example of what he called a branch that bore fruit, even though he never shared any classes with her at school. Having been introduced by Bill, a classmate, to Emmy, Edward formed a close friendship with her. On the other hand, Bill, who shared a class with Edward, never became more than an acquaintance. Although he did not go into detail in regards to why a deeper relationship failed to form between Bill and himself, in Edward's opinion they simply did not have enough common grounds on which to develop such friendship, whether in terms of shared interests or personality traits. Therefore, while he considered his acquaintance with Bill as a branch that produced another, more 'fruitful' one (his friendship with Emmy), he did not consider his relationship with his classmate to be 'fruitful'.

Therefore, while Edward did say that his first friendships at school all formed within the confines of his form class, the allegorical trunk of his friendship tree, he

also eventually made friends with those outside. This seems to indicate that while the class group a student is placed in plays is influential in peer group formations, it by no means restricts or predetermines the adolescents' actual choice of friendships. In fact, as is the case with Edward's friendship with Emmy, friendships with those outside one's classes might even be stronger than with those inside. As such, to some extent, this seems to make the development of students' friendships harder to predict. In spite of that, however, conscious choice can still be a factor in who students become friends with. At times this might be influenced by the group or clique with whom one identifies in the school. These group might not be in the same class group, or, as with the next case study, even in the same year group. In the next section I will examine how this interacts with their interpretation of self-identities.

Hanging out with the Year 10s: Choices of friends as the interpretation and expression of personal identities

One of the more conspicuous ways in which students' social identities are expressed in their behaviour is with who they choose to socialize—or 'hang out'. This is something that some previous ethnographies of student life suggest. Which group one associates with becomes part of individual students' personal social identities. The subcultural values, worldview and collective interests of the group are seen as integral parts of their personal values, worldviews and interests (Walker 1988:38–9). Foley (1990) reports a similar tendency among the adolescent subjects he studied to link one's self-perception to whom one associates with. In the case of his ethnography, this included a rather strong ethnic or racial dimension. A notable example is when, in a drunken rage, one of the 'Anglo' girls

he spoke to effectively accused Foley (1990:64) of siding with the 'Meskins' (i.e. Mexicans), even though he did not take sides. The reason for this was simply because Foley also associated with the Mexicans. The significance of this is in pointing out that act of socializing with a particular group is often interpreted by others outside the group as identifying with that group. It is one way that students' perceptions of their own and each other's social identity is influenced by the in-group or clique with which they associate themselves.

An example of the interplay between students' choice of friends and their self-interpretation can be found in Year 8 student Adrian, who was a member of Jay's Education Support class. While he was in Year 8, Adrian showed a preference for 'hanging out' with students in Years 10 and 11, including Edward and his group. He spent more of his recess and lunch time in the Year 10 quad than he did with his fellow Year 8 students. In our interview, when I asked him about who his friends were, he said, "Yes, I have lots of friends. [Thinks] Like Ron, Jim, Edward, Jessie." Aside from Jim, the other names he listed were those of Year 10 students.

He also seemed to be eager, or at least comfortable, showing to others his association with the students in the upper year group. For example, during a lesson in Jay's Education Support class, I noted that Adrian seemed to be 'talking on the phone', except he did not have a phone in his hand. He had 'talked' to an imaginary person on the phone in this manner before. When Jay asked him what he was doing, Adrian said that he was speaking to the Year 10 girls. The teacher decided to humour the boy and asked him what he was 'speaking' to them about. Adrian was reluctant to answer, which gave the opportunity for his classmate

Jordan to jump in and teased him, saying that Adrian was in love. This he denied vehemently. But Adrian mentioned the Year 10 girls again on another occasion, when he was asking Jim about a barbeque that they were going to have the following Friday. He asked his friend if they could invite the Year 10 girls (making no mention of the boys).

Similarly, during another session:

Jay asked the kids what they did on the weekend. Adrian—when it came to him—told a big long story. What’s most interesting is he made such a big deal of talking to the Year 11’s—playing with them—and that he got the phone number of the Year 10 girls, and was invited to their house. [...] He even took out his diary, saying it’s in there. Jay said he can show [the numbers] later [...] but he insisted, wouldn’t listen. He kept looking for the number[s] in his diary, even after a [teaching] assistant told him there was a more important thing to worry about.

The class was told to sit in a circle around Jay. [...] Then Jay threw [a] mandarin to them. Whoever catches has to tell us about their weekend. When Venny threw it to Adrian after her talk, he caught it with one hand—sort of. Jay joked that with such a catch he could be on the cricket team and the girls would go around him. He went “Yeah!” and laughed again. “Then when I slept I dreamed about the Year 10s”.

His attachment with the Year 10 students was highlighted by another instance of what might be considered unusual behaviour, when he came into the Education Support class after recess and suddenly told his teacher Jay that he had forgotten something. “What did you forget, Adrian?” Jay asked him. “I forgot to talk to the Year 10s,” the boy replied. Asked which Year 10 student he was talking about, Adrian mentioned one of the girls in that year group, and when a group of them came to the class, he kept murmuring that maybe they had come for him.

It is easy to focus on the fact that the Year 10 students were girls and say that Adrian’s apparent preoccupation with them may have been hormonally induced. That might be so and I do not deny it. In fact, regarding the last observation I noted my opinion: “It’s almost like the hints of a latent sexuality manifesting itself in

a way he doesn't really understand." The point here, however, is that the girls Adrian was drawn to were in Year 10, not in his own year group. He told me that he preferred the company of these middle school students to that of peers in his own year group and did 'hang out' with that group very often. On his part, Edward, too, told me that Adrian was well received by his friends, and even said that he thought the Year 8 student was "cool".

In a follow up interview after my fieldwork, I asked Adrian why he had preferred to 'hang out' with students in the upper year groups, as opposed to those in his own. Adrian told me that despite being in Year 8, he was actually the same age as Edward and his Year 10 classmates. As Anderson-Levitt (1996) points out, Western education systems are often preoccupied with sorting students according to not only age but also levels of 'maturity' or 'mental age'. Adrian's case is itself an example. According to his parents, he had been diagnosed with a learning disorder that had led the school administrators to place him two years 'behind' when he entered high school. Adrian was not comfortable with this. In our follow up interview two years after the fieldwork, the student emphatically insisted that he was supposed to have graduated from high school with Edward and the other friends he usually 'hung out' with. There was a sense of discrepancy between his self-perception as a fifteen year old and his actual situation of being in Year 8. Adrian's choice to associate with Year 10 students, who were actually his own age, can then be seen as his way of responding to this incongruity.

Social classification is an important part of self-identity interpretation. As Bornholt (2000, also Tarrant et al. 2001) says in her study of the connection between social and individual selves, self-concept is closely linked to self-categorization—the

social categories in which one places oneself. Further, in saying that we understand things through placing them in symbolic categories, Hewitt (1991) suggests an important part of our self-interpretation is how we self-categorize. School placement assigns students with a formal classification. It supplies students with a formal basis for interpreting their self-identity in the context of the school. Accordingly, since the school placed Adrian in Year 8, this was how he understood himself as a student. As he indicated, it was not a self-perception that he was comfortable with given his actual age. Adrian's choice to associate and socialize with Edward and his friends over his fellow Year 8 students may, therefore, be seen in this way as a means through which he attempted to 'rehabilitate' his social identity.

Adrian's 'rehabilitation' of his identity through 'hanging out' with the Year 10 students can be conceptualized in two related ways. First, his action was akin to Tajfel and Turner's (1979:35) definition of "social mobility", which sees social categories as

flexible and permeable, so that if [the individual] is not satisfied, for whatever reason, with the conditions imposed upon their lives by membership in social groups or social categories to which they belong, it is *possible* for them (be it through talent, hard work, good luck, or whatever other means) to move individually into another group which suits them better.

In Adrian's case, the condition imposed on his life was his formal identity as a Year 8 student at Pine View, with which he said that he was unsatisfied. However, at least in the informal sphere of social categories, his formal classification as a Year 8 student did not have to define his identity in relation to his peers. Adrian's association with Year 10 and 11 students, therefore, can be seen as the means by which he attempted to 'move' his social identity to another group he felt himself

better suited for. Since he did not refrain from socialising with other Year 8 students and considered Jim, a member of his Education Support class, his good friend, Adrian did not “leave, or dissociate himself, from his erstwhile group”, in this case the Year 8 students, which Tajfel and Turner (1979:43) say is part of ‘social mobility’. However, Adrian’s deliberate and frequent socialisation with Edward and his friends could be sufficiently read as an attempt to reframe his informal social identity through associating with that group of Year 10 students.

Further, Adrian’s act of associating with the Year 10 and 11 students gave him an informal basis for his self-interpretation. On the emotive and cognitive levels, this, too, provided him with an alternative to the identity that the school imposed on him. Tajfel and Turner (1979; also Tajfel 1978, Turner 2010) have also suggested that identification with certain social groups have been linked to self-esteem. Adrian said that he was uncomfortable with where the school had placed him, in Year 8, despite his biological age. His association with Edward and his group could, therefore, supply him with an informal alternative basis for his self-perception in lieu of the formal classification that the school gave him. Even though the teachers and administrators evidently perceived Adrian as not academically being able to be in Year 10, his friendship with peers from that year group could at least give him some ground for perceiving himself as being one of their number. It provided him with some measure of restoring to his self-perception, as well as a symbolic realignment to his social identity, as a fifteen-year-old.

Coupled with his predicament in being placed in Year 8, Adrian’s preference for ‘hanging out’ with Edward and the other Year 10 students indicates that students’

choices in peer relationships have a *symbolic* value pertinent to their self-interpretation. Another example of how personal and social identification can influence students' choice of friends can be seen in a recurring pattern that I observed among Pine View's students from Years 8 through 10. As I said in Chapter 3, I noticed from early in the year that Year 8 students seemed to have a preference for sitting with classmates of their own gender. Certainly, there were the occasional exceptions, but for the most part Year 8 boys would usually sit with boys while girls in the same year would form groups with other female members of the class. This was nowhere more obvious than when Jay took his Year 8 class to the computer room that was divided into two by a windowed wall. On that occasion the wall became a literal gender divider as girls congregated in one side of the wall and boys in the other, with the exception of two boys who came later and had to sit in the 'girls' section' of the room.

This trend began to dissipate with the Year 9 classes, where I observed a number of mixed-gender groupings in the classroom. Among Year 10 students there were a number of mixed-gender cliques not only within the classroom but also in the quads, the most prominent of which was Edward's. I asked Edward about the gender compositions of his peer groups as he went through high school:

Me: "Did most groups have the same kind of people or were most groups like yours? [...] What about boys and girls?"

Edward: "We were solid friends with girls by Year 9. Year 8 was like a cock fest."

Me: "What do you mean?"

Edward: "We'd occasionally bump into girls, but, like, yeah, we were weren't really good friends. Didn't really, like, talk to them. If we were talking to girls there was a reason."

Me: "Yea, I noticed that. I meant that Year 8 kids are pretty divided along gender lines."

Edward: "Yeah, they really are."

Me: "So you were talking to girls in Year 8? Let's talk about the other guys first. Why did guys not talk to girls back then?"

Edward: "No, no, I wasn't either. Nobody was. I mean we were all, like, on a friendly basis. But if you were talking to a girl, you liked her. Stuff like that. Just immaturity."

Me: "Ah okay. Were you afraid to talk to girls?"

Edward: "Yeah. [...] Like, what were we supposed to talk about? I wouldn't say afraid. I just acted differently. I didn't have fear. It's just like I had no reason to talk to them, they never tried to talk to me. And that's the thing. Neither group initiates the interaction so I guess you don't do it. This is me really trying to force back a reason but to be honest it was ages ago."

Me: "I see, I see. The girls never talked to you guys either."

Edward: "Nope. There was I think one couple in Year 8. Lasted two days. I remember 'cause I was in Science and a girl called Sophia came up and told me about it and said, "Jess doesn't wanna kiss Mark." And she wanted me to gossip it around the school for Jess. So that Mark would hear about it and not try anything."

Me: "So what happened? How did you guys come to have friends that were girls? I mean by the time you were in Year 10."

Edward: "Well how it works is: [in Year 9] there's groups of guys and groups of girls. And a group of guys will merge with a group of girls. 'Cause they each have one member dating another in the other's faction."

Me: "Okay."

Edward: "I remember Colin, Doug and Nate were good friends. And then Colin dated Sally, so Doug dated her best friend Cindy. And they tried to hook Nate up with Jocelyn Smith. Just so it would be three for three [laughs]."

The blurring of gender lines in students peer groups, therefore, can be attributed to an increase in their acceptance of friends of a different gender as they became older. One can also make sense of this apparent shift in the gender composition of students' peer groups through the lens of social identification. Scholars on youth identity such as Erikson (1959) and the (1980) assert that during early to mid adolescence, precisely the stage of life the Year 8 students were in, teenagers have only begun to develop their conceptualisations of gender identities. This would influence how they approached those that were their Others in terms of gender identities. As Edward said, in Year 8 he and male friends did not know how to talk to girls unless they had a clear reason to do so. By contrast, the gender identity of most Year 10 students would have been more developed, and consequently they would have been more confident about relating to those of a different gender.

That Year 8 students were more likely to congregate with others of the same gender makes even more sense when one takes into account that group categorisation is a key part of adolescent identity formation, as Newman and

Newman (1986) and Cotterell (1996) have suggested. It is therefore not surprising that the younger Year 8 boys, whose sense of identity is still in what Erikson (1959) famously terms 'identity crisis', would be more prone to socialising with others they perceived to be the same gender than were older Year 10 boys, whose gender identities were more established. Going by Newman and Newman's (1986) and Cotterell's (1996) assertions, in socialising with other boys, they would be affirming their gender identity as boys. The more established that gender identity was, the less the adolescents needed to associate exclusively with those of the same gender, and therefore it was more likely for the boys to associate with classmates of different gender. The same is also applicable to girls of both year groups.

The point I am making here is not so much about students' gender identities as it is about the interplay between their self-perception—in this case in terms of gender—and their interaction with their peers. I recall again here Sokefeld's (1999) point that one's personal identity is also socially constructed through one's social behaviour (see Chapter 2); whom one chooses as friends helps define who one is. As social behaviour, socialising and associating with friends carry meanings that contribute to the adolescents' personal and social identities. As a form of symbolic behaviour, who students choose to be friends with can be a means through which they socially define, or redefine, their self-interpretation.

Avoiding the “popularity limbo”: Choices of friendships, reputation and the construction of social identity

A popular adage tells us that ‘one is known by one’s friends’. This certainly seems to be the case of students’ social identity in that their apparent choices in friendships inform their peers’ understanding of who they are. In Chapter 2 I used Sokefeld’s (1999) discussion on multiple of identities to point to the social nature of identity interpretation. There I noted that the dilemma faced by Sokefeld’s informant was because his self-interpretation was not only defined internally but also socially by others’ perception of his group memberships. Regarding adolescents, Kroger (2007) similarly claims that memberships in peer groups are often defined by reputation. What this means is that a student’s group identity is not only derived from that adolescent’s choice of friends but also based on which groups their peers associate the student with. This is exemplified by the reputation that three of Edward’s friends gained simply by being constant companions to each other. By being very close friends, Cieran, Byron and Mark had acquired a collective identity in the eyes of their peers. Reminiscent of Walker’s (1988:52) “Three Friends”, the three boys had come to be referred to by the others in their group as “CieranByronMark” or, more simply, as “the Triplets”. And like the “Three Friends”, the “Triplets” were unrelated and each appeared distinct; “One’s short, one’s tall, one’s Asian”, as Edward put it. (In time, another boy called Jason would join them, after which they became known as ‘the four Triplets’.) Despite their differences, their close friendship with one another, and others’ recognition of that friendship, connected each of the boys with the others in the minds of their friends, even to the point of earning them a single but compound identity.

The Triplets’ case illustrates that who individual students associates with—or more accurately, reputed to be associated with—plays an important role in students’ formation of social identity, in particular with regard to how that identity

is externally validated by others' recognition. Erikson (1959) asserts that adolescents' concern with how they appear to others based on their peer relationships is a part of the development of their self-definition. This entails that students might choose their friends according to how they wish their perceived by others, especially if they are indeed aware of how their peers see them based on their choices of peer groups. This would also inform whom they choose to be friends with, or—as I am about to recount—whom they choose *not* to be friends with.

Edward told me about Casey, who was his friend when they were both in Year 8. As they spent more time together, however, Edward became alarmed and embarrassed by Casey's erratic pattern of behaviour. He recounted that his friend would take off his shirt inside the classroom and flex his muscles for everyone else to see. On one occasion, Casey was involved in a fight with another boy, who gave him a blood nose. The next day, while in class, Casey showed Edward his bag, which had been stained by his blood, and bragged about how 'cool' it was. There were other things that Casey did that made him seem unpredictable, and therefore considered by other students to be unlikeable. Edward said that such behaviour eventually made him stay away from his former friend. I asked Edward whether he would have done the same today. He said that he would still have stayed away from the boy, even in hindsight, even thinking that Casey's behaviour might have stemmed from some personal issue or emotional insecurity. Edward pointed out that had he remained friends with Casey, others would not have known how to approach Edward. He said he would be in what he called "popularity limbo". "It would just serve to segregate me," he explained, "people wouldn't know if it's okay to be nice to me."

Edward's dilemma is reminiscent of that encountered by the central character of Sokefeld's (1999) ethnographic parable, who is faced with the choice of having to choose between his kinship group and his religious sect. In Edward's case, he had to choose between his friendship with Casey and the acceptance of his other friends. The difference is that while Sokefeld's informant attempted to harmonize his conflicting social identities, Edward decided to choose one over the other. Regardless, in both cases, the dilemma arises from conflicting associations with their respective social groups. More importantly, both Sokefeld's informant and Edward's choice of which group to prioritize would reflect on their social identity as perceived by others. By continuing to socialize with Casey, Edward would have become identified with his socially unacceptable friend. Hence, just by maintaining a friendship Edward felt that his other friends "wouldn't know if it's okay to be nice to me".

Edward's dilemma regarding his friendship choices further underlines the symbolic value that peer relationships have in connection to students' interpretation of identity. Unlike with Adrian's case, though, the aspect of identity in question here is not so much self-interpretation but self-representation. That is, Edward's decision to dissociate himself from Casey was not motivated by struggles in his internal interpretation of who he was but by concerns over how his social identity would be perceived by others. The final point that I bring is that, as also suggested in Sokefeld's ethnography, self-representation is manifested in social behaviour. How Edward defined his social identity in terms of his friendships choices would have to be tangibly reflected in his behaviour towards

his peers, which brings us to the role of actions in students' validation of their self-interpretations.

Conclusion: Social behaviour in peer interactions as a means of self-interpretation

Many things that students do with, and in relation to, each other at school are connected to their interpretations of the identities of those peers. As a symbolic object, behaviour has meanings appropriate to specific situations. This capacity to convey meaning allows behaviour to serve as means to communicate individual identities (Goffman 1959, 1963). In this chapter I have focused on the meaning of social behaviour as the tangible manifestation of the connection between students' interpretations of identities and their relationships with their peers. Social identities are an important facet of how identities are understood (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel and Turner 2004). To understand social identity one must look at social behaviour, the type of behaviour that both expresses and validates social identities.

I began this chapter with an overview of student peer relations and friendships. I asked what friends meant to the adolescents in their lives at school. I questioned why they chose the friends that they did. In doing so, I explored factors that contribute to their peer choices. I asked whether any of the commonly cited factors such as shared backgrounds or shared interest might be sufficient as the sole explanation. My empirical data, however, suggested that students' choices of friendships and peer groups were more organic than is allowed by any deterministic structural factors. Instead, I have conceptualized the adolescents' choices in peer interactions as that: active choices, which form part of their

ongoing process of self-interpretation, which has been my main concern in this study.

I concluded that social behaviour towards fellow students does not only have consequences to those towards actions students behaved. Rather, because of the symbolic aspect of social behaviour, how they acted and reacted towards their peers carried significance for each adolescent's own identity. This is where social behaviour is important to students' self-interpretation. As I have suggested in Chapter 2, citing Sokefeld's (1999), definitions of identities are not only expressed through social behaviour but also often socially validated by it. Even more, the meanings of our social identities are frequently constructed in the forge of what we do in relation to others.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I explored the ways that students' interpretations of identities, both their own and those of others, interplay their social behaviour at school. I have utilized a conception of identity as self-meaning, the product of one's interpretation of who and what one is, which I frame as symbolic because the meaning of one's identity is not inherent in itself but must be constructed through the process of interpretation. I also suggested that identity as self-interpretation is informed by external factors, such as culture and social relationships, as well as by internal factors, such as one's past experiences. The synthesis of the individual process of identity interpretations and the cultural and social inputs involved in that process shapes each student's interactions with others at school.

The first sphere of interaction that I examined was the students' relationship with their teachers and other adult members of the school community (Chapter 4). I came to several conclusions. While they are tempered by variations in individual relationships, there were two levels of relationship underlying the interactions between students and the adults. Drawing from Tönnies' *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* dichotomy, I concluded that in addition to the formal role relationships between the adults and the adolescents, structured by the institutional nature of the school, their interactions also take place on the informal and personal level. On the former level, the adolescents' relational identity, as well as how they are expected to behave can be said to be imposed on the students by structural nature of Western-

style education, which they accept with varying degrees of alacrity. In addition to this, there is also the interpersonal level of student–teacher relationships, developed organically and bilaterally. On this level students have some measure of power over the nature of their relationship with their teachers.

I suggested that the behavioural response of each student towards individual teachers is greatly informed by which level of relationship dominates their interpretation of who the adults are, and how they are relevant to their lives. In this regard, what influences the adolescents' actions here is not so much their interpretations of their own identity, but those of the adults. I concluded that both the formal and the informal spheres are important and relevant to how students perceive their teachers. Both of them provide the context in which identities are interpreted and interactions are understood. The emphases that students give to either context of interaction influences their perception of the adults, and in turn their behaviour. I used Freiberg's (1996) metaphor of the citizen and the tourist in the classroom to clarify this point. A student would arguably respond more positively to a teacher they perceive as a member of their informal classroom community (a fellow 'citizen') than to one they define as a stranger and an embodiment of the school's formal authority (a 'tourist'). In this way, the adolescents' interpretation of the adult's identity is translated into tangible and observable behaviour. Hence, students' interpretation of adults' identities are linked to their behaviour in the context of how they understand the nature of their relationship.

I also examined this link between identity as interpretation of self and social interactions in the context of a second sphere of interaction, which is students'

peer relationships. Peers are an important part of adolescents' lives at school, and their impact on students' identity is, therefore, important to consider. I concluded that students' interpretations of themselves influences their interactions with their peers at school. This can be seen in their choice of friends. An example I used to highlight this point was the attempt by Year 8 student Adrian to re-interpret his place in the school by forming an alternative basis for his identity as a student. Likewise, their friends' interpretations of their own identity has bearing on their social interactions. I illustrated this with the dilemma that Year 10 student Edward had between dissociating from his friend Case and being unpopular with his other friends. The crucial point in both Edward and Adrian's resolutions of their respective situations was found in their actions. It was in their actions that they validated their identities, whether it is in their own eyes or in their peers'.

I have examined separately these two spheres of social relationships serving as the contexts for the intersection between students' interpretations of identities and their behaviour. These two contexts, however, exist simultaneously at school. At least in the classroom, students interact both with their peers and their teachers at the same time. An examination of this is pertinent to our understanding of schooling, and, indeed, in considering the function of schooling itself as a form of education.

Schooling and conflicting contexts in identity interpretations and social behaviour

The thread running through the two previous chapters is the idea that the meanings of students' behaviour, especially social behaviour, are not only relevant to how the adolescents' actions are to be understood but also contribute to their self-interpretations. Because of both social behaviour and identities are contextually interpreted, I have examined their intersections of the two in the two relational contexts that students encounter, and occupy, at school, which are their interactions with adults at school and with their peers. These two interactional contexts, however, do not exist separately; for the most part, they operate concurrently within the same physical setting. This intersecting of relational contexts may result in conflicts of identities and behavioural expectations. An example is present in the case of Celine's problem with being in the Academic Enrichment Program, which I began to recount in the Introduction chapter.

What is more illustrative of the intersection and conflict between student–teacher interactions and the adolescents' peer relationships was Celine's defiant behaviour towards the adults. Aside from Jay, her other teachers—especially female ones—reported that she persistently misbehaved and would argue with them when reprimanded. They even met together to discuss what they considered to be her problematic behaviour, as they often did regarding other students with similar issues. What the adults interpreted as defiant behaviour, though, might have a different meaning not only to Celine herself but also to her peers. For instance, in our interview, Celine and I spoke about her behaviour, particularly regarding a recent incident:

Me: “How do you think other people feel about your behaviour?”

Celine: “Teachers probably don't like it. Oh, I know they don't like it.”

Me: “How do you know this? 'Cause they told you?”

Celine: “Yep. And some of the students in my class laugh. They think it's hell funny. And some would just think it's... pathetic.”

Me: “How do you know this? Did they tell you?”

Celine: “Well, um... Well, my friends come up to me after I get thrown out of class and they’re, like, ‘Wow, that’s funny what you did.’ And then I was, like, ‘I didn’t mean to do it. It’s just... she was being really mean to me, teacher’s hell picking on me. And she was, like, she’s only watching me, no one else.’”

Recall my assertions regarding the symbolic dimension of behaviour, as well as the contextual nature of how its meanings can be interpreted. In this case, it is clear that Celine’s teachers interpreted her actions as defiant or as misbehaviour. Their conferring together to discuss the matter was indicative of this. According to Celine, they also told her as much. Both the student and her friends, however, saw her behaviour in the classroom somewhat differently. According to her comment above, at least in some instances, Celine herself saw her actions as a response to the teachers ‘picking on her’ and singling her out among her classmates. While the adults interpreted the girl’s actions primarily in the light of their formal student–teacher relationship, and the behavioural expectations associated with it, Celine herself understood her actions more on the basis of her informal interpersonal interaction with the teacher. Meanwhile, some of her classmates perceived what she did in yet another way, namely with amusement. To them, what Celine did was not so much ‘defiant misbehaviour’ against the teacher, and nor was it as much a response to the adult ‘being mean’ to their friend. Rather, they saw it as something ‘funny’. On that one occasion, Celine had been thrown out of class by her teacher for a particular set of behaviour—behaviour that she, her teacher and her friends perceived as having different meanings depending on the context in which they interpreted it.

This is significant in thinking about the purpose and function of schooling. Various scholars have put forward a diverse multitude of suggestions regarding the function of schooling as a formal form of education. Barrow and Woods (2006),

for instance, broadly give the purpose of the school as a place for students' training and socialisation into societal norms. Some, like Pallas (1993) and Vandenberg (1998) focus on the role that schooling has in individual adolescents' lives. They see it as having the purpose of preparing the adolescent person for the next step of life, adulthood, as well as for their societal roles and values as members of their community. Also pointing to the role that schooling has in preparing children for their future place in their societies, King (1994:25, quoting Spradley 1972) suggests that the primary function of education is to impart students with "cultural knowledge", "learned behaviours, beliefs and ways relating to people and the environment that members of a cultural group acquire through normal processes of enculturation." For some scholars, like Goodlad (1997, 2004), this gives formal education the key purpose of incorporating individuals into societal structures such as the democratic system, as well as inculcating them with that system. To others, such as critical scholars like Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), this instead means that schooling functions as a means to reproduce the imposition of existing power relations through "symbolic violence".

Schooling is perceived, to any extent, as more than just a way to impart knowledge and skills to children; it is also seen as a means through which societal values are incorporated and propagated in their lives as individuals and collectively. This is irrespective of whether scholars interpret those values as representing hegemonic inequality or egalitarian democracy. The point is that schools are seen as a venue through which society's social and cultural system become part of students' lives and *vice versa*. Most significantly for my argument, this involves shaping the *behaviour* in which those values are manifested. This is the likely purpose of behavioural standards that students are subjected to at

school—standards that include relating to teachers in certain manners, such as addressing them as ‘Sir’ or ‘Miss’ and complying with their commands. In being subjected to those expectations, students are being socialised into cultural values such as an understanding of ‘respect’.

In thinking about this, one must keep in mind how individuals interpret behaviour. I have asserted that the meanings of actions can be interpreted differently, not the least according to context. How students understand certain patterns of behaviour might not be the same as how their teachers perceive them. That is to say, they might not agree on seeing certain behaviour as having the same social value. To use Celine’s example, her teacher viewed her actions as anti-social, or as having negative social value. She herself perceived it as the ‘right’ thing to do given their ‘mean’ treatment of the student. Celine’s friends, meanwhile, perceived her actions as being social behaviour where they themselves were concerned; it provided them with amusement. In being perceived as a means to integrate individuals into a social system and vice versa, schooling is also seen as a means to produce certain types of people, a functioning member of society that engages with others in that society in a certain way. The type of person refers to identity, which is symbolic, and it is manifested, or validated, by behaviour, or certain types of behaviour, which is also symbolic. This is why a conception of the link between students’ identities and social actions at school as being mediated by symbolic interpretation or the creation of meanings is important in understanding the process of schooling and in developing pedagogical methods.

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Appendix A – Selected Interview Transcripts

The following are transcripts of some of the interviews I conducted with students to supplement data obtained from my participant observation. In addition to preplanned questions, I also asked *ad hoc* follow up questions. These are indicated in parentheses in the transcripts to the individual students' answers.

Adrian, male student from Jay's Education Support Year 8 class

Self

How do you generally feel about yourself and about life? Why?

A bit hard. I need to get the form folders. I feel happy. Because I have lots of friends to spend with.

Describe yourself in a few sentences.

I was good at maths and, well, probably need a bit improvement in English – still good. Well, I just like talking to friends after school, just to go out, we could have a good time.

What are your hobbies/interests?

Watching movies in computers, playing PS2, watching TV. And read some of the useful books I can replace by reading English books. Like some of them I got Indonesian books, some of them I can read them. My father said it's better if I read Lima Sekawan [the Indonesian name for Enid Blyton's Famous Five]. He said I can improve my English ... they are better than Doraemon books [a long-running Japanese

comic series about a robotic dog, also translated into Indonesian]. [“Are they in English?”] No ... it didn't improve my English but more useful.

[“What else?”] I do sports. I play soccer outside my garden. [“Basketball?”] I did but sometimes not anymore. Now not much. I play like [he thinks for a long time, whispering to himself] play tennis, and bowling.

Why are you into those things and who do you do them with?

Bowling – I can have something outside to play. Tennis – I don't want to answer. Reading – can improve my English a lot, I can more forward to go to mainstream. [“Why?”] Because that's what I want, and what my mum wants. With English can do on my own, but I still need help a bit. Tomorrow my father will speak to Mr. Heng, and talk about what I will be doing.

Soccer – I play by myself, outside the garden. I play tennis in school with my friends ... in the basketball court, but they haven't got the net up. Bowling – I joined, I mean I just cheer for the team, I play it at Cannington.

Is there anything about yourself you feel uncomfortable about? Why?

No I don't feel any uncomfortable myself about.

What do you feel your strengths might be? Why?

My strength is good at playing sport. [“Why?”] Because I can run fast and get stronger and stronger every day. I have strength to take shopping list, you know I shop with my mother and father, it taught me to pick one up one fast, I got lots of strength to do it.

What do you feel are your weaknesses? Why?

Just think that I'm not really good at S[ociety] and E[nvironment]. Because it's really hard to understand.

What do you think might be your biggest fear? Why?

I feel that I got medicine. I drink medicine because I was a bit conscious. My biggest fear is that I can't get rid of it when I don't want to do it anymore.

What does it mean to you to be a boy/girl?

I don't understand. ["Why are boys different from girls?"] Boys are different because boys have more muscles than girls. Because most of the people they win the record of the weight lifting ...

Who is the most important person in this world to you? Why?

My parents and my friends are the most important for me in this world because I can talk to them. And I could play with them. ["What do parents mean to you?"] They know what we have trouble [with]. ["Friends?"] Someone to talk with.

Do you have a question about yourself?

No.

Would you like to add anything about yourself?

No.

Family

Do you live with your family?

Yes.

Who's in your family?

My brother, my mother, my father and myself.

What does your family mean to you? Why?

My family means everything because they can make a food for me, and work, that's like I don't like getting too much things, you know sometimes my mum gives me some spare money ... but I don't like her to give me too much because later she doesn't have any money anymore.

How's your relationship with your family?

Just fine.

What's your ... like?

Dad: He's like a big strong but sometimes if he works too long he stretches his muscles.

Mom: My mom is a hard worker and like to work every day to clean my garden, so my garden look clean and nice.

Brother: He likes spending out with his friends going to church. [“What about his character?”] Don’t know.

Do you spend time with your family? How?

Yes. Don’t often spend time with my family. Sometimes I spend time playing games or watching TV by myself. [“When you do what do you do?”] We usually talk a lot [about] school.

Are you closer to your mom or dad? Why?

I don’t know.

What do your parents mean to you?

I thought we already answered that one.

Friends

Do you have friends? Who are they?

Yes, I have lots of friends. [Thinks] Like Ron, Jim, Edward, Jaden. [“All friends from school?”] Yes. [“Do you have friends from church?”] Yes. [His name is] Nando.

What do your friends mean to you?

My friends mean everything. So I have someone to talk about [“Someone to talk about or someone to talk to?”] To talk to. I just make mistakes... sometimes.

How did you become friends with them?

We meet and talk everyday.

What do you do with them?

I play basketball with my friends and talk to them. I talk about school subjects (what else?). And TV commercial. Like Big Brother. I just watch it, I don’t go there.

How often to do you spend time with them?

We spend my time with my friends (how often?) Lots. Everyday. [“Weekends?”] I don’t spend time with my friends at the weekend.

Do you have a girlfriend? What does that mean? I don't know what a girlfriend is. ["Don't your teachers ask you?"] I don't have a girlfriend. If you talk to them every day, is that a girlfriend? I'm not sure whether ... [Some people] keep asking, teasing. I said I don't.

If you have to choose, who is more important to you: your family or friends?
[Thinks, smiles] Hard decision. Oh... friends.

Do you spend more time with friends or family?

I spend more time with my friends. Because I got nothing to do after I finish my homework. ["How do you spend time with friends at home?"] I don't know.

Have you ever been in a situation where you have to choose?

No, not yet. ["If you have to choose?"] If it's a late night [shopping] I would really go [with my friends]. ["If they want to go separately?"] If [we are shopping at] Garden City [a shopping centre twenty minutes from his house] I go with my family. [But] Wherever my friends go I will go with my friends.

School

How do you feel about school?

I feel like happy to go to school, because I can meet friends. And I have activities to do. ["What if you can't go to school?"] I feel sad ... because I can't speak to friends, to my friends.

How do you think you're performing in this school?

Not pretty bad. Cuz I work hard and some people say that I was good in it but I still need to work on something ... like, let's see, putting a text box [in Microsoft Publisher]

What do you think your behaviour is like at this school?

Yes I am behaving well at school. I participate all classes. ["Have you ever gotten in trouble?"] I never got into trouble.

Do you have any problems at this school?

No, I have no problem in school. Because all things went well. And my friends never fight.

Subjects and teachers

Favourite subjects?

Electronic publishing, it's like computing. Let's see what else. So I can learn about computing and how it is used. Food awareness because I can make food and take them home. PE so I can get healthy and fit. Dancing, cause it can work your leg muscles, and very interesting. Because it is calm and lots of people take it. Science, because I can learn how to see things through a microscope.

Hated subjects?

Health, it's like really hard for me to understand (the English is like so advanced, rather than the mainstream one). No that's all.

Favourite teachers?

[Thinks] Mr Thornton? Electronic publishing. He was so kind, really kind, he helped those who really need help. Mr Hong, because he helps those who really needed help. ["How about Mr. Schneider?"] Yes. ["Number one favorite teacher?"] Mr Schneider.

How do you feel about the people in this school?

I feel like happy because we can talk together on our way to class.

How do you feel about people in your classes?

I like them because they are kind. ["No one you don't like?"] No. ["No one's been mean?"] No.

Anyone in this school you don't like?

No.

Education Support

How do you feel about being in the Ed Support class?

Sometimes I feel like not happy since some people were bad. Like Gus, year 9 student, sometimes he's a bit mean... I like him but ...

How do you feel about the teachers?

I feel happy because I can get help. ["How about the education assistants?"] I feel happy about [them] because I can get help. But not much help with maths. I don't really need to much help for maths. ["Do you have any favourite?"] Not yet.

How do you feel about your classmates?

I feel like happy to talk to him [Jim] in Education Support classes. ["What about Jordan?"] [He] Doesn't always go. ["Luke?"] Never. His timetable changed so he doesn't get much Ed Support studies. ["Venny"] [He is silent for long] ["No problems?"] No I don't have any problems.

Would you rather leave or stay in Ed Support?

Hmm.... Let's see... I just need to think for a while. I'd like to go to mainstream, but sometimes I don't feel confident enough. ["Why not?"] Because some work still needs to be done, and no one is able to help me until my brother and mother or my father is at home. Sometimes losing concentration, getting disturbed.

Future

Do you know what you want to be in the future?

I still don't know what I want to be in the future. ["Why?"] Because lots of things I can be but difficult because I need to choose one. ["Never thought about it?"] Sometimes. ["What would you do?"] No idea.

How do you feel about your future?

I feel like happy ... ["Why?"] Because I can stay happy. I feel safe about my future because there are lots of friends that are kind to me.

Do you feel you're going to have people that will guide you into the future?

Yes. Mr Hong. ["What about parents?"] Yea... they can also tell me. ["Why Mr Hong?"] Because he knows everything about me.

Media and Society

Favorites

TV Show?

Smallville. Because it's like ... I can see some good things happening ["Like?"] like saving people. Big Brother. I like BB because they have daily game show and have prizes and go on a trip where Big Brother tell you to go. Lost. I like Lost because it's really exciting and fun to watch. Others I like but I forgot what it is.

Movie?

The Chronicles of Narnia. It was cool and exciting. ["You said Star Wars earlier?"] Yes ... I like the third one, because they are new Jedi.

Singer or musician?

Damien Leith, Australian Idol winner. He won and he got lots of money for his singing performance.

Book?

Detective Conan [a Japanese comic series also translated into Indonesian]. I like it because it is better than Doraemon, because Doraemon is just a fantasy, and Detective Conan has reality in it, which makes me want to be a detective.

Video game?

Winning Eleven because it's a sport game, and a really good game. ["Why did u buy it?"] Because it doesn't have any violence in it.

How do you feel about society and the world?

I feel happy. Because it is clean in here. [note: I don't think he got the question)

How do you feel about Australia?

I feel happy about Australia because I have lots of food to eat. ["Do you prefer being in Australia or Indonesia?"] I think in Australia. Well, for holiday is all right just don't

want to be for long [in Indonesia, where he came from]. Because you don't have lots of activities to do. You know how they sell food near the road. It's not much fibre in it. That's why people sometimes get sick, isn't it? Isn't that how they get sick ... because they don't have enough fibre.

Is there any kind of people you don't like in this society?

No.

How do you think this country will become a better place?

By cleaning up the mess of the rubbish. So our world looks clean and nice.

Do you think there's anything you can do about it?

Not really for a while. ["Why not"] I haven't figured the way out yet.

Alley, female student from Jay's AEP Year 8 class

Self

How do you generally feel about yourself and about life? Why?

Live life to the fullest. Everyday'd a holiday. Everyday the last. (From Naruto).

Describe yourself in a few sentences.

Loyal, energetic, sporty, bookworm, nerd. (Just) got four books from the library. (Showed me four thick library books, fantasy genre). Be finished by weekend. Caring.

What are your hobbies/interests?

Naruto, sports, books (fantasy, nice big novels, things that cn't be real), writing stories (now writing a plot line), maybe starting ninjitsu (because of Naruto), robotics, drawing, photoshop.

Why are you into those things?

Because I like using my imagination, creative, use my mind. Even in sport.

Who do you do them with? Why? Usually hockey my friends, run and cycle by myself. Naruto as well, on YouTube.

Is there anything about yourself you feel uncomfortable about? Why?

What do you mean? Nothing.

What do you feel your strengths might be? Why?

Sports, core studies - maths, science, etc.

Character: freckles (laugh).

Courageous. Hang and climb around building sites.

What do you feel are your weaknesses? Why?

Socialising. Not one of the most social persons. I always get injured. Got wounds here and there. I talk too fast. My brain thinks too slow (compared to my mouth) ... or the other way around.

What do you think might be your biggest fear? Why?

Heights. (And you hang around building sites?) (Laugh). But I also do rock climbing, and that's okay.

And needles (as in hypodermic needles). My mom(?) thinks it's a made up fear because there was no fear before.

What does it mean to you to be a boy/girl?

I can play against boys easier - in hockey and soccer and running.

Why do you think so?

Because they're afraid of tackling you.

Who is the most important person in this world to you? Why?

Family, I guess, don't really know...

("Why?") Don't really think about it. I think more about doomsday and destiny (smile).

("Do you have a destiny?") Mum said ... you could make your own choices.

Do you have a question about yourself?

Why do I read so many books?

Would you like to add anything about yourself

Really weird. Kind of hyperactive but quiet. Love baking cookies ... because G---- ("from Naruto?") likes cookies.

Family

Do you live with your family?

Yes, live with mum. Every second weekend I go with dad. [They're divorced].

Who's in your family?

A brother, two lizards, mum. Then there's my dad. My bird (which is with the next door neighbour).

What does your family mean to you? Why?

What it means? A place to live. Source of money and food. Dunno.

How's your relationship with your family?

With dad, good, both sporty people. He's a personal trainer.

With mum, normal. My brother, I really hate him. We're just so different, completely opposite. He likes computers. Sometimes he's quite good - he helps with homework - but we're not best friends.

What's your ... like?

Dad

He used to work as a miner. He gives \$5 if I do well in sports. We cycle a lot and run a lot together. He's a horrible singer. He's sporty, happy, but strict, doesn't like us if we don't eat dinner.

Mom

Hmm... really don't know. She owns a business. She's a travel agent. She travels to England, France on a bike, checks out hotels. Sometimes she sends other agents to go too. ["Not very close?"] I am, but not really.

Brothers/sisters

My brother. He's uh... Wants to be a computer designer, game design, plays World of Warcraft (he's not related to Albert). Used to do a bit of surfing. ["So he's not too nerdy?"] No, he used to skate, but then broke his collar bone twice. He hates homework, because he has to do calculus. He's evil to me. Tortured me with a stereo once. He always likes to scare me. He's really opposite to me. He hates school work. I do, I think it's fun. He hates sports. I like it. ["Are sports important to you?"] I dunno.

Do you spend time with your family? How?

Yeah, but never spend time with mum really. Only hockey games and that's rarely. Dad takes me to games. He gets free tickets to Eagles games a lot. He tries to get good games.

["What about your brother?"] No, not really. Only when showing stuff on the computer. We're both photoshop junkies. But I do more abstract stuff, while he does more photomanipulations.

Are you closer to your mom or dad? Why?

Dad, most likely. ("Why?") Usually just spend time more. I train with him. Cycling, running, hockey, soccer, padable (a game her dad apparently invented).

What do your parents mean to you?

My money source [laughs]. They're there because they're there. I'll miss them if they're gone or dead. But I'm not the lovely 'parenty' person, though.

Friends

Do you have friends? Who are they?

I hope so. Rachel, Megan (From form), Talia, and a friend I can't remember the name. Best friend ... She's Talia in other classes. Ella, Catherine. ["Your best friends?"] Thea, Sarah, Ella are my favorite friends. I've known them for a long time, since year 3. Some friends are from the hockey team, the club. Some of them go to private school, some public.

What do your friends mean to you?

Not really sure. Never thought about it. I'm not a 'besty friendly' person. ("You don't hang out with particular friends all the time?") No.

How did you become friends with them?

Ella - school year 3. I used to get new kids to look after, and she was one. Megan, etc. They popped up somewhere. Thalia from athletics.

Do you do things with them? What do you do?

Not outside school. Outside I go with friends from the hockey team and Thea, Sarah and Ella.

How often do you spend time with them

At school - recess, lunch and hockey (training quite a few times a week. Do school work at night).

Outside school, bus stops and weekends (go to the city, anime shop, Borders).

Do you have a boy/girlfriend?

No. ["Why?"] I don't know.

Anything else you would like to say about your friends or boy/girlfriend?

My friends - I congratulate them for when I get really agro - because they can handle it.

IF you have to choose, who's more important to you: your friends or family?

Family. You've known them since you were a baby [after a few seconds of thinking].

Ella's parents are like my own family. ["More than your own?"] No no.

Do you spend more time with your friends or your family?

Neither. More on my own.

Have you ever been in any situation where you have to choose?

Don't think so.

School

How do you generally feel about school?

Quite like it. It's a place to learn.

How do you think you're performing in this school? Why do you think so?

Teachers said I've been too stressed. I've got a lot of things on. There's pressure to do your own sport.

How do you think your behaviour is like at school?

I think it's good. Not being bad or anything. ("Never a detention?") Once, but it was the whole class, and the teacher didn't show up so it was okay.

Do you have any problems in this school? What is it?

Not really. I find this school too small (laugh).

Subjects and teachers

Favorite subjects? Why?

All compulsory main subjects. Also I'm about to start film studies in year 9. Drama. I like being an actor. But now I can't do it. Next year, because you get one elective. ["Sports?"] I guess. Hockey. ["You don't consider sport a subject?"] Not really.

Hated subjects? Why?

I kinda like all subject. 'Worse' is maths. But I like it. Maybe just because I'm not the best at it. I need to be the best. If not, I don't like the subject.

Favorite teachers? Why?

All compulsory subjects I like.

Ms Rogowsky - Science and IT. She's loud, speaks fast. No one can understand her but I can. Well they can, but I can better.

Mr Schneider - He's funny, makes fun ways to learn.

Mrs Griffin - English. He's laid back, fun, I like English [since she writes stories].

Hated teachers? Why?

Ms Garrison - Maths. She's scary, dunno why.

Oh, and the librarians - they look evil. [laughs]

How do you feel about people in this school? Why?

Some are emos. One (kid) painted her eyebrows.

Some are annoying. Like Ross.

("In general?") (Hesitant). They're cool, I guess. Some are nerds. Like me, I guess.

("Why?") Because I'm in the AEP program. I read four books a day.

How do you feel about people in your classes?

A lot I don't like. They're evil to me. They call me 'ape' (because of my initials).

Is there anyone in this school you don't like?

Ross, Nick from hockey, Renee, Brianna (I almost whacked their nose - they kept annoying me, pulling my hair). Jacob, Blake. He was always calling me 'ape' and stuff.

Albert, Hoshi, Ken, Helen, Terence. They take credit from doing robotics that I did, Celine ["Why don't you like Celine?"] She's always mucking around. We made a journal of what she's doing and they kicked her out.

Academic Enrichment Program

How do you feel about being in this class? Why?

I feel like a nerd. But it's cool because everybody's sort of nerdy.

Get stressed easily. Teacher tells me to stop being stressed.

Mom wants me to do well in school. She doesn't like me doing sports. But...

Dad wants me to do well in sports. So the whole day is full of activity. Only get one hour leisure time everyday (She gave me a rough timetable of her day).

How do you feel about the teachers?

Ms Rogowsky's cool. They're good. They challenge me more.

I have a friend that doesn't want to be in the AEP [Academic Enrichment Program], doesn't want to be challenged.

How do you feel about your classmates?

Other than the above, some are pretty cool. Some are nerdy (like Albert).

He just drags on and on. I want to punch him. I'd enjoy that; I used to do boxing.

Would you rather stay or leave from this class?

Definitely, yeah. I don't want to go to 'evil' low class. No challenge.

Anything else you would like to say about school?

School's fun.

Future

Do you know what you want to be in the future? What do you want to be?

Why?

An astrophysicist, astronomer, work for NASA, or a fighter pilot.

I'd like to be the first female commander in the Australian defense force.

It has to be world scale. Like McKay (from *Stargate: Atlantis*). I wanna be like him.

Now thinking of it. Like I'll be doing calculus in year 9. Oh, I also want to be an actor.

Do you think you'll like that job?

I'd love them (excited).

Do you think you WILL achieve that?

Hmm... not really.

Probably will. I'll strive my best.

Do you have plans for how you're going to achieve this? What?

Just keep striving. Not stressing myself out.

("Have you done research on what you have to do?") Yeah.

Who might have influenced your decision? Why?

McKay, Sheppard, Ronan, Teyla [Characters in the TV Series Stargate Atlantis]

("Actors?") The Harry Potter stars. Oliver and James Phelps.

Oh, and I also want to be an author.

("Author?") J.K. Rowling.

How do you feel about the future of your life? Do you feel secure or afraid about it? Why?

Neither. I don't know. I don't feel either.

"No one's secure. You can never see the future" (her own saying).

Do you feel that you're going to have people that guide you into the future?

Who? Why do you believe this?

Doubt it. Because you can never get people to guide you somewhere. They have to get somewhere too.

Is there anything you would like to say about your future? About how you feel about it?

The future's cool. Endless possibilities. Whack you in the face. Reality can also be dreams.

Media and Society

Do you have a favorite... Why do you like them?

TV show

Stargate SG1 and Atlantis, Prisonbreak, Naruto Parts 1 and 2, [...] Dr Who, Oh, Digimon! Neighbours [...] and I love anime. [Note: She gave a very long list.]

Movie

There are heaps and heap. Transformers, Harry Potter movies, Mission Impossible, The Die Hard movies, all the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, Lion King! I love Lion King! The Naruto movies... Sometimes I go see movies with friends. Sometimes with my dad.

Singer/Band

Powderfinger, Red Hot Chilli Pepper, Evanescence, Korn Bon Jovi. (Shows me mini iPod) "It's My Life", I like that song. AC/DC, Green Day, Block Party, Cold Play, Eskimo Joe, Five for Fighting, Good Charlotte, Ronan Keating, SUM41, Fallout Boys, 3 Doors Down, U2... [Note: again, a very long list.]

Book

The Inheritance Trilogy (Eragon, Eldest...), Series of Unfortunate Events, Harry Potter, Ice Fire etc., The Golden Compass etc. (Phillip Pullman). I like mostly fantasy. And manga, like Naruto. Anything that's not real.

How do you feel about society/the world? Why?

I feel it's going to collapse. Gonna be WW3 breaking out soon. In the Middle East. It's going to break out soon. They say it's oil, but I think it's also about weapons. If you want to stop a war you have to join a war. ("So you approve of Australia's involvement in Iraq?") Yup. ("Does your family agree with you?") My brother doesn't agree, but my mum does. My dad ...

How do you feel about Australia/being Australian?

I'm proud. It's unique. (...)

What do you think is your place in this society? Why?

I wanna be something big, world scale. But now just a child.

Is there any kind of people you don't like in society?

Liars, smokers, people who swear a lot.

How do you think this society/country could become a better place? Why do you think so?

If we all not litter, not swear, all are equal. That's the basis of people.

Celine, female student from Jay's Year 8 AEP class

Self

How do you feel about yourself?

Mmm. Dunno. ["You don't know? Why not?"] I don't know how to describe it.

["How do you feel about life?"] It's okay.

Describe yourself in a few sentences

Energetic ... enthusiastic... Not so smart

["Why do you think you're not smart?"] 'Cause I'm not. ["How do you know you're not?"] Because I'm the dumbest in the class [laughs] ["Don't say that. [laugh]"] I *am*!

[laughs louder]

What are some of your hobbies and interests?

Sport, shopping, hanging out with friends, movies ["Who do you do sports with?"]

Friends and family and, like, teams and, like, the hockey academy.

["Why do you like sports?"] Because it's an interesting sport, just keep fit in a way, and something to do on the weekend and stuff.

Anything you feel uncomfortable about self?

Yeah. When I look at my weight [...] 'Cause I don't like 'em [sic].

What do you feel your strengths might be?

Muscles. Nah [laughs] ... Strengths... Um, sports.

What do you feel are your weaknesses?

Learning. ["Learning?"] Yeah. And listening.

["Listening? ... Why do you think your listening and learning are weaknesses? Do people tell you that or do you just feel it?"] [Thinks] Umm... it's both.

["Both?"] Yea. Also my weakness is, like, when people ask me to do stuff, I don't.

["Why don't you do it?"] [Laughs] I don't know.

["Now you said earlier that you feel you're not very smart. Do you feel uncomfortable with that or do you feel fine with that?"] Uhm... [thinks] fine.

["So you don't want to be an ultra smart person?"] Nah, I don't want to be that smart. I just don't want to be *really*, really dumb.

["Do you feel that if you're that smart... do you feel that there's a conflict between being good at sports and being smart?"] No.

What does it mean for you to be a girl?

[Thinks] I don't know. I wanna be a boy.

["You *wanna* be a boy?"] Yeah. ["Why?"] 'Cause I'm no girls' girl. I let off easy and stuff. And then, then it's discrimination, 'cause girls can't play AFL [...] and I wanna play soccer and AFL and stuff.

["You can play soccer as a girl, though?"] Yeah, but you don't go on TV and stuff.

Who is the most important person in this world for you?

I dunno... [thinks] Probably my mum. ["Your mum? Why is that?"] I dunno...

[Thinks] Nah, not her. My auntie.

["Your auntie?"] Yup. ["Why is that?"] She's always there for me, and... she's nice and she understands...

Family

["So you live with your mum and your dogs. Do you want to talk about your dad?"]

[She shakes her head.] ["Okay. That's all right."]

What does your family mean to you?

Lots... I guess. ["Like what? Like, how do you feel about your family?"] Y'know, I guess they mean the world to me, in a way. ["By this you mean your mum and your dogs?"] Yea.

["Okay. How's your relationship with your family? With your mum?"]

Better with my dogs than it is with my mum at the moment. [Smiles]

["Are you serious?"] Yeah.

["Why is that?"] 'Cause my mum's being mean [she drags the word 'mean']. A cow.

[Chuckles as she remembers she is being recorded] Oops. [Sheepish laughter, and then says something unintelligible].

["That's okay, remember no one's going to hear this. What kind of person is your mum?"] Godzilla [laughs]. I dunno... Umm... [Thinks] stepmum on Cinderella?

[Chuckles] I dunno... [...] She's like... mean... Well...

["How is she mean?"] She's really moody. ["She's moody?"] Yea. Like, one minute she's, like, fine and loving, and the next minute she's, like, *rawwr!*"

["And that's been hard for you, has it?"] Yea, but she's in Kalgoorlie at the moment, so it's all good.

If you want to answer this question, you can. Do you spend time with your mum?

Sometimes.

["What about these days? Do you spend time with your mum?"] Hmm... When she drops me to school [sic] and picks me up every Tuesday, that's all.

What does your mum mean to you? I know that you've already told me what she's like, but what does she mean to you?

I dunno. Probably she means the world to me 'cause she's my mum, I guess, you know. But no, I dunno, she's like really horrible. Gets on my nerves

["Is there anything else you would like to say about your family, about your mum, about your parents, about your dogs, even? [Laugh]"] Umm.. I love my dogs [Smiles].

They mean the world to me [...] I miss them. I haven't seen them since Saturday.

[Because she was not staying at home at that moment but at her family friend's home.]

Friends

Do you have friends?

No [laughs]. No, I do. [Laughs]

["Who are your friends? Are they from school?"] Everywhere.

["Everywhere? Are they in the same class that I sit in?"] Ellen, Teresa, Megs.

["Okay, so the bunch that you sit with?"] Boys? ["No, the two girls that you sit with. Are they your friends?"] Yep.

["Do you have friends outside the class as well?"] Yea.

What do your friends mean to you?

Lots.

["How did you become friends with them?"] I went up and I went, 'Hi, I'm Celine.'

["So you're not shy about introducing yourself?"] No. That's how I went to Teresa and Megs. 'Cause everyone was shy but Teresa and I knew each other so we were sitting together, and I walked over to Megs, and I'm, like, 'Hi, I'm Celine.' And she said 'Hi.'...

["Do you spend time with them, do things with them, hang out, do stuff?"] Yea.

["Outside of school as well?"] Uh-huh. ["What do you do with them?"] We go to the movies, to the shops, sleepovers, birthday parties, beach, swimming pools.

["How often do you spend time with them?"] Every weekend or second. And like after school sometimes. Depends, 'cause I got stuff on most days.

If you have to choose, who's more important to you, your friends or your family?

[She laughs quietly as she thinks. I laugh with her] Equal. ["Equal?"] Yeah, I can't choose.

Do you spend time more times with your friends or your family?

Friends. ["Why friends?"] 'Cause school's, like, seven hours a day, and then... next weekends I spend with my friends, and I've got out of school activities that I spend with my friends, sports like golf, Rock Eisteddfods on the weekends, and then I do golf as well. And.. yeah...

["Have you ever been in any situation where you have to choose between your friends and your family?"] No.

School

“How do you generally feel about school?”

I don't like it. [“You don't? Why don't you like it?”] Hmm... 'cause it's too much work. Well, at Pine View, in Year 8 girls there's too many, like, fights and bitching and backstabbing [...] way too much. Some Year 8 girls have been in physical fights...

[“How else do you generally feel about school?”] [She thinks] [“Tell me an example of what you don't like.”] Um... having different teachers for every subject. [Note: In primary school, from which Celine had just graduated, every teacher teaches all subjects for the same class.] [“You don't like that?”] No, 'cause I forget my teachers' names. [We both laugh]

How do you think you're performing in this school?

Not so good. [“Why do you think so?”] 'Cause I have permanent record things.

[“What do you have to do to get this kind of record?”] Um... be really naughty [Chuckles]. [“Do you think you're naughty?”] Yeah.

[“Why do you think you're naughty?”] Because teachers, like, tell me off and send me out of class.

[“Okay, aside from what people say to you, do you think you *are* naughty?”] Yep.

[“Okay, how do you feel about being naughty.”] Dunno. I don't feel. [Chuckles]

[“Do you like being naughty?”] Well, my class does. [“Which class is this?”] Um... my form. [“Wait. Your form is the AEP class, isn't it? They like being naughty?”] I dunno. I just am. I have very bad temper.” [“Do you?”] Yea.

[“Is that what somebody told you, or is that how you feel about yourself?”] How I feel about myself, and I've been told that quite often.

How do you think your behaviour is like in this school?

[Sheepishly] Not so good. [“Not so good? Why not?”] I... um... 'cause... I guess ...

[Thinks] Not really good at all. [“Okay. How do you feel about that?”] Yeah...

[Thinks] I don't know. [“Would you want to change your behaviour?”] If I could, probably yeah.

How do you think other people feel about your behaviour?

Teachers probably don't like it. Oh, I know they don't like it. ["How do you know this? 'Cause they told you?"] Yep. And some of the students in my class laugh. They think it's hell funny. And some would just think it's... pathetic.

["How do you know this? Did they tell you?"] Well, um... Well, my friends come up to me after I get thrown out of class and they're, like, 'Wow, that's funny what you did.' And then I was, like, 'I didn't mean to do it. It's just... she was being really mean to me, teacher's hell picking on me. And she was, like, she's only watching me, no one else.

Do you have any problems in this school?

Umm... no.... what do you mean?" [Sounds confused] ["Any problem, aside from what you've already said."] No, I just don't like Pine View. ["You want to move somewhere else?"] Yeah.

Do you have any favorite subjects?

Hockey. ["Hockey is your favorite subject?"] Yea. ["Why is that?"] Cause it's outdoors and ... um... 'cause ... I don't know. It's not really teaching, it's more like coaching, it's like sports sort of...

Any subjects that you don't like?

Science, computing, maths, English, Indonesian. ["Why don't you like them?"] 'Cause the teacher's strict, and have no sense of humor like Mr Schneider. ["Do you think mr blewitt has a a sense of humor?"] [Smiles] Yea.

Do you have any favorite teachers?

My hockey teachers and my hockey coaches.

["Why do you like them?"] 'Cause they are cool.

["How are they cool?"] I dunno, they, like, give you hockey tips. They, like, listen to you and stuff.

Albert, male student from Jay's AEP Year 8 class

Self

How do you generally feel about yourself and about life? Why?

Life's pretty good. Actually it's pretty good. Sometimes it's crap. Happens to everybody.

Describe yourself in a few sentences.

Really smart. In computer and science. I try not to brag.

What are your hobbies/interests?

Computer. World of Warcraft. I run a private server. Very knowledgeable about computers. Sometimes I do electronics. But not as much as computers.

Piano sometimes. Soccer. I play with friends at school. Sleep, not enough. Sleep in.

Why are you into those things?

Whim. If I take up another hobby, it takes time to be good at it. I started computers at two [years old].

Who do you do them with? Why?

Don't play much these days. Probably because I don't really understand. Mum and grandpa help with stuff to do with stuff to do with computers.

Is there anything about yourself you feel uncomfortable about? Why?

Comfortable with computers. Uncomfortable about my weight. [He was known as a large boy among his friends] I don't see what's wrong with it, but the public attitude... People call me nerd, not as much now but sometimes.

What do you feel your strengths might be? Why?

Computers, saxophone. Play contemporary music. Feel good about playing in front of people? Feel better afterwards.

What do you feel are your weaknesses? Why?

Sport, English (not sure - last year got a sucky class - good teacher but I feel I didn't do well). The teacher now seems better in mature hindsight. Getting homework done. Sometimes I'm a bit mean with [my friend] Abe.

What do you think might be your biggest fear? Why?

Boys are meant to play sport - according to general stereototype. If not they get called a wimp. I'm afraid of what I might do if I get pissed off. I try to control myself. If I get pissed off they ... Don't blame me, blame the system. I did karate a while back. It was pretty good, I liked sparring.

What does it mean for you to be a boy/girl? Why do you think so?

I've got a penis. [Laughs] Boys concentrate better at one thing. Girls multitask better. I saw this on a show. Most things I got are from Wikipedia.

Who is the most important person in this world to you? Why?

My mum, grandpa. My existence depends on my mum. She's very nice. Grandpa knows a lot of stuff. He goes on the share market and talks about it. He helps me with maths. I've been average at maths.

Do you have a question about yourself?

Why am I here? What's my purpose? The answer is 42. [A line Albert often quoted from the science fiction work The Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy) I have no reason - the whole has been screwed up.

Family

Do you live with your family?

Yes

Who's in your family?

Mum.

Father?

I'm not talking about that. I don't know who he is and I don't like to gossip. No siblings.

What does your family mean to you? Why?

A place to live, support, free food till I'm 18 then get a job.

How's your relationship with your family?

Pretty good. We don't talk much. Dunno why. Clashing personalities.

What's your mum like?

Laughs a lot. Very nice. She's getting a job but she wants to stay to look after me.
Likes to play games on the computer.

Do you spend time with your family? How?

Go to shops, but we haven't been on holiday or places for a while.

Anything else you would like to say about your parents/family?

Sometimes my mum's annoying. She says silly stuff about computers.

Friends

Do you have friends? Who are they?

Of course. Abe. From school. I'm a bit shy when I meet new people.

What do your friends mean to you

Not insulted when you insult them.

How did you become friends with them?

I'm a friendly person - I meet them at school, then just start talking.

Do you do things with them? What do you do?

Sometimes. On Sunday we saw *Pirates [of the Caribbean]*, before Spider-Man.
With Jarrad. He failed to get into the AEP program.

How often do you spend time with them?

In school - Year 6 and 7 - there was this Indonesian kid. Used to go this house a bit. Now I go to my cousin's house, borrow games, a lot.

Do you have a boy/girlfriend?

No, but I was asked out by Helen once. The fat one.

Anything else you would like to say about your friends or boy/girlfriend?

Friends are good.

IF you have to choose, who's more important to you: your friends or family?

Family. Because family is family.

IF you have to choose between your friends and family, which one would you choose?

Family.

Do you spend more time with your friends or your family?

Family.

Have you ever been in a situation where you have to choose?

Yes, but I chose to go with mum out of obedience.

School

How do you generally feel about school?

A bit boring, like life. But there are some cool stuff. It means having to get up in the morning.

How do you think you're performing in school? Why do you think so?

Not as good in Maths as in Year 7. Computers is easy. Science is pretty easy, higher stuff. I don't like tests. In general it's all right. I would know if not. Not like Celine. You know, a bit ... crazy. In computer she was ok, then clicked. She had a slip. If she screws up she gets kicked out. I've had complaints but never detention.

How do you think your behaviour is like at school?

"Did you wag [play truant]?" Wagged? No. But before I exaggerated being sick. Mr Schneider doesn't like you. Kinda insult people a bit, so I talk back. Otherwise...

I wanna get out as fast as I can.

Do you have any problems in this school? What is it?

No, except the bus came a bit late. It's annoying. It means I have to walk.
Sometimes mum drives me here. I make Hoshi carry my socks.

Subjects and teachers

Favorite subjects? Why?

Computers. Get to do robotic tracks. Mindstorms. Also after-school.
Music. In Junior Band on Fridays. Guy's crazy sometimes.

Hated subjects? Why?

Used to hate S&E. I hate Mr Schneider. Not as much now. I hate S&E and hate Mr Schneider, probably not as much, probably more. English. I have to write stories. I copied the story.

Favorite teachers? Why?

Mr Anderson, music. Also the guy teaching the band.
Mr Rogowsky, science and computers.

Hated teachers? Why?

Mr Schneider
Ms Franks. She's "deaf" and mean..

How do you feel about people in this school? Why?

Cool, okay. Some annoying.. This guy puts his hand in food and then put it on your face.

How do you feel about people in your classes?

Ross is annoying. Lots are okay. Abe, Danny Steve are okay

Is there anyone in this school you don't like?

The principal. He told everyone to hurry but then stopped us.

Academic Enrichment Program

How do you feel about being in this class? Why?

Normal. More homework. More challenge. Maths a bit challenging. I'm not bored.

How do you feel about the teachers?

They're okay. I've had worse.

How do you feel about your classmates?

Most are good except Abe. He kept poking me. And Ken, who's annoying but now better. But I can be really annoying too. I try to be annoying for people.

Would you rather stay or leave from this class?

Stay. Not really feel special. Maybe a bit. It's not so much different from mainstream. Except the homework. More opportunity to do stuff. Robotics, computers. I could make my own version of MSN [Microsoft Network Messenger]. The people are pretty good.

Anything else you would like to say about school?

It keeps me from sleeping in too late. And mum too.

Future

Do you know what you want to be in the future? What do you want to be?

Why?

Computer technician because it's my interest, pyrotechnician because I wanna blow up stuff, electronics engineer because I'm interested.

Do you think you'll like that job?

Dunno. PProbably will like it. Some of them could be annoying.

Do you think you WILL achieve that?

Uni, a degree, maybe an apprenticeship.

Do you have plans for how you're going to achieve this? What?

High school, just go by, to uni, study mechatronics, computer science.

Who might have influenced your decision? Why?

Grandparents. They let me get on the computer when I was three.

School hasn't done much in computer. The after school one is the *real* one. I learn new things. Hardware. Soldering. Advanced ones. DC converter, amplifier.

How do you feel about the future of your life? Do you feel secure or afraid about it? Why?

Middle. I dunno. How am I supposed to know?

Do you feel that you're going to have people that guide you into the future?

Who? Why do you believe this?

Yup. Maybe. Probably my grandpa. That would be my first answer. He gives heaps of career advice. He said don't be a researcher, no money. Teachers, my mum.

Media and Society

Do you have a favorite... Why do you like them?

TV show

South Park, Simpsons, House, Mythbusters, Family Guy. Don't really like sci fi.

Movie

Shrek, Pirates of the Carribeans, Simpsons coming out, Spider-Man 3, Beetlejuice.

Singer/Band

Weird Al Yankovic. I like to listen to songs without lyrics. Pachelbel's Canon, sometimes classical. Chamber music that everyone knows but don't know the title.

Book

Non fiction on programming. Terry Prachett, Douglas Adams, Harry Potter.

Others

Games. Make my own. Liquid War, Monopoly.

How do you feel about society/the world? Why?

It's cool. Has all the things like Grand Canyon and Niagara Falls. Really improbable that we exist. Lots had to happen.

How do you feel about Australia/being Australian?

Cool because nobody wants to bomb us. Australia is cool because it's multicultural. And we don't get bombed.

What do you think is your place in this society? Why?

Minor. Children.

Is there any kind of people you don't like in society?

Groups? No, that's discrimination. I don't like discrimination except against discriminators.

How do you think this society/country could become a better place? Why do you think so?

If everybody does what they're supposed to.

Do you think you can do anything about it? What?

What me? Control other people? Free will and stuff?

Hank, male student from the Year 10 class

Self

Describe yourself in a few sentences

Uhh.. Talkative, stubborn, um.. helpful, uh.. yeah I try to be helpful ish, an influence, in a good way [laughs] not bad. Good way, good way.

What are your hobbies/interests?

Aikido [...] the next one up from that would probably be kung fu, soccer, baseball, cars. Umm... I gotta put girls in there [laughs]. I'm not gay; I'm straight. [laugh]"
["[Laugh] Are girls a hobby?"] [Laugh] "No, you said hobbies *or* interests... "
[""Okay, okay, all right. You're not into footy?"] Unless you count football as soccer, but nah, I'm not into AFL or anything like that. ["Okay. That's pretty rare."] Well, I'm half Pom. Take from my dad's side. [Laugh]

Why are you into those things?

Well.. [laugh] girls are girls, I'm a guy! Well, aikido, kung fu, soccer and all that, I find them all interesting. Very unique in their own way. I mean, there are so many different cars and I mean with aikido it's so interesting how to disarm an opponent without using force. I mean, the first I thing I learnt about it is that the samurai learnt to disarm them if they were ever found without a weapon. And soccer, well, like I said I'm half Pom, so take from my dad's side [...]

Who do you do those things with?

I play soccer with my dad sometimes. I play with my older brother, little brother, um.. my mates sat at the oval [...] after lunch. I look at cars with my older brother. All the other guys I know, they all look at girls, but I'm taken, so I can't do that anymore. [laugh] And uh... Yeah, that'll be it.

You do your hobbies with friends of school as well?

Yeah, yeah, I do. We're always down the oval playing soccer or something like that. Or 'floor hockey'.

Anything about yourself you are uncomfortable about?

No. [“Why not?”] Well I’m happy with who I am. I don’t want to be one of those people who are, like, ‘Aww... my nose isn’t in proportion’. ‘Cause you are who you are. You should be happy with what you are because it’s the only body you’ll ever have.’

Strengths?

I reckon my strength... you mean abilities? [“And character.”] Uh.. computer usage maybe? Uh.. soccer. I’m a people person. Doesn’t get drunk. [...] yeah that’s I think what my strengths are.

Why do you feel those are your strengths?

They’re the good qualities I think everyone should have. And if you have them, it’s easy to get through life. One, you get along better with your colleagues, your work, mates. You’re make friends easier. You’ll be easier to get along with. Other people will find it easier to get along with you. And yeah... I just think those are qualities everyone should have.

What about weaknesses?

Um... spelling. I’m okay at reading.... [...] I had a test on it, I have a high reading level but I can’t spell [laugh]. I find that very hard to believe. [...] other weaknesses... AFL, it’ll have to be AFL. [“Why?”] Because I play soccer. I’ve never played AFL in my life. I can’t even bounce the ball properly without flying off somewhere else. [“No one says you have to play AFL?”] [Smiles] No, that would just be one of my weaknesses; doesn’t mean I want to play that sport. Everyone else plays it, but.

Why do you think it’s your weakness? Because everyone else plays it?

Um... well.. I don’t know. It’s just something I don’t do. It’s something I would like to be able to do, but ... practice makes perfect. [“Do you actually want to be able to play it?”] I don’t want to be able to play it professionally, I just want to be able to play it, like, have a game... without having the ball bounce off the other person...

Biggest fear? [...] Are you afraid like things like failure?

Lack of effort causes failure. If you put in the right amount of effort, you'll succeed.

Who are the most important person in the world to you?

I wouldn't be able to say one, but probably my friends, my close friends. ["Why is that?"] Well they mean a lot to me. I mean, your friends will come and go but your family will always be there. But I mean if you made a really good friend, you don't really wanna lose them. Your friends, they're like second family to you.

You want to say anything else about yourself?

[Smiles] I think I'm funny. [laughs]

Family

Do you live with your family?

Yes I do. My mum, my dad, my two brothers, one old, one little, and yeah.

What does your family mean to you, and why?

I think my family means... well... they're my family. I don't know exactly how to put it, but they're there for me whenever I need it, they're my home, really. Not somewhere I can live but they're always be there.

What makes you feel this way?

The fact that my parents haven't been divorced, they love each other very much. Um.. our family's had its troubles but we're getting along with them. They're really nothing to be upset about. We're all happy then it doesn't really matter about anything else.

How is your relationship with your family?

Little brother, he's eight. I'm seven years older, so I'm the boss. [laugh] Nah. My little brother, he's cool. We get along. My older brother Jonathan, we may have the worst relationship in the entire house. We getting along with it now, but anytime so many times stupid things, we fought a lot. But we sort of... get... back along. My parents

umm.. my relationship with them is good. They help me, I try to help them, when I can. Yeah.

What kind of person is your dad?

He's awesome. ["How?"] He's always been there, if I need him. Even times when he wasn't there [...] he would try to listen and help any way he could. He struggles very much to give us what he never had as a child. He's um.. try to give us possible life I could have. I really appreciate that, 'cause he's my dad. And he thinks about us before he thinks about himself.

Mum?

She'd be the same as my dad. My mum and my dad have struggled to give us the best life they could. My mum, when my dad was working she would stay with us. She gave up working so she could stay with us while my dad works double shifts so we could get off on a good life. Then my mum and my dad's working finally paid off. My dad doesn't have to work that hard, I get to see my mum more sometimes when I used to 'cause she used to go to work

What's your brother like?

[Laughs] You really want me to answer that? Nah, my brother's all right. He's been through his idiotic things. We're two and a half years apart. Um... we fight. We don't fight physically, but we yell at each other as brothers do. I mean. He's done so many stupid things in his life, but he starting to get on track, so my relationship with my brother's starting to get better.

Do you spend time with family? How?

We're not like any other family going on a Sunday drive. I spend time with my family, like we talk in the afternoon we talk in dinner. Or I help them, they help me. We um.. have conversations. We ask everyone about their day, things like that. So... and sometimes we go to the city or the markets and spend time...

What do your parents mean to you?

Everything... They mean so much. They mean hope, help, wisdom, um... love [...]

Do you have friends?

[Laughs, jokes] No! [Laughs] I have *human* friends, but I don't have like alien or mice friends, no... ["You got lots of friends?"] [Thinks] Yes... [Laugh]

Who are your friends?

[Laughs] I don't want to name them. They're good people!

Are they from school?

Some are. Some are from Kent St, Belmont, St Norbert's, Wesley, um... Aquinas. ["Have you been to all those schools?"] No. Some from primary school. Some from here... Uh... Perth Mod, and some other schools.

What do your friends mean to you?

Oh, they mean a lot. Um.. They listen to me... Except Kevan, he's just, like, 'can I meet 'em?' But uhm.. he'll listen... My friends, uhm.. understanding. Probably a big one. And um... advice. Like, they'll help me out and I'll help them out. Whatever it might be, like, computers, games, girls (God forbid) [laughs] Nah, I'm happily taken. Uhhh.. Yeah, things like that.

Who's your best friend?

I'd say all my friends are my best friends, but if I had to pick one it'd be Christine. She's been my best- [alarm rang signifying lunch time over] She's been my best friend for five years, so... She was the first one I made when I came to WA.

Do you have a girlfriend or boyfriend?

I have both! [Laughs] No, I have a girlfriend. Great girl.

How long have you known her for?

Uhm... a week and three days. ["Are you serious?"] I've known her for two weeks, we've been going out for a week and three days.

What does she mean to you?

She means a lot to me. She's really nice, she's caring. She means a lot to me.

What do you like about her?

How she's kind, she thinks of others before herself. She's helpful, she's honest, she's beautiful, she's really kind caring person.

How do you spend time with her?

Uh.. sometimes on the weekend I go to the city with her with some of my other mates. Or just go to her house, sometimes, like that. Yeah.

If you have to choose, who's more important to you? Friends or family?

Friends come and go but family will always be there, as my dad would say. But uhm.. it'd be really hard to pick. If I had to pick, I dunno. Friends are like second family, considered as family. So, second family and my family.

But if you *do* have to choose, who would you choose?

I'll have to say my family. It would, like, absolutely kill me to, let, my friends go, but family first.

Between family and your girlfriend?

[Laughs] Oh, now you're just being mean! Uhm... [Thinks] The way things going she wants to be part of the family, so I dunno. Bit young, I mean.

You spend more time with your family or friends?

I've always spent time with my family but at the moment, when I came to WA, I'll tell my friends, like, 'I'll be with my family all weekend' sometimes, but sometimes they're working so probably more friends than family at the moment, so...

Have you ever been in a situation where you have to choose between friends and family?

Yes, I have! Once my brother did something very stupid, and uhmm... my friends saw it. It was either tell my brother what I knew or let my friends go [...] help my friend

out or help my brother out. I ended up helping my brother out. My mate and I are still friends. He reckoned I did the right thing.

School

How do you feel about school?

School is great, great place to meet people.

If you could choose not to go to school, would you not go?

No! I'll go no matter what. I never wag, never... the only times I've missed school is when I'm sick or I have to go to the dentist or something like that.

How do you think your behaviour is like in this school?

Uhm... [Thinks] Recess and lunch I, like, muck around. I sometimes muck around, but when it comes to serious work, and that I cut it out and try to get through. Yeah, [...] I'm mostly serious.

Do you get in trouble for mucking around?

Teacher might say 'settle down, do your work'. I'd be like 'okay, cut it out' and do my work. But I've never been in serious, serious trouble.

Never been in detention or anything like that?

Uhm... primary school I had a few because I came late to school...

Do you have any problems in this school?

Uhm... there are a few morons in this school that are, like, just annoy me. I've never been in serious fights or anything like that. But there are a few people that annoy me. But apart from that, no, not really. [Silent] How about you? ["Me? [Think] Not really. This school has been pretty good."] [Laughs][...] You don't know this school well enough! ["[Laugh] I'm noticing, I'm noticing."] You're all right. You'll get through this school. Everyone likes you, because you're not a teacher. ["That's good to know"]

Subjects and teachers

Favourite subject?

I don't really have a favourite subject. I like maths, science, English. My other subjects. So I don't really hav one. I like them all.

Subjects you hate?

French. That's why I don't do it. I do Indonesian. Uhm... subjects I hate... probably photography. Which is why I don't do it.

Any favourite teacher?

Uh... I got a few. There's Mr Sharpe, because he's funny. Mr Price, he's still here, and like Santa Claus now. Mr Blimsey, outdoor ed teacher, he's really kind person. Mr Simons, uh, he's a good man. Mr Ryan calls me a freak. He's like seven foot tall, and I've got bigger shoes than him, so I'm like, 'stop being so tall [...]' Ms Rogowsky, she's all right. Mr Bate he's a funny person. Mr Barber the principal. He's not one of my teachers, but he calls me dog boy. [Laughs] ["[Laugh] Why is that?"] Because there's been three stray dogs running to the school, everytime they run in I'm the only one that goes out and catches them, so he calls me dog boy. [...] Oh, and you. ["I'm not a teacher."] No, but you're cool. ["Thank you."]

Any teachers you don't like?

Only teachers that give me lots and lots of homework. Uh.. Miss Black, for the fact that she doesn't really give you any chances. Like, she'll yet at you because... [...] she shouldn't treat kids like we're dirts, and that. Move on, told other teachers about it [...]

How do you feel about people in this school?

People in this school are great. I mean, I've never been in a fight myself. I give no reason for people to start a fight, but there's a lot of fights in the school that you probably hear about. Uhm... whenever I see a fight or something I always try to break it up. Like a couple of weeks ago there was a big fight between two girls. Me, Jarvis and this other guy, uhm, broke it up. There was fight between my mate and this other

guy I don't particularly like. I stopped those two from getting into serious trouble and that. It's just.. it's not good. But uhm..

Have you ever been bullied?

No, because I give no reason to. I mean people would be, like, start calling you names, trying to annoy you, but if you just don't care, then... it doesn't matter.

How do you feel about people in your classes?

They're all right. There are a few idiots. And the way they're acting they're not gonna get anywhere in life, but it's uh... what I want, and if I wanna get somewhere in life, it's my effort, not theirs, so... if they choose to be like that, so...

Who are they?

Harvey, Wayne's starting to settle down, then you got Cole, you got David [...]
There's a few others I don't particularly know their names but they just act all stupid. They like cause trouble in class. They distract people, they don't get on with their work. Just interrupt everything. ["Okay."] Noon would be one. ["Noon would be one?"] Noon definitely. ["Have you known him for a long time?"] Since Year 8. Oh, he starts a fight with *everyone*. And if you actually fight back... I actually *way* started on him. 'Oh, you wanna fight?' 'Cause he picks on people he doesn't think will fight back. If they actually do he'll stop.
["I'm thinking of doing an interview with him."] Oh, dear God. [Laughs]

Academic Enrichment Program

Well, I'm in the AEP Maths and Science. I was gonna be in AEP but it was too late to hand [the application] in, but they said I could be in the AEP maths and science and computing.

How do you feel about being in those classes, and why?

I think it's great, it helps me out. 'Cause I know I'm in the top classes. It's more of a challenge. I understand the work, and I can get through it, but um... it's a challenge for me, so it'll help me out a lot in the future.

And how do you feel about the teachers in those classes?

Ah they're good. They make work easy to understand, except Mrs Black. She sometimes do... she doesn't explain things that well. Uhm.. but the rest of the teachers, they're really good at explaining things. I don't get, like, stacked behind, or, like, 'can you say that again?' or something like that. It's really easy to follow.

How do you feel about your classmates in those classes?

Uhhh... Good. We don't normally have all the idiots in our classes because, uhm, obviously, if they're gonna be idiots, then they don't deserve being in top classes while other people who are trying want to be.

Jess, female student from the Year 10 class

Self

How do you generally feel about yourself and about life? Why?

Hard question to answer. I love life. It's fun. (Why?) I don't know. Because.. life is life. What else? ...

Like to look after myself..

Describe yourself in a few sentences.

I am... (laugh) fun, have a good sense of humour. I don't really let things get to me. I pretend to. Right now I'm pretending to be angry with Emil.

What are your hobbies/interests?

I don't really have many hobbies. Photography. My dad's a photographer. Finding good music, downloading from the internet. Movies. Just relaxing. Every time I get a chance I go outside for camp (with family and friends).

Who do you do them with? Why?

Friends. I go for photo trips with my dad.

Is there anything about yourself you feel uncomfortable about? Why?

Yes, just sometimes I think I have a weird personality, which I do.

("In what way?") It's hard to understand. Right now I probably don't make sense. My appearance. It's not perfect. I have braces. It's weird telling you this... I don't like my thighs. (shyly giggles)

What do you feel your strengths might be? Why?

I'm not scared to try things. I'm not shy. I was going to say I'm caring, but not really.

("Why not?") I'm a bit mean. I'm honest. Sometimes that's why.

What do you feel are your weaknesses? Why?

I guess my weakness is attention. I hate to be alone. Even walking here by myself was weird.

I don't always put all effort into things that matter. My grades aren't as good as they can be.

What do you think might be your biggest fear? Why?

Being alone. When I was a kid - my parents divorced - I saw how my dad was sad being alone.

What does it mean to you to be a boy/girl?

I don't know what it's like to be a guy, so just normal. It's good, because I think guys have to prove themselves - girls don't have to compete. But harder. More emotions. Girls have to wake up earlier, to shower and make up and stuff.

Who is the most important person in this world to you? Why?

My .. dad. We just have a really close bond. Although I live with mum. I only see him every second weekend but now more often, so maybe I don't see him as much, I don't get annoyed as much.

Do you have a question about yourself?

Personal ones.

Family

Do you live with your family?

Yes, half of them.

Who's in your family?

Mum, nan, two brothers (both younger and idiots), Dad and his girlfriend (I consider them family) and her son (I don't count him as family. He's 18 years old.)

What does your family mean to you? Why?

Lots. I don't know what I'd do without them. I tell dad everything. Personal things. I don't tell mum as much, but she knows...

How's your relationship with your family?

I'm really close to them. Me and nan are not close at all. We always have problems. We're too much alike - bossy. She's too strict, so I fight back. (She's a lawyer)

What's your ... like?

Dad

Not serious. Relaxed. But really 'contradictive'- overtly protective of me, especially about guys. He'd help anyone. He thinks he's not smart. I think he is. He's country proud. Both mum and dad grew up in farms. I did till 9 years old. That was when they divorced.

Mom

(Laughs) Really caring and emotional. Kind of serious. But not as fun loving, emotional. She worries. (About?) me, and my brother. If we're doing something she worries about what we do.

Brothers/sisters

Brothers. They just... Adam - 12 years old. He wears hearing aid. He's by his own a lot.

Tom - year 4. He's a nerd. He's pretty popular. They're totally opposite. I used to get on more with Ted, but now more with Adam. Now Ted's a bit weird, he thinks he knows everything. His friends are annoying.

Do you spend time with your family? How?

Yeah, because we always have dinner together (during the week). Unless I stay with friends.

That's the only time we talk. Weekend, mum says you can't be out the whole weekend, must have a bit of time at home. We go to movies, shopping. Now and then dad and I go for dinner. I also go with mum for coffee.

Are you closer to your mom or dad? Why?

Dad. Because I don't know why... ("Is it because of your personalities?") Yeah... but dunno why I'm not as close as with mum.

What do your parents mean to you?

They're my parents. They're always there. Safe. Dad means everything. I can't go for a day without my dad. As long as there's contact even just on the phone. Mum gives me food (giggles). I don't think of her as a person to talk to. She wants me to. My relationship with mum suffered because of my grandma. We live in her house now. She has an overpowering effect. She's a lawyer. She told mum how to raise us. It changed the way mum raised us. She thinks she knows everything, like Ted. And the generation gap. I can't wait to get out of the house. To live with dad. But now I'm not allowed. When they separated I was in Year 9. They didn't want to separate me from my brothers.

Friends

Do you have friends? Who are they?

Yes. Rose, Edward, Bill. Most are from school. ("Outside of school?") Lots because of Manjimup (where she used to live). Lots of friends out of school doing things like netball, social things through friends.

What do your friends mean to you?

Everything (*note: she didn't take time to think this time - unlike with 'family'*) If there's anything wrong, I can count on them. They're the same age, more understanding. I trust them, they're fun.

Do you do things with them? What do you do?

Movies, shopping, sleepover. ("Are your friends mainly male or female?") About 50/50.

How often do you spend time with them?

At least twice a week, weekend. Depends on whether I'm with mum or dad. When I'm with dad, I'm so far away. Dad doesn't want to drive.

Do you have a boy/girlfriend?

No, for three months now. It's a record - a shame. I used to go out with Edward three times. I don't feel like I need one now. I'm liking it.

IF you have to choose, who's more important to you: your friends or family?

It's so hard. I can't choose.

Do you spend more time with your friends or your family?

Family. I live with them.

Have you ever been in any situation where you have to choose?

No, yeah, but I had no choice. If there's a choice, (I'd choose) friends, but if they really want me to, I'd go with family.

School

How do you generally feel about school?

I like it because of the social (aspect). ("What about the study?") Okay ...

How do you think you're performing in this school? Why do you think so?

Good. Parents want me to do better. Not failing. I get B's.

How do you think your behaviour is like at school?

Good. I'm a good student. I can get really distracted. I talk a lot. I have more fun in class than learning. Never get chucked out of class.

("What about assignments?") Usually okay.

Do you have any problems in this school? What is it?

No, not really.

Subjects and teachers

Favorite subjects? Why?

Photography - I like taking photos. Outdoor ed(ucation) - I like building fires. I like SOSE because I don't do much, mostly talk.

I don't mind maths. Computing is okay but boring work, but always have relievers, and we don't do work.

Hated subjects? Why?

English. Now, I used to love it. I have to do work. I used to be good at it, then I went out with Emil and I stopped working. I'm not doing as well now. So I don't like it. Science. I do well in it. It's just the teacher's really boring.

Favorite teachers? Why?

Mr Schneider. He talks about his girlfriend all the time. Mr (Ted) Boyle. He's nice.

Hated teachers? Why?

None come to mind.

How do you feel about people in this school? Why?

I think people in this school are normal. We're immature a bit. I think with years 8 and 9 you can tell the different cliques. With year 10 (we're) just a big bunch of people.

How do you feel about people in your classes?

Depends what class. EMITS is pretty good. We all get along. With 'choice' subjects it's just different people together. Forms. You can tell what forms they are. Outdoor ed. It's a mix. I like the subject more than the people. With photography it's not like that.

Is there anyone in this school you don't like?

(Quiet for a long time) Don't think so. There's times I don't like them, but it's not that I don't like them.

Academic Enrichment Program

How do you feel about being in this class? Why?

I like class. But not computing. Boring, we don't do anything. I like the class but... I don't like computers, except for chatting, etc.

How do you feel about the teachers?

I've had so many. Just swapped teachers. Teachers are - most of them don't really care what you do. I like Ms Frank. She's not very strict.

How do you feel about your classmates?

Cool. I like them. They're all nice. No bitch ... sorry ... bad person. No mean person. Except for me, sometimes. I pick on people. Everyone gets along really well. No one I would stay away from.

Would you rather stay or leave from this class?

Stay.

Media and Society

What do you think is your place in this society? Why?

I'm a ... just as an Australian student.

Is there any kind of people you don't like in society?

I'm always gonna have a hard time. Australia is as good as it gets. There's always people ...

How do you think this society/country could become a better place? Why do you think so?

Unless we can speak our minds. I guess less racism and more ... understanding.
No discrimination.

Do you think you can do anything about it? What?

Just do the best I can to stop. It's hard to do but... hard to do something right now... but...

Additional Notes

(After the interview ended I told Jess that she seems to me to be an intelligent person. I did this because past observation of her interaction with her friends, in particular with Edward has shown that at least one person has put her in the 'dumb blonde' stereotype. I chose to do this at the end of the interview in order not to 'contaminate' the data I get from her. I told her that anyone that adheres to the stereotype as a general rule should speak to her. She said it was nice, and seemingly familiar with what I was talking about through first hand experience, spoke to me of

her problem with being stereotyped as such. The following is an attempted reconstruction of what she said from my notes.)

(She looks empathic) Yeah, I've had that stereotype my whole life. But I guess I can use that to my advantage sometimes.

("Which means you're not dumb?") (She thinks a bit and laughed) That's true!