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LITERATURE REVIEW ON FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO COMMUNITY CAPABILITIES

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

This report presents a review of a selected set of studies of Australian towns and cities to discover insights they offer for contemporary approaches to community capacity building. These insights concern issues in the structure and process of local social life in rural and suburban localities.

The Meaning of Community and Community Capacity

'Community' is addressed in the general terms of what the literature suggests is a multi-definitional sociological concept. The focus of the present study is on geographical, as opposed to functional, community. Geographical communities refer to those that are spatially bounded - a town, a suburb, or a locality within an urban area. We take Ife's (1995) definition of community, which merges ecological and social justice principles into five key, interactive principles of human scale, identity and belonging, obligations, *gemeinschaft*, and culture. These are used to define community and the ideology and practices appropriate to community reform.

Australian Community Studies Reviewed

Studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s in the research tradition of holistic community studies provide the focus of the review. Five such studies were chosen, examining suburban and rural communities and community life among indigenous and non-indigenous people. The studies typically combine ethnographic methods such as participant observation, with surveys and other forms of objective data collection. The studies of country districts are Gillian Cowlishaw's (1988) study of 'Brindleton' in far western New South Wales, Ken Dempsey's (1990, 1992) study of 'Smalltown' in northwestern Victoria, and Gretchen Poiner's (1990) study of Marulan, in the southern highlands of New South Wales. The suburban studies are of 'Newtown', studied by Lois Bryson and Faith Thompson (1966) in the 1960s and restudied by Lois Bryson and Ian Winter (1999) in the 1990s, and of 'Green Views' by Lyn Richards (1990).

Four factors that are likely to be relevant to community capacity building and have appeared in relevant empirical studies have provided the basis for the reading of the studies. The *social and economic base* of local society do much to shape the prospects for the people living in an area to command an income, found families and bring up their children. Social life in a local area often has *cultural dimensions* that reflect the common experience with distinctive local meanings that is particular to residents of a locality. *Social networks* give the fabric of local society and provide the relationships connecting its residents with social life beyond their immediate community. These networks and the bonding and bridging relations within them offer an important medium for community capacity building activities. Finally, local *citizenship and associational life* concern the role and strength of the local institutions of public life such as community services and voluntary organisations. These have particular importance in giving residents access to the services and reflect the needs, conditions and participation of the particular locality. Leadership in local political life is an important component of citizenship and associational life, provided there is longstanding community recognition of its importance and where leadership reflects local values and aspirations (Kenny, 1994: 163-6).

Factors Contributing to Community Capacity

Our review suggests caution about an uncritical embrace of community, or about strategies aiming to promote community for its own sake. Equally, it argues against approaches to building community capacities that rely on indiscriminate increase in the density of network connections between people, especially at the neighbourhood level.

As comparisons of the social and economic bases of the five localities and the social networks of residents shows, country districts are structured by a local social system in a way that is distinct from systems of suburban localities. Where the population is small and stable, the agricultural economy dominant, and other settlements relatively distant, residents interact with one another in multiple dimensions of economic and social life. In consequence, residents' lives are woven together to some degree, and the ladders of social and economic status that link them prevail across the different areas of their lives (Frankenberg, 1965: 285-96). The characteristically dense networks that the studies suggest go with longstanding residence in rural areas and country towns are likely to be rich in bonding ties. Social networks in these country localities appear to be poor in bridging ties beyond those linking people of different class and status groups.

In all three places, the closely knit networks that bind local people together do much to explain the difficulty in being accepted that is frequently the experience of new residents representing different educational, occupational and ideological backgrounds. In at least some circumstances such networks also appear to inhibit the take-up of economic opportunities for newcomers and native residents returned after an extended absence.

It is rare for the residents of urban localities to be linked together in the same way. Their economic opportunities are more diverse, and their lives less bounded by locality. They may meet their neighbours in church congregations or school committees, but it would be unusual for them to mix with the same set of people in all areas of their lives. The way in which urban residents use the city varies with respect to their housing status, their education, income, and social class, and their history of social and geographical mobility.

The studies invite discussion of the potentially valuable role of mobile professional and other workers in community capacity building. These workers represent an important resource for innovation and change in country localities. Bringing both additional and different skills and the experience of other localities, they offer a valuable source of ideas and experience of social development elsewhere. Individually, they open networks to bridging relations with the world outside the locality. In their particular fields, they make knowledge and skills available to improve local institutions such as schools, health and welfare services, and local business enterprises. However, it appears that the more longstanding residents of the towns and suburbs do not necessarily value this potential, or at least do not see it in the same positive light. This incongruity leaves an open question about how mobile workers may best be guided in the task of capacity building. The workers themselves may fail to recognise that the values and aspirations they hold differ from those of local people, or may seek to apply professional modes of capacity building out of touch with the forms of social action locals prefer. At the same time, local power

structures set limits on the opportunities to participate that are open to them, and local cultures are resistant to the kinds of new ideas they are most likely to offer. Some succeed in their efforts to be accepted, usually on the terms set by locals, some resort to a social life among their own group and a few are painfully excluded and move on prematurely.

These studies suggest the application of community capacity building in moderating social division associated with racial and ethnic division. While racial and ethnic difference are cultural constructions, the social tensions and hostility surrounding them clearly have a material element. This element lies in the incomes, employment and economic security of those on all sides of the social divisions that are associated with race and ethnicity, including social class and status. Given the importance of economic security in enabling tolerance, there is likely to be value in strategies directed to increasing economic participation even where they have no direct effects on reducing inequalities in opportunity among racial or ethnic groups. However, the importance of symbolic equality in the provision of economic and social support cannot be ignored. Endeavours to build community capacity must steer a narrow track between respect for local culture and the existing contours of social life, and appearances of favouritism to particular groups. The design of initiatives to build community capacity need to address local needs and problems in ways that respond to particular needs yet also reflect and reinforce universalistic values.

1 Introduction

During the 1990s there has been a return of Australian social policy interest to the theme of community. This move signals renewed concern with the social context of individual and family well-being, and an appreciation of the importance of social integration and social stability, accessibility of services and social support, and the diversity of social, geographical and cultural environments within which people live.

This return to community also reflects renewed interest in collectively oriented social policy interventions that will complement the established pillars of income support and labour market assistance to individuals. The defining characteristics of these interventions are their focus on place and their reliance on developmental and bottom-up approaches to work with local culture and institutions. The goal is to build the capacities of local communities to work better in meeting the needs and resourcing the opportunities of their members by, for example, developing leadership, skills and voluntary initiative.

This research turns to an established tradition of research examining the nature and experience of Australian communities for insights relevant to the development of community approaches to social policy. Drawing mainly from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, the community studies tradition has as its hallmarks the search for holistic understanding through extended study of the multiple facets of social life in a specific local milieu. The purpose of the project has been to review a selected set of studies of actual Australian towns and cities to find what insights these studies have for community capacity building.

Some of our findings take the form of cautions against too ready an embrace of community for its own sake, and for too eager pursuit of social connection between and among people living in the same area. These cautions apply particularly strongly at the neighbourhood level. We point to a set of dilemmas concerning the role that mobile professional and other workers, who may be in a local area but often are not fully part of it, may play in the development of its community capacities. These workers bring important skills and wider experience into an area, and often seek to participate in and contribute to its affairs, yet their contribution may not necessarily be welcomed or appropriate. Finally, we reflect on social diversity and social division, and its connection with material security in a period of profound economic change.

This report is in five sections. These introductory remarks are followed by a discussion of the concepts of community and community capacity. Section 3 describes the research tradition of community studies, introduces the community studies we have selected for review, and describes the lens through which we have read them. The findings of the studies themselves are reviewed in Section 4. Section 5 discusses their implications for building community capacity, and is followed by a brief conclusion.

2 Community, Communities and Community Capacity

Community is one of the oldest themes of social science. This chapter reviews the issue of how community is to be defined and how community capacity is to be understood.

2.1 The Meaning of Community

Attempts to define community are legion, and the elusiveness of consensus on a particular formulation legendary. In an exhaustive review of the literature almost half a century ago, Hillery (1955) identified 94 different definitions in use at that time. We shall not venture a ninety-fifth definition here. Instead, we will address community in the general terms of the concept's sociological heritage. At their most fundamental, these terms identify community with a particular quality of interpersonal relations – Weber called such relations 'communal' (Martin, 1970: 302) – as imbued with feelings of mutuality, commonality and belongingness together. Community is frequently associated with the conduct of social life on a small scale with high levels of face-to-face interaction. It is also generally associated with social continuity through time and with interpersonal relations that engage the whole person rather than the narrow and specified persona evoked as the representative of a specific social role (Frankenberg, 1966: 238-9).

The concept of community is inherently linked with the transformation from a pre-industrial, village-based society to one shaped by industrial capitalism and urban settlement. In one of the main themes of classical sociology, community is identified with social relationships based on kinship and descent (blood) and land or place, and is often referred to by the German term *gemeinschaft*. This is contrasted with the impersonal, interest-based associations of modern society, termed *gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1955). In the same transformation, the shift from community to association is paralleled by change from a society based on ascribed roles to one structured on the basis of individual achievement, and from social order predicated on the acceptance of common rules and beliefs to order generated from interdependence and the division of labour into specialised activities.

Because of its identification with a past time, the idea of community often carries an ideological burden of nostalgia and longing. Even in careful application to industrial capitalist society, the concept is essentially normative, evoking social ideals of social integration, stability, and interaction as full persons. Much contemporary interest in community, community capacities and community development stems from the conviction that the concept represents positive goals for social action, variously seen in terms of mutual support or as a basis of mobilisation for purposes of collective self-help and political action. It is important to recognise that community may also be associated with pressures to social conformity, collective resistance to change, and the denial of cultural difference.

Fundamental to any contemporary definition of community is the distinction between *geographical* and *functional* communities. Geographical communities refer to those that are spatially bounded - a town, a suburb, or a locality within an urban area. This has been the dominant tradition in English-language sociology, where community has come to mean 'the collectivity of people who occupy a common territory, share a

common life and interact within a common set of institutions' (Martin, 1970: 302-3). The concept of the functional community is 'based on some other common element providing a sense of identity' (Ife, 1995: 91-92) and providing a focus for close and continuing interaction and a sense of belongingness. Examples that have received close study are communities grounded in common ethnic origin (Martin, 1972), and in sexual identity (Altman, 1971). It is important to note that a community can present elements of both. This is most obvious in the case of spatially concentrated settlement of some ethnic groups, and of some groups of gay men.

The focus of the present study is on geographical community. In a popular contemporary perspective on community development, Ife (1995) offers a definition of community that is suitable to the purposes of the present study. This merges ecological and social justice principles into five key principles with which to define community and the ideology and practices appropriate to community reform. These are human scale, identity and belonging, obligations, *gemeinschaft*, and culture. These principles work in conjunction with one another. According to Ife's (1995: 90-1, quotations p. 90) theorising, interactions between the members of a community are imperative, so the human scale is one 'which can readily be [owned,] controlled and used by individuals'. People in the community either know one another or are able to get to know each other if need be. A sense of belonging, in terms of the individual feeling secure within the group is valued and important. Community members are obligated to contribute to the life of the community through participation in some activities and assistance in maintaining the structure of the community. *Gemeinschaft* structures and relationships mean that people relate to each other as 'whole' beings rather than representatives of roles or categories. Through this, personal growth is enhanced, and the full spectrum of community members' skills and abilities are fully utilised to the benefit of the community. Linked to this is the 'valuing, production and expression of a local or community-based culture' which is uniquely associated with the community (Ife, 1995: 91). Thus, this encourages a diverse, democratic and participatory people to produce, as well as consume, culture.

Some important issues arise in the consideration of community in geographical terms. One concerns the comparison of local social life in rural and urban settings, and the potential for differences between country and city to be read in terms of the social transformation from pre-industrialist *gemeinschaft* community to modern *gesellschaft* association. This reading sees rural towns as survivals of the more communal past, and cities as the place of anonymous, atomised and competitive individualism. In contemporary English-speaking societies, communities as Ife describes them have been found in both rural areas and in some parts of cities, mainly those populated by working class people resident in the same area for generations (Frankenberg, 1966). However, social relationships of this kind are not necessarily to be found in either setting, but depend on many factors including the history of settlement in the area, social and geographical mobility, the local economy and employment and housing, and the character of local institutional life.

A second issue is closely related to the first. The most powerful forces shaping today's societies are not local but national and international, and local life is as much a product of advanced capitalism and global cultural and economic influence as of local effort and culture. Thus the economies and social politics of local areas are only partly local, and this is equally true of rural and urban localities. Moreover, it must be

noted that the personal lives and key activities of the residents of a local area, whether in the country or the city, are also by no means limited to the local area. People may, and indeed often do, live in one area but work, play and shop in others. The extent to which they do so depends on the nature of the area itself, but also on the age, sex, class, education and social and geographical mobility of the individuals concerned (Martin, 1970). Both issues pose significant challenges to the understanding of community as a geographical phenomenon in research and the policy and practice of community development.

Black and Hughes (2001: 9-10, quotations p. 9) offer a way of adapting the concept of community in the light of these issues. In their own work, they focus on both 'communities of location' and 'communities of interest' (i.e. functional communities). The former resemble Ife's geographical communities, with one important difference. Black and Hughes observe that many people may 'use the same sets of services and other resources, be subject to the same governance, and identify with the same community, despite living 'some distance from the centre of population'. For this reason, they suggest that it is more appropriate to think of these communities 'in a centred way rather than in a bounded way'. They suggest that people should not be seen as either in a community or outside it, but as more or less close to the centre of its communal life. They acknowledge that many people are uncertain as to what is their community. This is particularly true in metropolitan areas, where people may identify with a number of geographical communities. This, they conclude, is not an issue of definition but rather a symptom of the complexity contemporary life, which is characterised by a high degree of mobility across different social groups, social fragmentation and little or no overlap between social groups (Black and Hughes, 2001: 11).

Finally, it is important to recognise that community, understood in the sense of territorially based relationships characterised by some degree of mutuality, commonality and belonging together, does not apply to all rural areas, towns, or suburbs. Thus not everyone lives in a community in the sense that we are using the term, and community is not to be found in all places. Whether a town or suburb can be described as a community can be determined only with knowledge of the relations and expectations that the people who live there have of one another. For this reason, we have preferred 'locality' to 'community' as a general term with which to refer to the various towns, suburbs and other local social settlements discussed in this report. We will refer to them as 'communities' only when research about the nature of relationships between their residents suggests that a sense of community exists.

2.2   Community Capacities

Where community refers to community members and their relationships with one another, the concept of community capacities refers to personal and social characteristics that can be mobilised into action for the good of the community. Partaking in a discussion of community capacity building, Poole (1997) drew on McLeroy's (1996) definition of community capacity as being the characteristics of communities that foster their ability to identify, mobilise, and address social and public problems. Poole suggested dimensions of community capacity including participation and leadership; access to and prudent application of resources; social and inter-organisational networks; sense of community; community history of collective

action; community power; shared core values; and capacity to engage in critical reflection. These appear to be characteristics of individuals within communities and can be measured on an individual level, but are enacted through shared situations and resources for a common goal. In order to be effective in initiating and sustaining action to meet a common goal, structures that are citizen owned and driven need to be in place and have the capacity to draw leadership from all corners of the community.

The Community Research Project (CRP) conducted by the Department of Social Security (1994-1997) provided the launching point for our own approach to defining community capabilities. The CRP evaluation defined capacity as:

> an interplay between various personal and systemic attributes that influence the extent to which an individual is able to contribute to, and derive benefits from, the private and public social and economic resources available in society. A range of personal attributes might include wisdom, skills, knowledge, the ability to learn, health status, self-esteem, emotional affect, self-efficacy, social interactivity, levels of social capital, perceived social valuations of oneself, and access to capital or other material resources. Systemic attributes relate to social roles and expectations, the provision of social services and facilities, and the manner in which and extent to which a society encourages and facilitates access and participation in its various institutions and community life (Smith & Herbert, 1997: 7).

Taking these ideas as our foundation, we have understood community capacity as residing in both the personal attributes of residents and features of the local social system. Relevant personal attributes include skills, knowledge, self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, levels of social capital and access to capital or other material resources. Systemic attributes relate to norms and values of the community, social roles and expectations and the provision of social services and facilities. Community capacity is the outcome of the combination of such attributes such as to:

- Increase the extent to which the members of a local community are able to establish advantageous networks within and without the community.

- Enable members to draw on resources made available through these networks to generate leadership, and enable members to identify problems, needs and goals of individuals, families, groups and organisations within the local community and cooperatively instigate and manage change accordingly.

- Generate opportunities for social and economic participation, both within the community and outside it;

- Facilitate relationships and social interaction across social divisions that exist within the community, thus promoting social cohesion. Such divisions may be between different generations, groups defined by socio-economic status and class, racial and ethnic groups, and urban and rural residence.

Community capacity building, therefore refers to establishing the conditions through which the necessary personal and systemic attributes can develop.

We have supplemented this approach with ideas about the types of social network and network development that may contribute to, or inhibit, building community capacity. The network construct provides a way of conceptualising the social environment of the individual person in the context of complex society with greater force and precision.

The essential idea of social network analysis was first stated by John Barnes in 1954:

> Each person is, as it were, in touch with a number of other people, some of whom are directly in touch with each other and some of whom are not. Similarly each person has a number of friends, and these friends have their own friends; some of any one person's friends know each other, others do not. I find it convenient to talk of a social field of this kind as a network. The image I have is of a set of points some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or sometimes groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other (1954: 43).

This construct provides terms by which to describe and compare the character and patterning of social relations linking people directly and indirectly. Such networks show the micro-level structuring of social integration and the maintenance of social norms and values, the structure of power and influence, communication and the spread of ideas, information and resources, and the provision of community and family support (Wellman, 1999; Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988).

We have identified several network characteristics as relevant to community capacities. Perhaps the most simple of these is the *size* of residents' personal networks. Individuals maintaining large numbers of relationships are in touch with the norms and values of many others, and through these relationships may gain access to critical resources such as social support, information and advice, economic assistance and economic opportunities. Where these relationships are with people in the same local area, large networks put many local residents in touch with one another and increase the prospects of their acting together.

The size of networks is often associated with their *density,* which refers to the number of a person's friends who also know one another and see one another independently of the person. Dense networks contain many 'bonding' relations (Putnam, 2000: 22), and are thus most likely to link people who are socially similar to one another. When the residents of an area are typically enmeshed in large, densely connected networks, they are likely to be provided with both affirmation of a common identity and strong support for the norms and values that members of the network share. It is this common identity that provides the basis for ready access to social and material support from friends and relatives, and for social stability and continuity at the local level. It is important to recognise that at the same time, dense networks also have the capacity to enforce tradition and resist change. This includes the application of sanctions, such as gossip and ostracism, to individuals who deviate from expected patterns of behaviour, and collective action to ways of life that serve some local interests at the expense of others. Close, dense networks express community's dark side as much as its warmth and strengths.

Networks in which the person's friends typically do not know one another independently of the person are low in density, and are often described as loose-knit.

Networks of this kind typically reflect the separation of home and work life, of kinship and friendship, and of affective and instrumental activity. These relationships may be weaker than those typical of dense networks. Since it is these 'bridging' relations (Putnam, 2000:22) which connect individuals across the cleavages of social difference including race, class and generation, weak social ties may be more important than strong ones for social integration (Granovetter, 1973). Loose-knit networks are more common in urban than in rural areas, and more common among people who have been mobile than people who have not. They are flexible, give access to diverse norms and values, and may foster individual development and change. For exactly these reasons, loose-knit networks are more difficult to maintain and may leave their members isolated and unsupported.

Differences in the size and density of networks are often associated with differences in the *composition* of their membership. Most important in this respect are their spatial distribution and the social homogeneity or heterogeneity of people's friends and associates in terms of class, education, and cultural/ racial or ethnic/ identity. Social and geographical mobility is a key factor in diversity of network membership in both respects. As people move from one area to another their networks become spread in space, and as these moves bring them into relations with others different from themselves they may also become more socially diverse. Education, upward class mobility and the social contexts of employment and occupation also affect the kinds of networks that people form. The effects of these are greatest when combined with residential movement from locality to locality. For some occupational groups such as teachers, social and geographical mobility go together, with steps up occupational ladders requiring periodic moves from one town to another. In Australia, this is most marked in rural areas.

The literatures of community and social network draw attention to a further, very important aspect of social relationships and structures at local level. In both rural and urban areas, the networks of residents may be more or less centred on the locality in which they live and the social and cultural influences that orient them. For some people, the relationships, opportunities and expectations of local life represent most of what is important in life. For others, however, locality and local social life are far less important. The concerns that matter to them, and the reference groups that they rely upon to define themselves and evaluate others, lie outside local society; these may be national or even international in focus.

Frankenberg (1966: 154-73) characterises these groups as *locals* and *cosmopolitans* respectively. Locals draw their networks from, and orient their actions to, local status groups and local norms. Cosmopolitans, in contrast, have only parts of their personal networks in the locality. They draw their frames of reference from wider national and international society, and construct their measures of achievement and social status in its more fragmented terms. The division between locals and cosmopolitans only partly coincides with class and ethnicity, but does broadly correspond to differences in education and mobility. The division between locals and cosmopolitans is a source of tension and cleavage in political organisation at the local level. It interacts with other social divisions in the leadership and control of voluntary organisations, political parties and local government.

In the result, the character of the social networks to be found in a particular locality reflect at once the collective history and character of the place and the personal histories of the people currently living there. Large, dense networks are most likely to be found in country towns and rural areas, but these are not the only kind of network to be found among their residents. The networks of urban residents are likely to be more variable, both from person to person and from one urban locality to another. Both are cross-cut by the mobility of local residents, and particularly by the places that locals and cosmopolitans occupy in local economies and politics.

We have used these concepts from social network analysis and the community studies literature to form a bridge between the social and economic character of social life in a locality and its community capacities. These concepts serve to link the nature of social relations with capacities, whether latent or actual, of the people living in a particular area, town or suburb to work together, identify common needs and goals, generate leadership, and deploy resources towards positive ends.

The next section of this report describes the Australian community studies research literature and the particular research studies selected for review.

3 Australian Community Studies

3.1 The Community Study Research Tradition

This project draws on a set of studies of Australian communities conducted in the community studies tradition. Jointly inspired by sociology and anthropology, community studies have sought to extend anthropology's pursuit of holistic understanding of social institutions and personal life to modern societies. The defining questions of the community studies genre address the interaction of culture and institutions in a specific social milieu. Its works have included classic studies such as Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd's studies of *Middletown* and *Middletown in Transition* (1929, 1937), Arensberg and Kimball's *Family and Community in Ireland* (1940), Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957), and Gans' *The Urban Villagers* (date). In Australia, community studies grew as the development of a national sociology did, both within anthropology and as a discipline independent of it.

At its most broad, community studies have aimed to study society, or a particular part of it, in microcosm. Methodologically, community studies take their point of departure from the ethnographic perspectives of anthropology, 'studying small-scale societies by participating in the social life of the group, in order to achieve an understanding of its distinctive culture'. Some degree of participant observation is a key feature of this method of study (Bryson & Winter, 1999: 61). As the tradition developed, it has become increasingly common for researchers to supplement ethnographical observation with sociological techniques such as surveys, and the use of multiple methods has become a hallmark of community research. Reflecting the aim to study society in microcosm, many of the early community studies were conducted in discrete localities, mainly rural areas, country towns or towns relying on a single industry such as mining. Nevertheless the research tradition also began to be plied in the cities or, more commonly, inner-city working-class areas.

The social structuring of class and power has been a major theme of many of the Australian studies conducted in this tradition. This was a key theme in the first Australian community study, *Coaltown* (1944), by the anthropologist Alan Walker, who examined working class life and politics in a coal-mining town. Although the number of Australian community studies is small, a range of social factors which operate within (and, at times, define) communities have been addressed. Early studies such as *Mateship in Local Organisation* (Oxley, 1974) and *Bradstow* (Wild, 1974) explored class as the central, defining factor of the community under scrutiny, largely at the expense of other important factors operating within Rylestone shire and Bradstow.[1] A number specifically focus on ethnic and cultural issues relating to migrants, such as *From Pasta to Pavlova* (Huber, 1977), *Indians in White Australia* (de Lepervanche, 1984) and *Community and Identity: Refugee Groups in Adelaide* (Martin, 1972). Gender was initially raised in *Open Cut* (Williams, 1981), and continued with more recent work reported in *The Good Old Rule* (Poiner, 1990) and *A Man's Town* (Dempsey, 1992). Aboriginal life and politics have been explored in

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[1] The neglect of gender was recognised when a later edition of Oxley's work was published. One explicit intention of a brief revisit in 1977 was to allow 'a woman sociologist speak on the women's side of local affairs' (Oxley, 1978: xiii).

Black, White and Brindle (Cowlishaw, 1988) and *Domesticating Resistance: the Dhangadi Aborigines and the Australian state* (Morris, 1989). *An Australian Newtown* (Bryson and Thompson, 1972) was the first Australian community study of a suburban area to be conducted within an explicitly sociological agenda, and the first to have systematic restudy a generation later (Bryson & Winter, 1999: 62). Richards' *Nobody's Home* (1990), looking at life in a newly established dormitory suburb, demonstrated the importance of ideology in the construction and shaping of aspirations for home ownership and home-centred family life.

Our engagement with Australian community studies has focused on a selected set of particular studies with particular relevance to strategies to build community capacities. The next section discusses our selection of studies for review.

3.2 Selection of Studies for Review

Many of the 'classics' of the Australian community studies literature written in the 1970s examined social life as it was in the postwar period, when agriculture and manufacturing dominated the Australian economy, male unemployment less than two per cent, and social relationships were more geographically bounded than is the case in the present. Because our research seeks insights relevant to present efforts to strengthen communities, we have preferred to focus our review on studies conducted recently, in the 1980s and in the 1990s wherever possible.

We have chosen a set of empirical studies of Australian communities as representing suburban and rural communities, and community life among indigenous and non-indigenous people. In some cases, continuing research in and/or restudies of the same community has given added depth and enabled consideration of historical change. The studies chosen typically combine ethnographic methods, often including some form of participant observation, with surveys and other forms of objective data collection.

Our review includes three studies of Australian country towns and the rural areas that surround them. As the title suggests, Gillian Cowlishaw's (1988) *Black, White or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia* (hereafter called *Brindleton*) is a study of racial division in four small towns (population 2000-8000) in western New South Wales. Aboriginal people comprised one quarter to one half of the residents in these towns. 'Brindleton', as she calls the composite town she describes, is the most geographically isolated of the localities covered in our review. Cowlishaw provides a vivid and strongly felt account of inequality, racism and the management of social boundaries in a part of Australia that is socially as well as geographically remote from urban Australia.

Cowlishaw is an anthropologist, and while she collected the data for her study in 1983-1984 the work is informed by much longer acquaintance with the area and its people. She relied primarily on interviews, participant observation and historical sources, supplemented with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from the 1981 Census. Cowlishaw's focus on race relations, an important reason for our inclusion of her study, means that her study gives a sharper picture of the differences between black and white society in the district than of the social differences within each population.

Ken Dempsey's two books, *Smalltown: A Study of Social Inequality, Cohesion and Belonging* (1990) and *A Man's Town: Inequality Between Women and Men in Rural Australia* (1992) (referred to hereafter as *Smalltown* and *Man's Town* respectively), report the results of more than a decade of community studies research. 'Smalltown' is a town of some 2700 people in northwest Victoria, some 250 km from Melbourne. Another 1050 people living in the surrounding district. Dempsey's research, conducted over a period of fifteen years, included participant observation, interviews, and fourteen surveys. In addition, the researchers attended meetings and public events, had drinks in the town's pubs and clubs, and on at least some occasions were billeted in local homes during short visits.

Dempsey's interests reflect the classic themes of the Australian community studies tradition: class, status and social equality and inequality, belongingness and social integration. *Smalltown* provides a general view of the town and its hinterland, describes objective indicators of inequality and the way these are interpreted by the people of the district, and captures the flavour of local social process in social and sporting activities, community organisations and political life. *Man's Town* examines gender inequality in Smalltown, arguing that men's activities and power depend on the appropriation of women's time and labour.

In *The Good Old Rule: Gender and Other Power Relationships in a Rural Community* (1990) (called *Good Old Rule*), Gretchen Poiner breaks the convention of community studies research in which the identity of the town or city under investigation is obscured. Poiner studied Marulan, a country district in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. Marulan is near enough to Goulburn for its residents to work and shop there. Markedly less isolated than Brindleton and Smalltown and lacking the full complement of social institutions that these more distant towns have, Marulan is representative of a different range of rural life in Australia. Poiner's study relied on historical records, participant observation, surveys and personal interviews. Moreover, she was a resident of Marulan herself, with her family owning a farm and spending weekends and holidays in the district. She thus writes of the town as an insider, with some effect on how she sees the town and its life and probably also on what is and is not reported. Although this research is quite old, the active research having been conducted in 1977, the author claims that the social life of the area has not changed significantly (1990: 5).

The subject of Poiner's study is gender and power, and the dynamics of power within the gender relations of the town. Class is nonetheless also a significant theme. Both Dempsey and Poiner find their residents of country towns denying the significance of class and status differentials, although these hierarchies are in plain view. Drawing on Weberian theoretical traditions, both find locals accepting of material inequality in an ideological context presuming equality of social status and human worth. For residents of both Smalltown and Marulan, a shared ideology affirming the moral superiority of country and small-town life enables people of different classes to see themselves as 'all in the same boat'.

Our review also includes studies of two suburban areas of a large capital city. One of these is 'Newtown', already mentioned as the subject of the first Australian community study set in an urban locality. Titled *An Australian Newtown: Life and Leadership in a Working-class Suburb* (*Australian Newtown* for short) and first

published in 1972, the original study by Lois Bryson and Faith Thompson examined employment, family life and community participation in a new area of mainly public housing on what was then the outer fringe of Melbourne. Residents of the area, many of them immigrants, worked in the manufacturing plants nearby. The research methods employed in the original Newtown study included examination of local services and their usage, a household survey, participant observation and in-depth interviewing. The study became widely known because of its controversial recommendations that social policy for the area should reflect not the views of the professionals who had commissioned the research but those of leaders drawn from within the residential population.

The opportunity to conduct a longitudinal study of Newtown arose fortuitously when the suburb was included, with nine others, in the Australian Living Standards Study (commissioned by the Community Development Project, above). This was conducted in 1991 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS; 1991) where Ian Winter was employed. While the methods used were similar, they did not replicate those of the original study and entailed collection of data in somewhat less detail than the earlier study (Bryson & Winter, 1999: 59-60). The 1991 study provided a small but detailed survey of 62 families with dependents under 20 years of age[2]. Some data from surveys of neighbouring areas were also used. Key leaders from the community were interviewed, and official data from documentary and bureaucratic sources were employed. In *Social Change, Suburban Lives: An Australian Newtown 1960s to 1990s (Social Change)*, Bryson and Winter (1999) draw on the data from both studies to track social change in Newtown over a quarter of a century. Faithful to the classic tradition of community studies, their book makes Newtown a study in microcosm of Australia's transition from a manufacturing to a service-led economy, from a social environment with low levels of unemployment to one experiencing much higher levels, and from a demographically young to an ageing population. Although the fortunes of Newtown residents were bleaker in the 1990s than the 1960s, the authors have not found cause to change their views about the appropriate source of social policy leadership for the area.

Lyn Richards conducted her study of 'Green Views', a new housing estate on Melbourne's other urban fringe, over a three-year period in the 1980s (more exact). In *Nobody's Home: Dreams and Realities in a New Suburb* (called *Nobody's Home* hereafter), she describes the motivations and processes by which the residents of the estate took up residence there, established relations with other residents, and created institutions to meet their needs and express their views. She targeted nuclear families (overwhelmingly home owners or purchasers) as research participants. Data collection, primarily surveys and unstructured interviews, took place in 1978, 1979, 1981 and 1983, with the bulk of survey material collected in 1978 and interviews with town leaders conducted in 1983. Although the analysis of such data included sophisticated statistical techniques such as factor analysis, it is the richness of

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[2]   Of these, 49 were two-parent and 13 sole-parent families. It is important to note that taken together the two studies provide longitudinal evidence about a suburb over time, but that this does not constitute longitudinal evidence about particular people who live there. Separate surveys were conducted as part of each study (Bryson and Winter, 1999: 60).

qualitative data and their interpretation that occupy the forefront of Richards' account of the people of Green Views.[3]

Richards differs from the authors of the other studies selected for review in limiting the focus of her research to the home lives of estate residents. She is, of course, concerned with the residents of a dormitory suburb, and she tells us little about their employment or other aspects of their lives beyond the estate. Her interest is in family, home and community, and in the ideologies that shape the nexus between these. The phrase 'nobody's home' which gives the book its title captures the central contradiction of suburban life in the social valuation of a dwelling which, for the same reasons that it is valued, is often empty of its inhabitants. *Nobody's Home* opens to view a micro-world of rich and contradictory fears and longings concerning the idea of the family and the family home, neighbourhood relations and community participation. As later discussion will show, her analysis shows residents as having ambivalent and often contradictory ideas about the kind of relationships they would like to have with neighbours.

As this brief introduction has already suggested, the coverage of these studies varies considerably. Some of this variation reflects differences in time, place and the nature of local society. Another part can be attributed to the backgrounds, interests, theoretical perspectives and methodological choices of the investigators.

3.3 Reading the Studies

We have read these studies with a view to the insights that holistic, empirical study of actual social life in these varying contexts may offer concerning community capacities and the factors that bear on the strengthening of these capacities.

We have read these studies of five Australian localities with a view to evidence and insights relevant to contemporary approaches to the strengthening of local communities. We have based our reading on four types of factor that are likely to be relevant to community capacity building and also discussed in some degree of detail in empirical studies of Australian communities.

Virtually all perspectives on the social world and social development take *the social and economic base* of local society as a fundamental starting point (see, for example, Kenny, 1994, and Ife, 1995).[4] These economic foundations do much to shape the prospects for the people living in an area to command an income, found families and bring up their children. These foundations concern the role of agriculture and extractive industry, manufacturing and service provision in employment and trade,

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[3]   The Green Views study was a stimulus to, and provided the sample data for, the development of new computerised methods for indexing and analysing qualitative social research data in a rigorous and systematic way. Richards is one of the creators of NUD*IST and NVIVO software.

[4]   Black and Hughes (2001) conceive of community strengths as lying in four domains: natural capital, produced economic capital, human capital, and social and institutional capital. What we discuss as the social and economic base of a locality includes natural and produced economic capital and some aspects of human capital.

and the way these in turn link the local with the national and international economies. In practical terms, these are reflected in the ownership and control of land, the people who live there, the kinds of jobs and business opportunities that are available to them, and the incomes and assets they have to live on. The social and economic base also has a geographical dimension in the nature of rural, regional and urban settlement and its historical pattern of development, its nearness or distance from other towns and cities, and the transport and communication channels that connect them. Community development offers both conservative and radical approaches to revitalise and extend local economic activity (Ife, 1995: 139-47).

Social life in a local area often has *cultural dimensions* of social life that are important, and to some extent distinctive. These have foundations in the history of local settlement. Some have their background in Australia's history of Aboriginal dispossession and white settlement, with present-day groups understanding this history in different terms. Others may be grounded in religion or ethnic origin. Still others reflect the local development of ideologies and traditions, sharpened by the expectations and life experience of particular generations of residents. The importance of these distinctive cultural traditions lies in the possibility, not realised in all localities, that the residents of a local area may imbue common experience with distinctive local meanings. Possibilities of this kind may represent both opportunities for and challenges to social development (Ife, 1995: 155-175).

Social networks give the fabric of local society and the relationships connecting its residents with social life elsewhere. The role of these networks in providing social support, maintaining values and engendering responsiveness to new opportunities has already been discussed. These networks and the bonding and bridging relations within them offer an important medium for community capacity building activities (ref.). The goals of these may include bringing new resources into local networks, enriching the networks of socially isolated individuals, opening communication between groups that have been closed to one another, and mobilising disparate sections of local society in concerted action (Kenny, 1994: 159-188).

Finally, local *citizenship and associational life* concern the role and strength of the local institutions of public life such as community services and voluntary organisations. These have important dimensions in giving residents access to the services that they need. Institutions such as churches and schools have their places in virtually every Australian locality, but they take their particular character from the needs, conditions and participation of the particular locality. In the result, these institutions may serve as points of intersection between local and wider culture. These and other local needs are also the object of community service through community groups and voluntary organisations of diverse kinds. Leadership in local political life is an important issue in community development, where there is longstanding recognition of the importance of leadership that comes from within the community and reflects local values and aspirations (Kenny, 1994: 163-6).

4 Community Capacities in Five Australian Localities

This chapter reviews the findings of the studies of social life and relations in five localities. The discussion is structured on the basis of the four factors presented above as contributing to community capacities. As already noted, the studies report findings gathered over a twenty-year period from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. Because our concern is with the underlying character of social life in these localities, we present our description in the ethnographic present, noting specifically those points that refer to a particular time.

4.1 Social and Economic Base

The economic base of a locality has a strong influence on the social life within it. The effects are both direct and indirect. Resources and industries shape employment opportunities in the areas that surround them, and types and levels of economic activity do much to determine the incomes and living standards of the families that live there. Geography and the twin contexts of economic resources and physical place have a critical bearing on this. The most significant differences among the communities examined in the present study are between communities of town and country.

In the rural communities of Smalltown, Brindleton and Marulan, pastoral and farming industries and their local servicing dominate the local economies. Located in the far west of New South Wales, the economy of Brindleton depends heavily on pastoral production, the only really productive industry in the region. However, there is great variation in the size and profitability of landholdings (*Brindleton*, 199-200). Once a large employer of rural labour in stockwork, transport, and skilled trades, the pastoral industry now provides little employment for rural labour. A meatworks provides employment, but much of it is less than full-time. The newly developed cotton industry is highly mechanised (*Brindleton*, 126-130). Smalltown is in the farming district of northwest Victoria. As in Brindleton, farm employment has been declining over a long period. Even so, in 1981 one third of the local workforce were farmers or farm workers. There is also some local manufacturing -- in the 1980s comprising farm equipment manufacturing, a knitting factory, a turkey processing plant, and an offal processing plant. Employment in these enterprises fluctuates in tune with the surrounding rural economy (*Smalltown,* 22). Marulan, lying about halfway between Sydney and Canberra, is less distant from urban centres and also less dependent on agriculture than Brindleton and Smalltown. The district has both large and small farming enterprises, mainly in sheep and cattle production, with horse breeding growing in importance in recent years. In addition to family-owned enterprises, the area has attracted investment from 'Pitt Street farmers' and weekend or hobby farmers seeking a rural retreat. Although Poiner (*Good Old Rule,* 67) notes the decline in rural employment in Australia generally, she does not mention such a decline in the Marulan district. Many of those doing farm work in the district are themselves also the owners of land, usually in smaller parcels. The main industry in the town is a quarry, but some residents of the town also find employment outside it, in industrial Marulan South and in Goulburn.

The towns of Brindleton and Smalltown are service centres for the surrounding rural areas. Local businesses, government services, professionals providing health care and legal services, and local institutions such as schools, churches and community

organisations are to be found there. These are also the seats of shire or town government, itself an employer of skilled labour and professional services. In Brindleton, 55 per cent of jobs were in the private sector, in areas such as transport and transport servicing, retail and wholesale trade, manufacturing, hotel and catering, and banks and stock and station agencies. Most businesses are small family firms, and the occupants of most employment in them are recruited locally. Cowlishaw (*Brindleton,* 120) notes that local business is declining in the face of competition from chain stores and travel by affluent consumers' to other regional centres. The remaining 45 per cent of jobs were in government and public sector jobs. The lower ranks of such employment in positions such as school support staff, nursing and domestic hospital staff, and outside labourers in local government, roads and communication services are filled from within the town. Most professionals such as doctors and lawyers, government workers such as teachers and police, and bank managers and stock and station agents are recruited from outside Brindleton and do not expect to remain there indefinitely (*Brindleton,*126-129). Dempsey (*Smalltown,* 22-27, quotation p. 25) characterises Smalltown as having a 'petit-bourgeois economy servicing a petit-bourgeois farming industry' in which all of the farms and four in every five local businesses are family enterprises. He notes that the provision of government services and the associated employment is increasingly concentrated in larger rural centres to Smalltown's disadvantage. Professional and white-collar workers represent 41 per cent of the town's workforce. While the share of this group in total employment has been growing, it remains well below the proportion of professional and white-collar workers in the state as a whole. Like Brindleton, the town recruits professionals, technicians and management personnel from outside, and most of these workers move on as their careers progress. Marulan, once the main service centre for the surrounding district, no longer fills this function. Ease of travel to Goulburn has reduced its role to the provision of basic commodities and services such as food supplies, newspapers, post office, police and medical attention (*Good Old Rule,* 7). There are three churches and a primary school, but students travel to Goulburn for high school education. Its location on the main highway between Sydney and Melbourne has also given employment in service stations, cafes and a truck-stop, and a lorry checking station.[5]

Brindleton, Smalltown and Marulan are similarly unable to provide employment to the young people who grow up there unless this is available through the family business. Young people seeking education and careers must normally leave the area, though Dempsey notes that some do return to Smalltown later in life. Brindleton and especially Smalltown also have populations of retired people including farmers from the surrounding district. The loss of young people and addition of retirees mean that the populations of the town are ageing, though this is countered in Brindleton by the high fertility of the Aboriginal population. Brindleton particularly also serves as a residential centre for rural workers displaced by declining agricultural employment. Citing data from the 1981 census, Cowlishaw (*Brindleton,* 129) describes more than a third of Brindleton residents as not in the labour force. The town has a large population of people who are unemployed and/or welfare recipients, the largest proportions of whom are Aboriginal. Welfare is the main source of income of many

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5   In the period since Poiner's study the highway has been upgraded, and the freeway now bypasses the town, though a service facility at the turn-off continues to provide employment.

Aboriginal residents. While just over half of households are home owners or purchasers, the town also has a large stock of public housing, housing provided through an Aboriginal Housing Cooperative, and an Aboriginal reserve. Cowlishaw often refers to 'the Aboriginal end of town'. Smalltown also has unemployment and underemployment. Dempsey (*Smalltown,* 166) reports that the two biggest employers of unskilled male workers lay off half their labour force for several months each year, when the workers either claim unemployment benefits or do itinerant work.

In contrast to these country centres, Newtown and Green Views developed as new suburbs on the growth margins of a large capital city. In these areas, it is the housing market that forms the primary link to the economy, with factors such as employment, earnings and transport costs conditioning residents' capacities for home purchase or rent payments and their economic opportunities while living there. Both are in outer areas of greater Melbourne. Quality of accommodation and the auspices of land development differentiate the two from one another.

Newtown was built in the 1950s and 1960s by Victoria's public housing authority as a small estate established to provide low-cost housing for workers in the large manufacturing plants in the vicinity (*Australian Newtown,* 19-24). Its history of settlement has been intertwined with the growth and decline of manufacturing and the fortunes of Australian and immigrant labour that have been employed in it. Public housing policy promoted the sale of public housing to eligible purchasers, and by 1991 some 84 per cent of dwellings were privately owned and the remainder publicly tenanted (*Social Change,* 46-48). These are generally detached, single-family houses of modest but adequate standard. In 1966 the manufacturing industry provided employment for 56 per cent of men and 59 per cent of women in Newtown, much of it in the motor vehicle manufacture and food processing plants nearby. The construction industry employed another 13 per cent of men. By 1991, manufacturing provided employment for only 39 and 27 percent of men and women respectively, and construction for only 7 per cent of men. Employment in wholesale and retail trade had become more significant, increasing from 12 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women in 1996 to 23 and 26 per cent respectively. Employment in the service sector had grown, with employment finance and property, public administration and community services together reaching 13 per cent of men and 34 per cent of women in 1991, it remained low in comparison to Victoria as a whole. While there have been small increases in higher status white-collar jobs, the general pattern is one of deterioration in employment security and income. While most men continued to work within half an hour's travel time from home, more women had to travel distances greater than this in 1991. The most significant change, however, was a significant rise in unemployment; by 1991, 14 per cent of the male population over 15 years and 9 per cent of the female population were unemployed (*Social Change,* 71-104).

Green Views is a privately developed housing estate 21 km from Melbourne. It opened in the late 1970s. Detached family homes were sold as part of a planned 'community' promising controlled development with facilities such as schools and transport and a 'country' atmosphere. Almost all residents entered as owners or more commonly purchasers of new houses built to order. These were most often bought as a house and land package at a price a bit over the average Melbourne price, although later additions were of a lower standard than the initial development (*Nobody's Home,* 24-46). Richards' study focuses on residential life on the estate, and her account

provides little information about the economic structure of the region in which Green Views is situated. It is clear, however, that Green Views is a dormitory suburb – the title *Nobody's Home* comes from popular refrain. Only about one third of residents gave proximity to their place of employment as an important factor in their decision to live in Green Views. The house itself and associated aspects such as privacy, space and the amenity of the area were far more powerful influences (*Nobody's Home,* 14). Most came from nearby suburbs on the same side of the city, mainly from the older and more industrial suburbs lying between Green Views and the city centre.

The social structuring of class and power and the way these are operated at local level is a central theme of four of the studies considered here, and is the subject of theoretical as well as empirical concern in each. The perspectives and methods of the studies differ significantly, making it difficult to draw conclusions across them. Cowlishaw, Dempsey, and Poiner share an interest in the way in which local residents understand hierarchies of class, status and power and how they place themselves in such terms. Bryson and Winter also share these concerns, but treat residents' perceptions and self-identifications not as phenomena of the local society but of wider Australian society. Richards observes the existence of class and status hierarchies in Green Views and the way Green Views residents identify their own places in these, but her primary focus is on the construction of ideologies of home, family and domestic life.

Cowlishaw (*Brindleton,* 107-119, quotation p. 245) describes Brindleton as bisected by race and racism, which she understands as 'a multi-faceted set of divisions which appear natural or necessary because each reflects the other'. Racism works through the construction and reproduction of racial categories. Those defining black and white are based on shifting criteria combining descent, colour, and culture, lifestyle and identification as Aboriginal. The material circumstances of the two groups are significantly different, and visibly so, and until the mid-1980s black and white residents generally lived in different areas of the town. Aboriginal and white residents typically belong to different community associations and drink in different pubs and clubs, but some sporting organisations have mixed memberships. Cowlishaw sees the social order of Brindleton as predicated on white domination, its basic means being what she describes as 'mundane racism' practiced in acceptance of derogatory attitudes and behaviour among whites as a normal feature of everyday life. While this does not go uncontested, including by Aboriginal organisations, it is reinforced by white control of local economic and political institutions. Cowlishaw provides little detail about the social stratification of white society in Brindleton, but in passing notes its differentiation by economic class, employment and professional position. The legislative shift of the 1960s and 1970s in pursuit of racial equality and Aboriginal self-determination – to which Cowlishaw gives the ironic term 'the enlightenment' – and the racially defined benefits and programs created through it have given rise to new bureaucratic and service positions, many held by Aborigines, to administer programs and deliver services. The result is an added layer of social differentiation within black Brindleton.

The racial divide in Brindleton is crosscut by a second division between 'locals' and 'blow-ins', the latter being mainly transient professionals with jobs in government institutions, banks and some forms of industry. Cowlishaw notes that the term blow-in has become so well established in Brindleton as not to carry derogatory

implications. Teachers form the largest single group of blow-ins, but it is also recognised that police expect to move on with five years or so. The educational and professional qualifications of these blow-ins give them relatively high positions in the local stratification system, but their status as transients undermines any capacity to translate this into social influence in the town.

While Cowlishaw's focus is on race and race relations, Dempsey and Poiner examine the social construction of social class and status. Smalltown (*Smalltown,* 19) is unusually racially and ethnically homogeneous; Poiner does not comment on racial and ethnic diversity in Marulan.[6]

Dempsey's study included specific research on the class structure of Smalltown and its district. Applying 1981 census data for men to the class schema developed by Goldthorpe (1969, 1980), he found a cluster of upper middle classes comprising more than half the local population; a small lower middle class of clerical and sales workers account for about one tenth, and a working class of skilled and unskilled manual workers the remaining third. A smaller share of skilled workers makes the working classes smaller than in Australia generally. The middle classes are numerically dominated by farmers, and professionals and administrators under-represented in comparison with Australia as a whole. Census data show the incomes of professionals and administrators in Smalltown as markedly higher than those of farmers and businessmen. While Dempsey attributes much of this difference to understatement of income on the part of business proprietors and self-employed workers, he notes the superiority of tenure and conditions that employed professionals enjoy. Working class incomes are considerably lower, less than half those of higher level professionals.

Poiner's (*Good Old Rule,* 51-57) primary interest is gender inequality, but she understands the social structuring of patriarchy and class inequality as historically intertwined and mutually constitutive. She found the main axis of social division to be between those who own land and those who do not. Because of the centrality of agriculture and mining in the district, class relations in Marulan are highly masculinised. Outside the town, there is clear recognition of the superior class position of the large landholders but little class opposition associated with it. Locals, including rural workers, share values supporting owning rural land and working it. Farming families, as opposed to graziers, form a petty bourgeoisie. Like Dempsey, Poiner regards both groups as understating their incomes to significant degree (*Good Old Rule,* 61-68). Most of the economically active people in the town work for wages, mainly in the quarry nearby. There are kin and family ties among workers, and ties of community and shared rural values undercut the emergence of a proletarian consciousness among quarry workers. Small business, mainly the general store and truck owner-drivers, form a town petty bourgeoisie. The few professionals form a thin layer of high status in the town. Although town members recognise class differences, they attribute little importance to them (*Good Old Rule,* 69-78).

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6   Poiner (*Good Old Rule,* 54) notes the dreadful irony that as a consequence of the relations of settlement in the district race is no longer a factor in Marulan.

Dempsey and Poiner find relatively little status differentiation in the towns they studied. Poiner describes the local hierarchy as bisected by the division between town and country, and finds identifiable status groupings of upper-status landholding families, farming families, most townspeople, and a small subgroup of 'rough' townspeople. Professionals are incorporated in the undifferentiated category of townspeople when elsewhere they would be likely to be part of a 'middle class' category. Poiner notes that most people respond to questions about status differences with denials of their existence (*Good Old Rule,* 95). She attributes this to the functional interdependence of residents in the local area, a tendency to recognise social inequality only in specific contexts and hence to deny it in the terms of a general phenomenon, and an egalitarianism in which economic inequality is accepted so long as it is not accompanied by claims to social or moral superiority. The terms of this egalitarianism are masculine, picturing the world of those who are equal in the male terms of occupation and head of household (*Good Old Rule,* 95-106).

Poiner sees this as a locally constructed status hierarchy, but one that is linked to and not wholly independent of the wider pattern of status relations in Australia. Dempsey insists that Smalltowners do not share enough opinion about the nature and ranking of status groups in their district to speak of a local system of social stratification. Because residents' views challenge fundamental tenets of Australian sociology, Dempsey's research probed repeatedly using a variety of methods. Some 20-30 per cent of respondents denied the existence of class differences among residents of the district. Others acknowledged that there were differences, but denied that they mattered, and in particular rejected the idea that class position might influence social relationships in the community. Non-locals, mainly transient professionals, were more willing to acknowledge class differences. Smalltowners do acknowledge differences in status, but these differ too much from one resident to another to speak of an agreed model of status hierarchy (*Smalltown,* 125-147).

As in Brindleton, the residents of Smalltown and Marulan distinguish between long-standing local residents and those who have come from elsewhere. In Smalltown, too, such people are referred to as blow-ins. Both Dempsey and Poiner report that it takes a long time for new arrivals to the town to become accepted as full members of its society, and that newcomers, especially in middle class and professional occupations, may be expected to earn their place there through active participation in community services. Transient professionals who remain apart socially and culturally are particularly likely to attract criticism. The three studies also point to the exclusion of other individuals and groups from full membership in local society.   In Smalltown 'no-hopers' with reputations for disreputable behaviour, idleness or the neglect of children or property attract the kind of opprobrium reserved in Brindleton for Aborigines. Smalltown and Marulan alike withhold acceptance from hobby farmers, (called 'blockies' in Smalltown), and Marulan views its Pitt Street farmers similarly. In a topic not discussed in the other accounts, Dempsey reports that women who breach local codes of respectable female behaviour are the excluded from polite society; especially if transient and lacking local kin, such women will be subjects of unpleasant gossip and may even be openly criticised or shunned.

In their studies of suburban Newtown and Green Views, Bryson and Winter and Richards do not expect class and status to take on specific local meanings but to reflect those of Australian society generally. For Bryson and Winter these are

reflected in occupation, which functions as an indicator in both popular understanding and sociological research tradition. Newtown residents are largely blue-collar workers; in the early 1990s this category accounted for 85 per cent of men and 89 per cent of females. Larger proportions of both men and women were in the lower ranks of unskilled positions in the 1990s than the 1960s, reflecting the downward mobility of the suburb associated with the decline of manufacturing industry. The area has small proportions of men and women in managerial administrative, professional and paraprofessional positions; this is a significantly lower representation of these levels than is to be found in the general workforce (*Social Change,* 88-104).[7] Richards (*Nobody's Home,* 6) presents similar data for Green Views. In that suburb, 43 per cent of husbands worked in blue-collar occupations, 26 per cent in white-collar jobs, and 31 per cent in professional positions. She also asked respondents to her survey to assess their own class membership: 43 per cent of respondents saw themselves as working class, and 55 per cent as members of a middle class.

4.2   Cultural Factors

In its most basic sense of giving a 'design for living', culture has a pervasive role in shaping daily life, and some aspects of this role operate at a local level.

In the rural areas studied by Cowlishaw, Dempsey and Poiner, what Poiner calls 'country-mindedness' forms a key premise of local society. Poiner (*Good Old Rule,* 39-52) sees the idealization of rural life as part of an ideology of rural idyll and the foundation of an outlook that is fundamentally conservative. In like vein, Dempsey (*Smalltown,*: 35-41) describes Smalltowners as almost universally affirming the superiority of small-town life over all other forms, and as envisioning the city as a source of threat to the good life they affirm. It is this common conviction that underlies egalitarianism in these districts, enabling residents to see differences in income, property, and the division between country and city as less important than a shared way of life. Smalltowners in particular picture their town as a friendly place, 'one big happy family', and use the physical proximity of small-town life as a metaphor for social and emotional closeness among its residents. Identification with the town's image of itself is part of what defines those who belong in it and to it.

There appears to be a general expectation, most strongly held in the rural communities but discernible also in suburban Newtown, that those who come to the area from elsewhere should accept local society as they find it, on its own terms.[8]   As one Marulan resident put it (*Good Old Rule,* 88), 'after the first ten years it's a friendly place, but you have to be here that long. Then they accept you. After thirty years you become like them.' Dempsey observes that newcomers to Smalltown are expected to join enthusiastically in community affairs, but the newcomer should 'be prepared to stick closely to the part scripted for him' (*Smalltown,* 60). Newcomers should not be

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7   They discuss perceptions of class and class difference primarily in terms of organisational participation and social leadership, issues that had been central concerns in *Australian Newtown*.

8   This seems to be less true of Green Views, where everyone was new when Richards began her study.

'too pushy', or seek positions that locals already have claims on. In Brindleton, the dominant white culture brands anyone questioning local orthodoxies of race relations, including newcomers, as a 'do gooder' or, much worse, a 'stirrer'.

Four of the five studies considered here have gender and relations between men and women in work and family life as a central theme. Expectations about gender appear to be more uniformly held in the two country communities of Smalltown and Marulan than the two suburban localities. Both researchers find men dominant over women, and women largely acquiescing to their place in this gender hierarchy. Both Dempsey (*Smalltown, Man's Town*) and Poiner (*Good Old Rule*) characterise the areas they studied as imbued with a strongly family-centred culture in which members of both sexes affirm a highly traditional division of labour between men and women in the home, paid work and participation in community affairs. This does not preclude women from economic activity, as partners in agricultural and town businesses, in paid employment, and the sale of goods such as plastic kitchenware, cleaning agents, and manchester items through 'partytime' activities (*Good Old Rule,* 118). However important such activity may be in economic terms, it receives little social recognition. One reason is that it is almost universally seen as secondary to women's role as wife and mother, including by the women themselves. The researchers apply different theoretical lens to the study of gender relations. In the result, Dempsey sees the women of Smalltown as subordinate at all levels of social organisation. Poiner, linking power with ideology, maintains that both men and women in Marulan subscribe to a family ideology of male dominance which denies both the existence of gender inequalities and their significance. Addressing Oxley's (1974) claim that women were the maintainers of status snobbery, she finds women actively managing images of status to secure higher status for the family than would be accorded on the basis of the husband's occupation alone. Women themselves, however, were keen to be seen as deferring to their husbands. Although her survey evidence showed women among those rated as 'influentials' in the town, she found even women who made significant contributions to the family's income and assets saw themselves as helpmeets. Dempsey's analysis gives greater weight to men's control of material resources, and men's appropriation of women's time and domestic labour to fund their own social, sporting and political activities. Men also control space and the social designation of places such as pubs and clubs as off-limits to women of good reputation.

Interestingly, there appear to be empirical differences in the roles women play in community associations in the two towns. In Smalltown, women's participation is largely limited to gender-segregated groups such as church and school auxiliaries, and to the auxiliaries of men's organisations. It is men's organizations that run the town, and they meet at times and places that make them inaccessible to women. In contrast, Poiner describes women as highly visible in local voluntary associations and men as playing a smaller role (*Good Old Rule,* 139). In the town particularly, women are seen not only as influential in the district, but as having more influence than men (*Good Old Rule,* 141).

Family ideology is no less important in suburban Newtown and Green Views, but its content is more accommodating of change. The culture is family-centred in these areas also, but the expression of this culture is more closely identified with home ownership and the home itself. In part because of the economic pressures of home

purchase, it is common for women in these areas to be employed, and to work full-time.

In Newtown (*Social Change,* 71-104) this has been the case for a generation, especially among the low income, immigrant families who first settled there. In the 1960s Newtown women had higher rates of labour force participation than other Melbourne women with the same family characteristics. By the early 1990s women's rates of labour force participation in Melbourne generally had caught up with those in Newtown. The proportion of employed Newtown women working full-time fell during the same period. Bryson and Winter (*Social Change,* 97) believe this does not reflect the preferences of the women themselves, but changes in labour demand on the part of local employers. They speculate that Newtown women may be divided in the priorities they gave to their domestic roles and paid work, suggesting that while some seek jobs primarily for financial reasons, others also look for satisfactions intrinsic to work life.

This is clearly true of Green Views, where many more residents have professional qualifications and employment. But Richards also points out that for Green Views residents at least, home and work are two sides of the same coin of personal satisfaction.

> If the home is a necessary condition for family life, and two incomes are necessary for the home, the home will normally be empty of the family for whom it is necessary… The images of the estate were mixed and satisfaction uneven, but what was sought and seen was an environment that provided a setting for ideas of family life stressing the proper paths (including paid work for women) to a particular private world (*Nobody's Home,* 144).

Their almost universal description of a good family life denies traditional gender divisions in favour of 'togetherness', companionship and communication. Many also mention 'sharing tasks in the marriage'. This vision does not necessarily entail equality between husband and wife, or necessarily deny extreme role segregation. The enemy of the togetherness they seek is lack of time, and many wives report feeling under great time pressure. Overwhelmingly, the way of resolving tensions between aspirations for employment and money and for home and family is by sequencing the priority given them, with women 'dropping out' of the labour force when they have young children and returning soon after. Richards (*Nobody's Home,* 157) concludes that 'If the young and the educated are espousing new family values they are not doing so at Green Views. Here, at least, the powerful ideas of family are the traditional ones; ideas of independence for women and egalitarianism for marriages are rare and almost always mixed with old values.'

Finally, in the case of Brindleton cultural differences associated with the racial divide stand out as fundamentally important in the life of the town. Cowlishaw observes cultural differences between (and among) Aborigines and whites in such basic matters as fertility and child rearing, attitudes to property and spending of money, and the value placed on orderliness and punctuality. These differences may be important in their own right; she notes that there are comparatively few social relationships linking black and white Brindleton. Cowlishaw (*Brindleton,* 230) gives an example of the different assumptions underlying black and white behaviour and their evaluation of

one another. A sympathetic welfare officer was helping to run a water polo club with a majority membership of black youths. As he saw it, 'Their greatest need appeared to be acceptance by the white community to allow them to develop skills to compete in the wider society' (Roy, 1984: 2). Cowlishaw observes that he takes white rejection and the competitive nature of society for granted. Attendance by large numbers of Aboriginal parents from the reserve made the swimming pool committee nervous. The welfare officer commented,

> Middle class values such as punctuality, accountability, formality and impersonality in organisations are alien to these people. It was impossible for instance to deny a child a barbecue because he did not have his 50 cents; all his relatives who attended with him would be insulted and get up and leave. Similarly, one could not insist on regulation swimming shorts or demand that games begin on time (Roy, 1984: 6, cited in *Brindleton,* 230).

Cowlishaw points out that in fact 'the games did begin, people did pay, and the children did not go naked into the pool'. At the same time, white middle-class propriety was threatened by the lack of emphasis on formal rules, while these middle class mores appeared peculiar and anti-social to the blacks. The success of the endeavour thus did not serve to facilitate social interaction between black and white parents, or to reduce racial barriers to mutual understanding.

The significance of such cultural differences is greatly magnified in they way they are interpreted across the racial divide, where they are seen as explaining and legitimating racial inequality in the town. These interpretations do much to define the political culture of race relations in the town. Cowlishaw (*Brindleton,* 208-221) identifies 'hard-line' and 'soft-line' views of Aboriginal people and their circumstances among whites in Brindleton. The holders of hard-line views resent support to indigenous people through welfare, housing and education benefits, and claim knowledge of misuse of such resources by the recipients. Soft-line views are usually held by 'members of the helping profession, usually blow-ins', but are also shared more quietly by older residents. These views identify Aboriginal problems with material deprivation and accept the validity of providing welfare support to them. Cowlishaw notes that both views see Aborigines in terms of problems, hard-liners seeing them as being problems and soft-liners seeing them as having problems. They also share other misconceptions, including that there is no racism in Brindleton.

Race and culture stand out more starkly in Brindleton than elsewhere, and the racial dimensions are little mentioned in the other studies examined here. Ethnicity may also be a potent source of cultural difference and social division (see Martin, 1972, de Lepervanche, 1984). Ethnic difference is a sub-theme of social life in both Newtown and Green Views. One third of Newtown's population was born outside Australia. While the largest numbers of these have come to Australia from the United Kingdom and the former Yugoslavia, the present-day population also includes people from Asia, including China, Viet Nam and Sri Lanka (*Social Change,* 57). In its extreme forms, conflict between ethnic groups may parallel racial conflict. This does not appear to be the case in Newtown in the 1990s. Bryson and Winter (*Social Change* 156-7) report a 1991 survey as showing a majority of Newtown residents as happy with or accepting of the ethnic mix of the area. When Green Views residents were asked if they mixed with people in the area who were different from themselves, only

44 per cent said yes, and only 4 per cent said they avoided doing so. There was, however, ambivalence and tension under the surface. Richards notes that having 'too many migrants' is seen as lowering the status of the suburb, and that tolerance is always conditional. In particular, tolerance is conditional upon assimilation to Australian cultural norms. Acceptable migrants are those who are not 'new', offer no 'language barrier', do not live in 'ghettos', stand for common values, and are not lower class. An episode of racist graffiti showed that a reservoir of stronger feeling lies behind the rational discourse of fitting in (*Nobody's Home,* 72-93).

4.3   Social Networks

Dempsey provides most complete account of the social networks linking together the residents of a country town. He says that, 'Smalltownites proudly boast that theirs is a community in which "everyone knows everybody else"' (*Smalltown,* 94). Although this is not literally true, it is relatively so, and most people have at least second-hand knowledge of most others. Reflecting the historical stability of Smalltown's development, kinship provides a strong foundation to local networks. His kinship survey showed that some 30 per cent of local adults are at least third generation residents of the area, and two thirds have at least one relative living locally. Friendship networks are similarly overlapping, with people's friends typically knowing their other friends, and friends often socialise in regular groups. Kinship, marriage and friendship cut across status and class. It is usual for neighbours to exchange small services, such as feeding pets, minding children and helping with projects. This kind of neighbourliness is institutionalised in activities such as the rostering of church members to visit the sick in hospital. There are nevertheless limits to the social support which friends, neighbours and even kin are prepared to provide. Adult children will assist their elderly parents to maintain their independence, but are less willing to accept long-term dependence. Neighbours can be expected to assist only with short-term matters. (*Smalltown,* 81. 84, 98-105). The dense networks that bind Smalltowners knit the people of the district together and enable them to imagine themselves as 'one big happy family'. The same networks facilitate the reinforcement of local norms and values, the social isolation of newcomers, and the exclusion of those judged as socially undesirable. Smalltowners appear to have very few bridging ties, in part because the town itself lacks social diversity.

Social networks in Cowlishaw's Brindleton appear to be much less integrated, but her focus on race relations means that her inquiry sheds little light on the bonding relations on either side of the racial divide. White society may be bound together in much the same way as in Smalltown, but Aboriginal networks appear to be factionalised (*Brindleton,* 109). The social networks of the town are little accessible to blow-ins such as police and teachers, and these respond by keeping company mainly with their own kind until they move on at the end of their required period of service in the town. The most significant bridging ties are those that cross the town's racial divide. These are most frequent among working class residents of the town, between white workers and some 'up-town' Aborigines who although they affirm Aboriginal identity eschew involvement with Aboriginal organisations (*Brindleton,* 111).

The city studies provide an interesting comparison. As suburbs of a large city, neither area has the geographical isolation or the long history of settlement that Smalltown

and Brindleton have. Newtown is nevertheless old enough for some residents to have lived there for many years, and for families to have two generations living in the area. Green Views was studied in its first years of settlement, when social relations in the area were in the process of being formed. Bryson and Winter (*Social Change,* 175-183) find Newtowners active in relationships with kin, friends and one another. Even in the 1960s, many had kin in the area or nearby. One in five had at least one relative in Newtown, and one in three if the area is extended to include the adjacent suburb. Although data for the 1990s are not fully comparable, it would appear that by that time even more Newtowners had kin living close by. By then, one in four had relatives also living in Newtown[9] and half had kin within a 30 minutes' drive. Most are in frequent contact with these relations, including giving and receiving social and material support. Bryson and Winter find strong similarities between their findings for Newtown and Richards' for Green Views (*Nobody's Home,* 190-4). Almost half of Green Views residents have parents living in Green Views or nearby, and most have continued contact and the exchange of support with their parents after moving to Green Views.

Residents in Newtown and Green Views have friends in the suburb, but they also have important friendships with people living in other parts of the city. In Newtown, residents more often counted neighbours as friends in the 1960s than they did in the 1990s. Comparing their findings with other studies, Bryson and Winter (*Social Change,* 179-82) interpret the earlier pattern as unusual and most probably part of a distinctive process of working class settlement in what was then a new estate. Green Views residents have generally maintained their relationships with friends elsewhere after the move, but to expand these networks has been less common. For new residents with young children, the geographical contraction of their social networks has had much to do with changes in family life that reduced their free time and the ease of moving across the city.

People who moved to Green Views have made friends on the estate, but growth in social relations between neighbours levelled off within the first three years (*Nobody's Home,* 195). Richards' data on patterns of friendship on the estate generated a typology in which 'family community' (mixing socially as close friends) was the least common pattern. A larger group of mainly working class residents lack the same close friendships but exchange favours and social contact with neighbours. The attitudes of four other groups to their neighbours stress independence, reservation and distance, or clearly functional expectation (*Nobody's Home,* 202-215). There are factors that should have fostered social connection. Green Views residents see themselves as having much in common because they are 'all in the same boat'. As first settlers in a new suburb, they are all establishing new homes and gardens. Many are starting new families. Even so, finding friends is not assured. Women are divided by class, status, ethnicity, and differences in the way they bring up their children, and friendships between them are contingent on life stage and the age of children, class and income, and culture and lifestyle. Richards provides a moving account of loneliness on the new estate, especially among women who have left the workforce to care for young children. The life moment when children are young and women at

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9   One family in twenty had relatives living in the same street.

home is a brief one, and friendships based on that moment lose force when one or other returns to work. Moreover, residents are not at all sure that they want neighbours to be friends. The description of the ideal neighbour has two faces: a neighbour ought to be agreeable and willing to help, but also someone who is 'not in your pocket'. Much of the social life on the estate takes place in groups, but even this form of interaction is often best conducted away from home. Mothers' groups find meeting in one another's homes problematic because of tensions arising around different standards of children's behaviour and status competition in home décor and the provision of refreshments.

As the discussion of friendship and neighbouring suggests, class and ethnicity appear to create social barriers to social interaction, and there appear to be few bridging ties within the Green Views estate. Its residents may, of course, have non-local ties of these kinds in their networks. Bryson and Winter do not discuss social interaction in Newtown across lines of social difference in Newtown, but the homogeneity of its resident population suggests similarly few bridging ties in that area.

4.4   Citizenship and Associational Life

All of the studies concern themselves to some extent with participation in local institutions such as schools and churches, community services, community associations and political activity, but they differ a good deal in the questions they ask about these aspects of local society. In consequence, there is considerable variation in the nature and depth of discussion of the workings of these institutions. Coverage of local institutions such as schools, churches and services such as health, infant welfare is particularly varied. We focus here on selected areas of citizen involvement in local institutions, associational life and leadership that are well represented in the range of community studies that we are drawing from.

On the evidence provided for Smalltown and Newtown, Christian churches no longer provide focal points for community life in the way they may have done in the past. Both Dempsey (*Smalltown,* 19) and Bryson and Winter (*Social Change,* 184) report much higher levels of nominal affiliation than of attendance, and see a decline in the local influence of churches in these areas as in Australian society generally. In Smalltown, and probably also in Newtown, this decline is also reflected in an ageing membership of church social organisations. In Brindleton there are two Catholic churches, one at each end of town, and a primary school at the Aboriginal end of town. The Catholic church has a large Aboriginal following and one third of students at the primary school are Aboriginal. The Church of England is attended primarily by whites (*Brindleton,* 116-7). Bryson and Winter note a growing representation of 'other religions', mainly non-Christian faiths, in the Newtown population, but do not report whether these people worship in Newtown or elsewhere.

Schools are important local institutions both in their own right and as the objects of social activity and fund-raising on the part of parents in all the areas. Cowlishaw dissects race relations in Brindleton schools, where these more than any other local institution provide a point of social interaction between otherwise separate social groups (*Brindleton,* 176). This interaction is often conflictual, with black and white communities 'getting at' each other and teachers caught in the middle. Aboriginal groups attempt to influence the schools and the school curriculum. White parents see

the appointment of Aboriginal teacher's aids, student allowances and gestures towards Aboriginal studies courses as evidence Aboriginal students are favoured over their own children. Teachers usually come from elsewhere, with Brindleton often being their first professional appointment. Finding the 'enlightenment' philosophy that informs their teacher training proves poor preparation for the situation they encounter in practice, they soon adopt the local 'realism'. Few stay more than the required two or three years (*Brindleton,* 176-183). Dempsey (*Smalltown,* 96, 195-6) has less to say about Smalltown schools. In Smalltown also, the local schools serve children from most social groups, especially at primary school level. Only members of the wealthy upper middle class send their children to private schools, and usually do so only for secondary education. In this more culturally uniform town common school attendance supports the formation of informal social ties across the boundaries of social class, reinforced through common participation in other local activities such as sporting groups. The same kind of discussion is not available in the accounts of Newtown and Green Views, but it is likely that most children in these areas also attend local schools. Because the residents of these suburbs are less diverse in class and status, social mixing in the schools probably does less to mute class division. Newtown's ethnic diversity is probably reflected in interaction between ethnic groups in schools in that area.

In all the areas, parents also participate in groups associated with support and fund-raising for local schools. Richards provides the most illuminating discussion of groups of this kind, which in the case of Green Views followed a developmental trajectory from an activist phase seeking to have a school established in the area to the formation of a school council after the school opened. Participation in these groups is based not on class and status but on life stage, finely graded according to the age of children.[10] In the first phase, an interim committee concerned primarily with fund-raising was largely a women's affair. Men, many of them the partners of the active fund-raisers, joined in when the school council was formed and 'policy work' required. A mothers' club continued to raise funds for the school.

Sporting groups, especially those associated with cheaper and more popular sports, also bring diverse social groups together on a local basis. This is perhaps the most significant form of mixed-race activity in Brindleton, mainly in the larger team sports played by adults and in sporting groups run for children. However, Aborigines rarely participate in the management of these groups (*Brindleton,* 117-8). Nearly one in every three Smalltowners belongs to a sporting group. Sporting activity in Smalltown is highly gendered, with men and women belonging to different organisations and men's activity subsidised by the domestic and organisational labour of women (*Smalltown,* 199; *Man's Town,* 55-58, 64-93). Sports are almost as popular in urban Newtown. Bryson's original study had found that status and ethnicity played little part in the selection of leaders in these organisations. In the 1990s the researchers found that while membership in organisations is even greater than before, economic hardship does seem to deter participation (*Australian Newtown,* 302; *Social Change,* 185-7)

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10   A similar pattern appears to prevail in Smalltown (*Smalltown,* 190).

Localities also have groups, largely self-appointed, devoted to civic improvement. These groups aim to provide leadership to the community according to their own vision. Membership in these groups is less likely to mix people from diverse backgrounds of class, status or race than those discussed thus far. The leaders of such groups are most often drawn from the middle and upper middle classes, and in mixed groups are exclusively or predominantly male.

Brindleton and Smalltown have the complements of men's and women's service clubs that are usual to a country town or an urban district. These include men's service organisations like Rotary and Lions Clubs, and women's groups such as Country Women's Association and VIEW (Voice, Interest, Education for Women). In Brindleton it is whites that belong to these organisations. A separate set of Aboriginal organisations work for the interests of Aboriginal residents in housing, education and land rights (*Brindleton,* 115-6). Smalltowners are enthusiastic 'joiners' of organisations. The most influential ones have a membership of middle class males, graziers, professionals and businessmen. Service clubs recruit their members by invitation, and membership is almost wholly from the middle classes, and even the Jaycees were squeezing out 'rough' elements from their number. Women, especially those not in paid employment, are more likely to belong to fund-raising auxiliaries for local bodies such as the local hospital, fire brigade and ambulance service. Newcomers to Smalltown often form their own organisations (*Smalltown,* 202-8). Marulan appears to be too small and overshadowed by the nearby Goulburn to have the full representation of service clubs. In other respects it differs from Brindleton and Smalltown primarily in the greater predominance of women in its organisational life (*Good Old Rule,* 136-143).

As a new estate, Green Views lacked the usual array of established organisations. In the early days residents formed groups around the activities and services they wanted to have available there. Richards describes such groups as always seeking members, and joining groups as the way new residents could 'get in' to the local society of the estate. Membership in activist groups nonetheless comes disproportionately from people with professional qualifications, males and 'established' residents.

The studies of Brindleton, Smalltown and Newtown, also discuss the role of shire and council governments as ostensibly democratic auspices for the exercise of political leadership at local level. In Brindleton (*Brindleton,* 153-5), graziers and shopkeepers control the shire council and its employees and services. This group gives little recognition to the needs of Aboriginal residents, seeing these as the responsibility of the state department of Aboriginal affairs and other specialist funding bodies. The use of ridings to structure representation on the council was being abolished at the time of Cowlishaw's study. In principle, this may have opened local politics to greater participation by Aborigines, blow-ins and Labor Party members, but Cowlishaw doubted that Aborigines would have enough political unity to get their interests served. Smalltown has both shire and town councils. The upper middle classes control both. As in Brindleton, daytime meetings make it very difficult for working class people to hold office (*Smalltown,* 204-5).

In the 1960s Newtown was on the urban fringe, and its political leaders gained political representation of the area as a riding of the larger rural shire to which it belonged. Its three local councillors were effective in representing the priorities of

Newtown residents, and the riding structure enabled them to ensure that the rate revenues from Newtown's factories were spent on local facilities and services. By the 1990s urban development had spread and the urbanised part of the shire had become an urban council in its own right. Newtown has benefited from the sophisticated social planning approach developed by the council, and although ridings have been abolished the decline of manufacturing has made the loss of these rate revenues less significant than it otherwise would have been (*Australian Newtown,* 263-7; *Social Change,*196-9).

Leadership at the local level and its contribution to community capacities is a key focus of both Bryson and Thompson's original study of Newtown and Bryson and Winter's restudy three decades later. The original study was conducted on the invitation of the 'Civic Group' of mainly personal service professionals working in the area but in many cases not living in it. This group, mainly ministers of religion, social workers and teachers, were familiar with the social problems that people in Newtown experienced and sought research advice which they believed would assist them to promote social development in the area. They saw this in terms of making Newtown into a 'community'. A key aspect of this vision was the promotion of social interaction among residents, including organised activity with self-help and community service objectives. Bryson and Thompson saw this orientation to social improvement as inappropriate because it did not accord with the values and expectations of Newtown's working class residents.

> The members of the Civic Group are unusually enterprising, dedicated and talented and many of the improvements they have initiated are appreciated by the local residents. However the Group's commitment to an ideal of community also means that they offer the people a 'life package deal'. This involves not only facilities and other material benefits but also a way of life and a set of values. The first concern of most of the residents, however, is with the interests and activities of their families. They are likely to be drawn into civic affairs only when these are seen to be of practical assistance in meeting family needs. This means that many of the aspects of community life which Civic Group members hope to sponsor are unlikely to appeal to them (*Australian Newtown,* 11).

Elsewhere they note the close association between professional and middle class values, and the confidence of the Civic Group in their own judgement of what Newtown and Newtowners needed.

Drawing on the work of American sociologist and urban planner Herbert Gans (1965), Bryson and Thompson termed these leaders 'external caretakers'. The term 'caretaker' referred to agencies and individuals offering aid that they intend to benefit members of the society. Caretakers were described as 'external' when their own origins and values were alien to those to whom they offered assistance. They contrasted the Civic Group with two other groups of local leaders, mainly local councillors and members of the local progress association, whom they classified as 'internal caretakers'. These leaders commanded much greater recognition from the residents of Newtown, had similar class backgrounds to theirs, and pursued projects more closely corresponding to local values and priorities. These were mainly improved facilities and services for the area, such as sport and recreation facilities (a swimming pool was very popular), infant welfare and pre-school centres, and an

elderly citizens' centre. Bryson and Thompson argued that if the Civic Group wished to encourage social interaction in the area it should promote the kind of social and sporting groups that local people favoured.

By the 1990s, most members of the Civic Group had left the area, and although others have replaced them there has not been a group with the same resources, enthusiasm and power. Bryson and Winter believe that the personal service professions are more aware now than in the 1960s of the perils of social improvement directed at groups other than one's own, and that policies grounded in economic rationalism leave few resources free for unspecified community development activity. There has also been a generational succession in internal caretaking in Newtown. Although new, younger councillors are better educated than residents in the area generally, these leaders continue to share residents' values and priorities. These have included a battle, ultimately lost, to protect Newtown's interests in Victoria's restructuring of local government. A group descended from the old progress association has been active in resident action campaigns over issues such as traffic control, school closures and psychiatric facilities. In the 1990s, Newtown has high levels of unemployment and its residents are at the lower end of widening economic inequality. Bryson and Winter nevertheless regard the members of the locality as able to defend and represent their own interests through their own locally generated leadership. This section has provided only brief excerpts of the reports of these broad-ranging studies, but we believe it gives a fair representation of the findings relevant to strategies for community capacity building. We turn now to their implications for contemporary policy development of this kind.

5 Factors Contributing to Community Capacity

What lessons do these studies of Australian communities offer for the development of policies and practices for building the community capacities to enhance the lives and opportunities of their residents? In this section of the report we reflect on the portraits of social life in these five localities to draw out their implications for strategies for capacity building.

5.1 Developing Community and Local Social Networks

Our review of these research studies of social life in five Australian localities suggests caution about an uncritical embrace of community, or about strategies aiming to promote community for its own sake. Equally, it argues against approaches to building community capacities that rely on indiscriminate increase in the density of network connections between people, especially at the neighbourhood level.

Smalltown and Marulan are communities in the sense that we have defined it. Brindleton should probably also be seen as a community, but one riven by cleavage and division. Newtown is not a community in the same sense, though it has become more community-like over time. In Newtown and Green Views, the good life that residents aspire to is individual rather than collective, and private rather than public. It is doubtful that Green Views residents especially would enjoy the kind of community found in Smalltown.

As comparisons of the social and economic bases of the five localities and the social networks of their residents shows, country districts are structured by a local social system in a way that is far less likely to be true in suburban localities. Where the population is small and stable, the agricultural economy dominant, and other settlements relatively distant, residents interact with one another in multiple dimensions of economic and social life. The inhabitants of smaller towns in particular are necessarily reliant on other local residents for company in social and cultural activities, and on local institutions for the services they need. More than in the city, the members of these communities live in the same area, have children in the same schools, do business with one another, belong to the same churches or the voluntary fire unit, and socialise in the same pubs or clubs. In consequence, their lives are woven together to some degree, and the ladders of social and economic status that link them prevail across the different areas of their lives (Frankenberg, 1965: 285-96). This appears to apply to the people who live in Brindleton and Smalltown and the districts that surround them to a considerable extent. It appears to be only partly true of the residents of Marulan and district, which is less reliant on a single industry, partly because it is within commuting distance from other towns and cities, and has experienced more incursions by outsiders.

It is rare for the residents of urban localities to be linked together in the same way, living, working and socialising with the same set of people. Local areas of large cities, especially if newly settled, have little opportunity to generate a local social system; local institutions may take distinct form, but the significant social frameworks are likely to be those of the larger rather than the local society. Their economic opportunities are more diverse, and their lives less bounded by locality. Urban

residents more usually have disparate sets of relationships with kin, friends, and work colleagues. They may meet their neighbours in church congregations or school committees, but it would be unlikely for them to mix with the same set of people in all areas of their lives. As Martin's (1970) classic study of social networks in three Adelaide suburbs showed, some city people centre their lives in their own suburb but most do not. The way in which urban residents use the city varies with respect to their housing status, their education, income, and social class, and their history of social and geographical mobility. Newtown and Green Views compare interestingly in this regard. Both are suburbs rather than towns. As will be seen in later discussion, Newtown, settled more than a generation ago when it was on the suburban fringe, has a more closely woven social fabric than Green Views, where residents know one another only as neighbours and the purchasers of homes from the same developer.

Discussion of social capital and community capacity points to two types of social relationships as important. One is enduring, close relationships, referred to as 'bonding ties', characterised by predictability, continuity, and emotional warmth. Bonding ties facilitate the development of personal security and self-esteem, and are associated with supportive, trusting interpersonal relationships. Because these relationships are significant for personal identity and a sense of belonging, bonding ties are powerful as sources of both social approval and disapproval and can enforce sanctions as well as provide support. Bonding relationships are usually those between kin and close friends. Where these are dense, such that one's kin and friends are also relatives and friends of one another, their effects are particularly powerful. Relationships between people who are dissimilar, often called 'bridging ties', are important because they cross social divisions, linking people to social worlds beyond their own. Typically not as close or enduring as bonding relationships, the value of these relationships lies in their capacity to open social horizons and to enable people to gain access to resources that are not available in their own personal circle.

The characteristically dense networks that the studies suggest go with longstanding residence in rural areas and country towns are likely to be rich in bonding ties. Networks of this kind clearly underlie the strong attachments of Smalltown residents to their town and their feelings of belonging to it and to one another. Dempsey maintains that the web of interpersonal relations diminishes the significance of divisions of status, class and religion that are more salient elsewhere, and provides many instances of people relying on one another for support and assistance. Dempsey also points repeatedly to the way these networks circulate gossip and enforce social exclusion of those who offend local norms. In Brindleton too there appear to be groups of people in the town who are closely linked to one another and who can count on one another to support common attitudes and maintain accepted standards of behaviour. Close, densely connected networks undoubtedly contribute to the solidarity of particular subgroups on both sides of racial divide. Marulan is far less isolated, and networks there seem not to cross class and status boundaries in the same way except in the heightened circumstances of bushfire emergency.

The economic and political effects of close-knit networks appear to be generally conservative. In all three places, the closely knit networks that bind local people together do much to explain the difficulty that new residents experience in being accepted in the town. In Smalltown and Brindleton they underpin the dominance of political elites in local government, and in Brindleton the closure of local politics

against Aboriginal representation. In at least some circumstances such networks also appear to inhibit the take-up of economic opportunities. Dempsey reports that young people who value Smalltown's close-knit community are reluctant to leave for opportunities elsewhere, and that some of those who have left Smalltown to get an education find it hard to regain acceptance when they return with new skills. In Brindleton the mobilisation of opinion against 'stirrers' may go beyond disapproval to include the administration of economic and legal sanctions.

Social networks in these country localities appear to be poor in bridging ties beyond those linking people of different class and status groups. Smalltown itself seems to have few significant social cleavages, primarily because there is very little social diversity. Most of the links its residents maintain with people outside Smalltown are with people like themselves, mainly relatives and adult children in the city. In Brindleton, there are comparatively few ties across the racial divide. Professionals, 'do-gooders' and 'stirrers', mainly blow-ins, do make relationships of this kind, but distrust by locals on both sides reduces the scope for these connections to increase understanding or open further opportunities. Because of their mobility, the connections that blow-ins make have frequently to be renewed.

The networks of Newtown and especially Green Views residents are more loosely knit. Comparing the networks of Newtown residents in the 1960s and 1990s, Bryson and Winter (*Social Change,* 172-5, 179-83) find that these have become more densely interconnected over the period, so that it is now not uncommon for Newtowners to have friends and relatives living nearby. At the same time, however, they appear to distinguish more sharply between friends and neighbours in the 1990s than they did in the 1960s when the area was newly settled. Long-term Newtown residents attribute their closeness to neighbours in the earlier period to the process of settlement in a new suburb, their being 'all in the same boat', and having to fight for local government responses to their needs. Long-term residents felt this gave Newtown and Newtowners a sense of community.

Green Views residents appear to have the segmented networks characteristic of urban life. Women bound to the home by the care of young children formed relations with one another, but in less exigent circumstances Green Views residents did not see mere proximity as a basis of personal association. The more usual pattern was for Green View residents, men and women alike, to keep work and family life separate. Like Newtowners, they recognised themselves as new residents, and 'all in the same boat'. As home owners, however, they were divided by class and status in a way not true of Newtown's public housing occupants in the suburb's first years.

The fears and ambivalences Green Views express about relationships with neighbours suggest that they have reservations about neighbourhood community as a lived ideal. Richards found that 'community' had firm limits. As has already been noted, there was a strong and pervasive ambivalence in Green Views residents' views of the good neighbour in which with expectations of mutual assistance were accompanied by fears of intrusion. This ambivalence expresses an underlying recognition that the needs that drew neighbours together also divided them. Thus one might appreciate a neighbour 'watching' one's house while away all day, but the same 'watching' may threaten the family's weekend and evening privacy. It is risky to get too close to a neighbour for, once established, the intimacies of friendship are difficult to withdraw. Richards does

not believe that residents' ambivalence toward neighbouring, or their manner of acting it, were distinctive to Green Views but part of a larger cultural package that they brought to the estate with them. Close relationships with neighbours threaten the privacy of family, marriage and home. One cannot choose one's neighbours, and bad relations with them may jeopardise the enjoyment of home and family life. The risk that neighbours pose is exacerbated in a suburb of home owners, where the home is also the family's most significant economic investment.   Thus those who are most attached to their homes, and have the most to lose, are most distrustful of community at this most local level.

5.2   Leadership and Mobile Professional and Other Workers

The problematic place that mobile professionals and other workers occupy in the life of a town or other locality forms a thread in most of the studies reviewed here. This thread is absent only in Richards' study of life in a new dormitory suburb where everyone is mobile. Our review suggests a dilemma. These workers represent an important resource for innovation and change in the localities where they live for a time. At the same time, power structures set limits on the opportunities to participate that are open to them, and local cultures are resistant to the kinds of new ideas they are most likely to offer.

While the specific occupational groups vary from locality to locality and study to study, the general characteristics of these mobile professional workers include a level of education or occupational training that sets them apart from most local residents, a career path which has lead them to the locality but which will in due course also lead them away from it, and cosmopolitan values and attitudes reflecting the cultures of national and international rather than local society. They are teachers, doctors, lawyers, bank managers, police, social workers, ministers of religion, and representatives of state and federal government departments. Because country service is often required of newly qualified professionals such as teachers and doctors, many of those in rural areas are young. Brindleton locals call these people blow-ins, and in their own ears at least the term is not derogatory.   People in Smalltown and Marulan also appear to use the same term, but perhaps they take greater care for politeness. The studies of rural areas and country towns make plain the time and effort required of these people to be accepted in the town and to find a place in its social world. Some succeed, usually on the terms set by locals, and may even put down roots. Some give up the struggle and make their social life among their own group. A few are painfully excluded and move on before they had initially intended.

These mobile workers are a potentially important resource for the towns and suburbs they join for a time. Bringing both additional and different skills and the experience of other localities, they offer a valuable source of ideas and experience of social development elsewhere. Individually, they open networks to bridging relations with the world outside the locality. In their particular fields, they make knowledge and skills available to improve local institutions such as schools, health and welfare services, and local business enterprises. For these reasons, some of these workers have potentially important contributions to make to the identification of local needs, the generation of opportunities for social and economic participation, and the collective management of change.

The studies invite discussion of the role of mobile professional and other workers in community capacity building. They suggest, first, that the more longstanding residents of the towns and suburbs do not necessarily value this potential, or at least do not see it in the same positive light. The studies of Smalltown and Marulan alike show established residents as welcoming new arrivals only if they take local life as given. New residents in Marulan are expected to earn their acceptance through voluntary service. In Smalltown, newcomers taking take up roles in activities must follow the scripts already written in local custom, and should not wittingly or unwittingly encroach on the established social territories of local participants. Newcomers to Brindleton confront the division of the town into black and white, and locals who do not welcome its questioning by people newly arrived from the city. Many of the 'stirrers' are blow-ins, and it is clear from Cowlishaw's account that teachers and others do challenge accepted ways and points of view. People perceived as stirrers are not, however, welcomed into more general acquaintance in the town. Cowlishaw observes both teachers and police as generally maintaining a social life amongst themselves.

The study and re-study of Newtown and its leadership adds a further perspective. In 1960s Newtown a group of middle-class professionals, mainly clergymen, social workers and other human service professionals, formed a Civic Group with the aim of helping the people of Newtown. They saw the needs of the area as for personal development and the enhancement of 'community'. The authors of both studies saw the leadership of the Civic Group and the groups that followed it as out of touch with the values and priorities of Newtown residents. These criticisms referred to both the substance of their goals, as for an idealized vision of community, and the middle-class forms of social organization that they employed, such as formal organizations, seminars and social research. The authors contrast such 'external caretakers' with the 'internal caretakers', mainly in local government, who they considered in better tune with the values and aspirations of Newtowners. Their goal was not community, but the material resources and amenities to support privatised, home-centred, working-class family life.

The occupational roles that mobile professional and other workers play are significant for the well-being of the people who live in a locality. The first concern of the workers themselves is likely to be with the tasks and concerns of their particular jobs, and it is probably not reasonable to expect them to know how best to approach a contribution to community capacity building. Moreover, some part of this contribution may arise from their lives as residents and citizens in the locality. Taken together, the studies leave an open question about how they may best be guided to do this. Joining in on local terms, the distinctive contribution they offer may be vitiated. Acting individually in response to their own values, they risk achieving only ineffectual 'stirring'. Working together with others like themselves, they risk misjudging the wishes of their constituents. The experience of Newtown's Civic Group provides a cautionary tale of this last kind.

5.3 Participation to Moderate Social Divisions

While Cowlishaw's *Brindleton* raises social cleavage and division to clear view, these issues pervade all the studies and the local social life they describe to some extent. It

is useful to consider what insights these studies offer for community capacity building addressed to moderating social division.

Writing of race as a social process, Cowlishaw describes its categories as 'real but very imprecise'.

> For a substantial minority of people in Brindleton, identity is not an automatic consequence of their biological and cultural characteristics. Many are ambivalent about their position in the binary system of classification. The ambivalence is often the consequence of cultural and biological divergence. On the one hand, a person who is identified with regular work, a stable nuclear family and participation in clubs and associations in the town will, whatever their colour, culturally have more in common with the majority of whites than with the most distinguishable black sector of the population. On the other hand, those who are part of a large family network most of whom are unemployed and some of whom are familiar with the lock-up, who have trouble keeping up the rent payments and who are to be seen sometimes joining the crowd of drinkers in the front bar of the central hotel, these people may be fair skinned and still be blacks. Thus, a set of social and behavioural traits, which also have class significance, are attributed to blacks (*Brindleton,* 106).

Cowlishaw's focus is on racial division, and as already noted she does not foreground discussion of those groups and activities where such division is not salient. It is nevertheless clear that there are some such groups and activities in Brindleton. Moreover, some 'stirrers', including both locals and blow-ins, have been successful in moderating local practices of racism and exclusion in particular areas and activities. It is useful to recall the discussion of cultural differences in Brindleton above. The welfare officer running the water polo club may have lacked understanding of how differently black and white parents saw the basic requirements of participation, but the club was popular nonetheless. Churches, sport and schools[11] also provide meeting grounds for particular subgroups of black and white Brindleton. Thus even in Brindleton there are areas of community strength available to serve as starting points for community capacity building endeavours.

Bryson and Winter (*Social Change*: 36-7) point to the fertile ground that recession and high unemployment give for resentment to grow into hostility. Data collection for their re-study of Newtown took place in 1991, before race and ethnicity took the prominent place on the political stage that they occupy in Australia now, and the research appears not to have investigated race and ethnic division in local society.[12] In Green Views the researchers did ask, and found a rich and barely hidden vein of inter-ethnic prejudice. Like Bryson and Winter, Richards links the expression of ethnic tensions with material issues. She notes that 'Ethnic origin became an issue every time people felt that the status of the estate, or the quality of family life, was at stake' (*Nobody's Home*: 72-93, quotation p. 80).

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[11]   It must be acknowledged, however, that school interaction is often conflictual.

[12]   Given the severity of economic decline that Newtown residents have experienced, it is worth noting that such evidence did not present itself unasked for.

While racial and ethnic difference are cultural constructions, the social tensions and hostility surrounding them clearly have a material element. This element lies in the incomes, employment and economic security of those on all sides of the social divisions that are associated with race and ethnicity, including social class and status. As the study of Newtown in the 1990s shows, the employment shift from manufacturing to services has had severe effects in some localities. Economic globalisation has affected the prospects of those who depend on export industries, not only negatively but everywhere in ways that disrupt local certainties. Home owners are very sensitive to movements in interest rates.

Community capacity building strategies aimed at fostering social and economic participation thus have a role to play in moderating social divisions associated with racial and ethnic division. Given the importance of economic security in enabling tolerance, there is likely to be value in strategies directed to increasing economic participation even where they have no direct effects on reducing inequalities in opportunity among racial or ethnic groups. Ife (1995: 139-147) discusses a variety of economic development approaches, ranging from what he terms conservative strategies such as attracting or initiating locally-based industry to what he considers radical strategies such as co-operatives, community banks or credit schemes or LETS (community-based currency exchange) schemes. Those at the conservative end of this range are likely to be of most value where the objective is to enhance economic security with the aim of moderating social division.

Cowlishaw's account of racialised resentments in Brindleton is a vivid example of the importance of symbolic equality in the provision of economic and social support. She shows that economic support to agriculture and industry are perceived as of benefit to the district as a whole, while welfare benefits and 'enlightenment' programs directed to indigenous groups are seen as advantaging a minority and moreover as provided on a racial basis (*Brindleton,* 197-210). Endeavours to build community capacity clearly must steer a narrow track between respect for local culture and the existing contours of social life, and appearances of favouritism to particular groups. While these issues stand out clearly in Brindleton, they do not arise only there. The design of initiatives to build community capacity need to address local needs and problems in ways that respond to particular needs yet also reflect and reinforce universalistic values.

6 Conclusion

In a well-known work, Bryson and Mowbray (1981: 259) argue that many community projects may provide help to certain people, improve or provide certain services, and contribute to the development of skills and even people's interaction and recreational activities undertaken with each other, 'but this still does not add up to the achievement of "community". They make the point that there are limitations on what can be achieved at the community level, since many structures, programs and services that directly affect members of a given community are managed nationally. This necessarily restricts the degree to which autonomous control, and thus participatory decision-making, within the community can exist - an essential ingredient of strong, self-sufficient communities by most definitions. What it can do is 'assist the less powerful, redress some injustices and be of value to its clientele in minor ways' (Bryson and Mowbray, 1981: 266).

Our review of the findings of community studies conducted in five Australian local areas provides no simple recipes for community capacity building. It does, however, draw attention to issues in the structure and process of local social life that have had little discussion in this context. We hope that it will serve as a useful basis for reflection on appropriate strategies for the different types of social context reflected in the studies we have examined.

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