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**Neoliberalism and the Cultural and Political Dispositions and Practices of Millennials in London and LA  
a socio-cognitive analysis**

Leyva, Rodolfo

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*a socio-cognitive analysis*

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**Neoliberalism and the Cultural and Political  
Dispositions and Practices of Millennials in London  
and LA: a socio-cognitive analysis**

By

Rodolfo Leyva

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Political Sociology

King's College London, University of London  
School of Social Science and Public Policy

2013

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the everyday experiences and aspirations of young people living in Los Angeles and London, focusing on their cultural and political dispositions, emotions, thoughts and practices, and how these converge with, and diverge from, the dominant neoliberal discourses they are surrounded by. The contemporary literature on youth and youth politics tends to view young people as active and cognizant agents in the reproduction of socio-cultural and political-economic institutions, discourses, and practices. Applying a socio-cognitive approach to the analysis of interview data, ethnographic observations, and media-cultural texts, this thesis contends that these bodies of literature neglect the unconscious dimensions of young people's practices, and in particular, that insufficient emphasis is placed on how these contribute to the reproduction of neoliberalism. It argues that, if the literature on youth is to adequately conceptualize and represent young people and their roles in social reproduction, then research explorations must attend to these unconscious dimensions. As this thesis will demonstrate, doing so facilitates and enriches analyses of the ways in which different institutional settings influence, constrain, and enable young people, and of some of the ways that young people contest, internalize, and negotiate between the dominant societal discourses presented to them. The thesis also explores some of the lessons that a socio-cognitive approach to youth culture and politics can contribute to the work of critical educators concerned with progressive social change. It argues that critical and progressive educators must incorporate socio-cognitive insights into their practices in order to tackle the potential dispositional barriers which may hinder the realisation of the political objectives of critical and progressive pedagogy.



## Preface

*“While the world economic crisis of 2008–2009 might have killed off neoliberalism as a global ideological project—patently, in the noun form—it is highly likely to leave the capillaries of the beast, less Leviathan than Great White Shark, largely intact”* (Comaroff, 2011, p. 142).

*“I’m an ardent believer in free-markets”*. – Barack Obama 2010<sup>1</sup>

Following the 2008 global financial crisis, there were a number of scholars, activists, and journalists who, somewhat overly optimistically, were quick to pronounce the end of hegemonic forms of neoliberalism (Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Cahill, 2009; Grantham & Miller, 2010; Stiglitz, 2008). What started as a wave of housing foreclosures in late 2006 in the US quickly ballooned into a national and international credit crisis that bankrupted or severely weakened longstanding financial institutions and entire national economies (e.g., Lehman Brothers, Bear Sterns, Iceland, Ireland, Greece), which had been exposed to toxic and mispriced financial derivative schemes, like mortgage back securities and interest rate swaps (Mason, 2010; Taibbi, 2011). The aftermath that followed gave rise to a temporary rupture in the belief that anti-inflation policies, multi-national corporations, and unregulated market forces would bring about global peace and prosperity. Indeed, and quite remarkably, even French President Nicholas Sarkozy and then US presidential candidate Barack Obama joined in the choir by bemoaning the failures and excesses of neoliberal capitalism, while the phrase ‘the demise of capitalism as we know it’ appeared three times in 2009 in the opinion pages of *The Guardian* (Comaroff, 2011). However, neoliberalism - which can be roughly understood as a political-economic paradigm, based on an ideology that calls for the state implementation, facilitation, and enforcement of a market economic system and logic across national and global settings, and essentially across all forms of human organization and decision making - has remained largely intact, and continues to guide the policies of Western and Non-Western governing elites (Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Hall, 2011). For example, the neoliberal economic and financial deregulation policies which, among other things, relaxed if not effectively eliminated capital controls such as position limits on

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from:  
<http://www.politico.com/politico44/2012/12/obama-im-not-a-socialist-151997.html>

financial speculation, leveraging practices, and capital gains taxes, and which are held to be the main cause of the 2008 global financial crisis (Mason, 2010), have gone largely unchanged in the UK and the EU (Prieg et al., 2011; Stiglitz, 2012), and only cosmetically altered in the US (Taibbi, 2011). To be certain, the fact remains that while governments across the globe have responded in different ways to the crisis, the majority of them are unwavering in their belief that neoliberal-derived pro-market strategies will solve the looming and now global problems of unemployment, income inequality, credit crunches, sovereign debt, and global warming to list a few, as evidenced by the following official statement from the Group of Twenty (G20) (national governments which represent sixty-five percent of the global population):

Our work will be guided by a shared belief that market principles, open trade and investment regimes, and effectively regulated financial markets foster the dynamisms, innovation, and entrepreneurship that are essential for economic growth, employment and poverty reduction [...]. These principles [...] have lifted millions out of poverty and have significantly raised the standard of living (Group of Twenty 2008).

However, the G20's commitment to neoliberal market principles and prescriptions seems to overlook the empirical reality that the 2008 financial crisis and its wide reaching social, political, and economic effects, is only the latest of a series of similar crises that have followed the last thirty years of the neoliberalization of the global economy, and that have at different intervals, impacted most of the developed and developing world (Ellwood, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Mason, 2012). For example, the widespread riots, volatile financial markets, and political instability now unfolding in Greece, Spain, and Italy, and the massive and drastic cuts in public spending being implemented by current Canadian, UK, and US government administrations closely echo events characteristic of the 1980s and 90s neoliberalization of the developing world. During this period, from Mexico to Russia, to Argentina and Thailand, entire national economies crashed one after another under the weight of unsustainable financial speculation and lapsed capital controls (e.g., the 1994 Tequila Crisis, or the 1997 Asian Financial

Crisis), which were encouraged and facilitated by, among other powerful and Western controlled neoliberal institutions, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the US Treasury Department and Federal Reserve. These and other neoliberal institutions effectively forced financial liberalization onto the developing world, which was consequently accompanied by drastic austerity measures and increases in the privatization of public resources, poverty, and unemployment along the way (Ellwood, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2008). While multi-national corporations, institutional investors (e.g., hedge funds, insurance companies, and investment advisors), and local elites have throughout the neoliberal era profited from the various windfalls, the vast majority of people have suffered and continue to suffer the consequences of a global economic system that is now, in effect, a global speculative casino (Baker, 2009; Chomsky, 1999; Ellwood, 2002; Schiller, 2000); one which is significantly contributing to the proliferation, at a seemingly exponential rate, of the growth of slums and shantytowns in metropolises all over the world (Davis, 2006; Patel, 2010). As Harvey (2005, p. 185) argues:

For those left or cast outside the market system a vast reservoir of apparently disposable people bereft of social protections and supportive social structures there is little to be expected from neoliberalization except poverty, hunger, disease, and despair. Their only hope is somehow to scramble aboard the market system either as petty commodity producers, as informal vendors (of things or labour power), as petty predators to beg, steal, or violently secure some crumbs from the rich man's table, or as participants in the vast illegal trade or trafficking in drugs, guns, women, or anything else illegal for which there is a demand.

But as the neoliberal chickens come home to roost, the reactions from the ground have taken different forms across the developing and developed world. Tunisia and Egypt saw the rise of revolutionary movements led primarily by disenfranchised, marginalized, and unemployed young people which toppled Western backed neoliberal dictatorships, while in Greece, Italy, and Spain, popular movements inspired by anarchist principles of participatory democracy

have risen to mount a sustained challenge to the neoliberal policies being imposed on them by unelected European Central bankers (Baird, 2011; Kitidi, 2012; Mason, 2012). While it is still too early to tell how successful these movements will be, their resistance is visible, youth led, relatively widespread in its respective national settings, and can, to some extent, be partially credited for the recent 2012 elections of socialist French president Hollande, and the quadrupling of Greek parliamentary seats captured by the Coalition of the Radical Left. Arguably, however, the most significant achievement of all of these popular movements has been the fact that they have not relied on political parties and centralized power structures to bring about social change. Rather, utilizing a variety of strategies, they have reinvigorated the notions of direct democracy and mutual aid, and have, along with an informed critique of neoliberal policies (which they view as the main cause of existing socio-economic problems and disparities), reintroduced them into the public discourse. *Los indignados* movement in Spain, for example, has since May 15, 2011 carried out continuous and daily political resistance, consisting of public space occupations, nationwide boycotts, walkouts, and strikes, and has attracted between 6 and 8 million Spaniards, and 80% of national public support.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, this movement has launched a successful campaign to prosecute the former head of the IMF Rodrigo Rato for his role in the failure of the Spanish bank *Bankia* that significantly weakened the Spanish economy. In Greece, bottom up and decentralized initiatives concerned with important issues like food distribution have enacted systems that bypass wholesale distributors who import cheap produce from foreign markets, and instead support local farmers. Such initiatives, while still in their infancy, are gaining momentum. As Kited (2012, p. 1) observes, “it is obvious that the alternative distribution network set up by the municipalities cannot affect the totality of this process. But it remains a very positive sign of self-organization, as well as an expression of solidarity in action between the poor producers and the impoverished consumers”. However, all of these cases of political alternatives and actions are in stark contrast to the limited extent of resistance in the UK and the US: the two leading pioneers, paragons, and promoters of neoliberalism (Rutherford & Davison, 2012). There, the neoliberal model of representative democracy where key decision making

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20110806/mas-seis-millones-espanoles-han-participado-movimiento-15m/452598.shtml>

power is controlled by an elected elite and unaccountable market-oriented technocrats has gone largely unchallenged, with three seemingly indistinguishable major parties running and controlling the central government in the UK, and two doing so in the US. This is despite the fact that the last thirty years of neoliberal policies have seen income inequality skyrocket, and have contributed to the post-2008 crisis dramatic spikes in child poverty rates, rises in the costs of living, and cuts to public spending in both countries, consequently diminishing the quality of life for significant numbers of working and middle-class people, whilst at the same time soaring incomes and record profits continue to be enjoyed by a tiny minority of wealthy and powerful elites (Eaton, 2011; Grantham & Miller, 2010; Ramesh, 2011). For example, in the UK, Ramesh (2011, p. 1), reports that income inequality is growing faster than in any other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) country as:

The share of the top 1% of income earners increased from 7.1% in 1970 to 14.3% in 2005. Just prior to the global recession, the OECD says the very top of British society – the 0.1% of highest earners – accounted for a remarkable 5% of total pre-tax income, a level of wealth hoarding not seen since the second world war.

While in the US, Grantham & Miller (2010, p. 175) report that:

In the three decades from 1979, the highest paid 1% of the population doubled its share of national pretax income, to 18%. Incomes of the top 1% increased 194%; the top 20%, 70%; and the bottom 20%, just 6.4%. The Gini index saw inequality attain the same level as during the Great Depression. Corporate profits are at their highest level in five decades, while wages and salaries have the lowest share of the national pie on record.

Furthermore, governing and other power elites in both countries are now, and usually under the discourse of ‘we are all in this together’, openly declaring that UK and US residents need to get used to many years of growing and lasting unemployment and cuts to public spending (Curtis, 2012; Taibbi, 2012). Despite all this, and considering that 65% of the UK and 50% of the US population view

income inequality as problematic (Ramesh, 2011), the majority of non-elite people that compose the majority of UK and US society do not seem to have developed a heightened sense of political consciousness (Rustin, 2012), or at least not one that is comparable to that evident in other parts of the world as described above, leading to Jameson's (1994: xii) rather sardonic claim that, "it is now easier to envision the end of the world, than the end of capitalism". The recent surge of anti-corporate, anti-government corruption, and anti-cuts to public spending protest movements springing up all across the UK and the US, while meaningful, is still arguably quite marginal, and mostly consists of single day events that do not go beyond people walking in state-permit approved streets (known as free-speech zones in the US) and waving signs. Moreover, because of their limited temporal and tactical nature, these types of political practices do not significantly challenge existing power structures and this is why UK and US power elites tend to disregard them as simply people letting off steam. As Villa (2008, p. 6) notes, "where political action actually transcends the opening of a chequebook, where it is relatively popular, spontaneous, and civic-minded in character, it is treated by our leaders as little more than white noise, irrelevant to the political process". Furthermore, whilst on a walk in central Cairo, Tunis, Athens or Barcelona, one is likely to run into some form of sustained political action or be handed a pamphlet outlining political grievances and anti-neoliberal solutions, on a walk down any high street in the centre of any major city across the UK and US, one will observe that public political practices of any kind are very rare. Even the popularity and energy of the 2011 US Occupy Wall Street movement has noticeably died down. This begs the questions: how and/or why is it that the majority of the UK and US population who do not benefit from, and are in some instances significantly disadvantaged by, the current neoliberal arrangement, seemingly continue to support and reproduce it; and crucially, are they even aware that they are doing so? Moreover, why is it that the resistance or challenge to neoliberalism in the UK and the US is not as widespread and sustained as it is in other parts of the developed and developing world? That is, as Hall (2011) asks, how does one account for this current conjuncture, where unlike in other parts of the world, there is as it stands in the UK and US no visible and viable alternative to neoliberalism?

These are questions that this thesis has been designed to help address. Focusing on UK and US neoliberal societies, it will make the case that

neoliberalism must be understood as a unique social phenomenon whose reach and influence stretches far beyond the realms of political-economy and into the spheres of culture and socio-cognition. That is, the hegemony of neoliberalism is often theorized as being enabled by a combination of macro political-economic systemic imperatives and civil society consensus structural factors, and micro-subjective processes whereby neoliberal discourses permeate through the majority of the population's 'common sense' understandings of how society should function (Chomsky, 1999; Gill, 2003; Hall, 20011). For example, according to Harvey (2005), the UK and US's long march to neoliberalism was largely facilitated by the circulation of neoliberal discourses via civil society institutions (e.g., universities, churches, mass media), which embedded themselves into the majority population's 'common sense', where neoliberal ideas are seen as the sole guarantor of freedom, prosperity, and democracy. However, while I agree with the macro component of this dominant thesis, I will suggest that these taken for granted 'common sense' understandings constitute only one dimension of the micro-subjective side of the social reproduction equation. This 'common sense' angle, no matter how sensitively it has been applied in contemporary theories of hegemony, is still mired in, or at least very much reflects, the Marxist concept of false consciousness, which Jost (1995, p. 397) defines as, "the holding of false beliefs that are contrary to one's social interest and which thereby contribute to the disadvantaged position of the self or the group". While there are plenty of convincing sociological and social-psychological accounts that lend empirical support for the prevalence of false consciousness in contributing to an individual's active support and reproduction of beliefs and practices that disadvantage them and their social group (Fox, 1999; Jost, 1995), false consciousness theorizations, nonetheless, imply that individuals hold a relatively cognizant, albeit misguided, awareness of their consent, contribution, and submission to the existing social order. To be certain, it assumes a sort of phenomenological ontology, where people, regardless of their oppressed or marginalized position, are perpetually reflecting on their direct experiences and practices. However, as Bourdieu (1990) notes, people's conscious consent to established and oppressive social practices, and capitalist systems in particular, whether deliberate and/or misdirected, does not sufficiently account for the durability of capitalism and its uncanny ability to evolve and adapt to changing times despite the ongoing crises and rampant social inequalities that it creates. Nor

I might add, does it account for the significant discrepancy in resistance to it as discussed above. If it did, then the century old Marxist project of consciousness-raising should have worked by now, or at the very least proved a more effective means of developing counter-hegemonic forces than is currently the case in the UK and the US. Thus, for Bourdieu, it is not the falseness that is incorrect in ‘false consciousness’ theorizations, but the consciousness (Burawoy, 2008). Instead he proposes that an investigation of social reproduction requires that we pay attention to the role that people’s deep-seated socio-cognitive dispositions (that is, their unconsciously and habitually manifested beliefs, attitudes, inclinations, preferences, and practices) contribute to the reproduction of capitalist societies (Bourdieu, 1990).

Nonetheless, contemporary theorizations concerned to explain the durability, persistence, or contestation of neoliberalism continue to tend to take for granted and/or ignore these super-ordinal cognitive processes, even though numerous empirical studies from the cognitive sciences demonstrate that they exert an unconscious yet powerful influence on the ways that individuals perceive, interpret, and act in the social world (Ariely, 2008; Epley & Gilovich, 1999; Ferguson & Bargh, 2004; Fishbach & Shah, 2006; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2007). Indeed, this research has consistently demonstrated that much of our everyday behaviour is largely automated and beyond the realm of our conscious awareness, triggered by any number of subliminal socio-environmental stimuli (e.g., advertisements, facial expressions, voice intonations, smells, etc.). This research, has also emphasized the conscious dimensions that human cognition enables, and that are dependent on, and form a reciprocal relationship with, underlying unconscious cognitive and affective dimensions (Damasio, 1999). However, while multi-national corporations have for some time now used these cognitive insights to help sell their products, that is, to bypass consumers’ conscious awareness and rationality in order to elicit unconscious dispositions that lead to increased consumption (Ariely, 2008; Crisp, 2004; Patel, 2010; Olson, 2009), they have not been used by critical social researchers concerned to understand the social reproduction of neoliberalism. This thesis is an attempt to help fill this gap. By incorporating insights from theories of social cognition, in particular the concept of socio-cognitive schemata (or frameworks) which shape how we act upon and interpret the social world, it seeks to enrich our understandings of how socio-cultural and political-economic structures, institutions, and discourses influence



the conscious and unconscious attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals, and, consequently, help us to better understand processes of social continuity and social change (Cerulo, 2010; Kesebir et al., 2010; Lieberman et al., 2003; Ridgeway, 2006; Sheperd, 2011; Torney-Purta, 1992). As Van Dijk (1996, p. 5) argues:

A continued plea must be made for a more integrated and more explicit study of the relations between discourse, cognition, and society. Our theoretical and critical understanding of the relations between discourse and society, [...], will be necessarily incomplete without such a cognitive 'interface'.

#### *Aims, Objectives, and Methods*

In contrast to the tendency of much of the Western political-economic and sociological literature on systems order to emphasize either deterministic structural and power elite explanations (Gill, 2003), or bottom up culturalist explanations (McGuigan, 2010), the following chapters offer an analysis that looks at both the top-down and bottom up dialectical mechanisms and processes that I will suggest help to sustain the current neoliberal conjuncture. After documenting some of the ways that neoliberalism, as conceived and implemented by an elite group of politicians, businesspeople, and intellectuals, has inflected the dominant societal structures, institutions, and political, economic, educational and cultural discourses of UK and US society, this thesis will empirically explore how this neoliberal nexus influences the culture and politics of non-elite UK and US inhabitants, and in particular those of the contemporary post-1980s generation of young people commonly referred to as the Millennial generation (Twenge et al., 2012). The specific objectives of this thesis are to investigate:

- How far and in what ways the socio-cultural and political-economic dispositions, emotions, thoughts and practices of contemporary urban young people in London and LA are infused or inflected by neoliberal discourses and practices.

- What critical educators dedicated to progressive social change can learn from a socio-cognitive approach to the analysis of youth culture and politics.

The methods used to address these objectives, which will be laid out in more detail in Chapter 4, consist of an improvised mixture of critical-ethnographic strategies, made up of in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty-nine young people (ages 16-19) and three adult youth workers from Los Angeles, and fourteen young people (ages 16-19) and two adult youth workers from London, coupled with a series of ethnographic observations conducted in youth centres and music concerts. The interviews were primarily designed to elicit responses from young people on the following themes: leisure time, news and media exposure and use, economic and political behaviours and beliefs, understanding of political-economic issues (e.g. employment practices, environmental politics, political-economic systems, and poverty), and opinions on solutions to political-economic problems, education, and personal and family aspirations. Their responses, which will be discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, have been analyzed for both their conscious/reflective and more unconscious/dispositional elements. However, I want to emphasize that while the analysis of the data provided in these chapters is informed by established inductive and analytical social science methods, and grounded in empirical evidence, this research is exploratory in nature, designed to investigate some of the substantive content and central tendencies of contemporary youth culture and politics, and what this investigation may contribute to socio-cognitive inspired pedagogic strategies aimed at progressive and democratic social change. It is, therefore, primarily meant to lay a foundation for future research, whilst at the same time also offering some important substantive insights that can contribute to contemporary understandings of the barriers and possibilities for progressive social change.

I selected Los Angeles (LA) and London as the major urban centres from which to recruit participants because I have lived in both cities for extended periods of time, and have got to know individuals who provided me with invaluable access and entry to schools and youth centres. Furthermore, LA and London are considered alpha world cities, as well as templates and testing grounds for neoliberal policies in other urban settings (Brenner, 2006; Davis, 2006).

## *Why Youth?*

While a similar study on an adult population would have been fruitful and worthwhile, this thesis focuses on young people. There are a number of reasons for this: first, contemporary generations of young people (which in this thesis encompasses a 16-19 year old cross-sectional demographic) have been directly bombarded and/or surrounded by neoliberal discourses more than any other previous UK and US generation, and also represent the most immediate generation of emerging adults who will be eligible to participate in the electoral process. Therefore, they offer a unique sample from which to observe the relationship between neoliberal discourses, cultural experiences, and political and cultural beliefs and practices. Second, young people are and will have to face the most severe consequences of enacted neoliberal policies (e.g., higher university tuition fees, disappearing social safety nets, and decreases in employment security, benefits, wages, pensions, and increasing privatization and militarization of public spaces). Third, neoliberalism, has since its inception, been consistently challenged by individual and organized groups of young people who have fuelled, established, and participated in global movements against neoliberalism, currently manifesting itself in the US, and to a limited extent in the UK and elsewhere, as the ‘Occupy Movement’. At the same time, it is also young people, through their consumption practices (which are the most sought after by corporations) that significantly help to maintain and reproduce the global system of neoliberal political-economy and fuel the consequent processes of economic and cultural ‘globalization’. Fourth, according to several studies from the developmental psychology literature, political-economic and socio-cultural attitudes and beliefs begin to develop and crystallize during adolescence (Eckstein et al., 2011; Krosnick & Alwin, 1991; Loughlin & Barling, 2001; Sears & Levy, 2003). And fifth, young people possess the creative capacity to manipulate culture in indefinite and unpredictable ways that have the potential to generate new modes of creative, expressive, and practical thought and action that can impact the established social arrangements of society. That is, young people tend to inhabit a variety of cultural forms, some of which are unique to young people, and more often than the rest of population, strongly identify themselves in relation to specific cultural forms (ranging from mainstream, sub-cultural, and counter-cultural). Coupled with the fact that, “their political views are rarely carbon copies of their parents” (Flanagan, 2008, p. 1), young

people occupy a privileged position from which to observe wider processes of social continuity and social change (Furlong & Cartmel 2007; MacDonald & Shildrick 2009). Therefore,, research on contemporary UK and US urban young people's socio-cultural and political-economic cognitive frameworks and corresponding practices can help to illuminate the barriers to, and the possibilities of, successfully contesting the current neoliberal conjuncture. As Shilrick et al., (2009, p. 457) argue, "if new cultural trends emerge or significant social developments happen, it is feasible that they will be seen here first or most obviously, among the coming new generation of young adults". Moreover, as Twenge et al., (2012, p. 16) point out, "there is considerable intellectual, cultural, and economic interest in discovering and predicting generational trends". Lastly, the growing international literature concerning youth politics has shown that while young people are mostly alienated from conventional political participation like voting, new media forums, (specifically social networking Internet sites), have given young people new ways to be political and civically-minded (Coleman, 2006; Harris, 2008).

#### *General theoretical approach and thesis structure*

What follows in this thesis should not be interpreted as an exercise or a return to 'Vulgar Marxism' or structural or cognitive determinism. The theories and empirical methods that guide this thesis were carefully selected for their insistence on a multi, inter, and/or trans-disciplinary analysis and exploration of the individual-society dialectic and cognition-culture interface. The thesis is underpinned by an ontological presupposition which understands both society and individual human agents to be products of multiple, or more precisely, confounding determinations, which far from being fixed or total, are in constant flux and reconfiguration. There is limited value, I would suggest, in trying to understand something as convoluted as neoliberalism and its multifaceted effects on individuals, using an over simplistic application of the classic Marxist and Weberian arguments which respectively valorise the material and ideological as primary societal determinants from which all else follows. Nor is there much value in working with first instance deterministic and reductive dichotomies which take the form of economic versus cultural, sociological versus psychological, rational versus emotive, or structural versus agentic. In this thesis, explorations favour a

more holistic and comprehensive approach that views key socio-structural, discursive, and cognitive determinants as overlapping and mutually reinforcing in the reproduction of society.

The rationale for this is that, whilst it may well be the case that the economic determines the cultural, or that the psychological determines the sociological, there is no contemporary mode of empirical methodology that I am aware of that can even approximate a proof of first instance determination. Therefore, rather than get bogged down in such unfalsifiable and tautological distractions, it seems more fruitful instead to search out and document as many of the most prevalent dimensions, factors, and mechanisms as can be feasibly accounted for, map existing relationships and points of mutual reinforcement or contestation between them, and from that, infer theorizations grounded in empirical data that help to describe and explain the complex role of human institutions and human agents in the reproduction of society. I believe that it is only through such a comprehensive mapping of multiple-determinants, and their various points of intersection and mutual reinforcement that we can begin to get a more complete picture of the complex socio-cultural and political-economic processes and structures which enable, constrain, and mediate individual thought and action. Moreover, as well as exploring the ways these processes and structures promote oppressive ideas and aspirations, it is also necessary to highlight possible points of interjection, and instances of opposition and/or reaction to dominant social discourses and practices. This kind of analysis, I would suggest, is more likely to be generative of new ideas and strategies that may in some way contribute to the challenging of established and burgeoning oppressive social modes, and the creation of a more just and equitable society. The overall structure of this thesis is as follows:

To begin with, in Chapter 1, I discuss the genealogy and ontological claims of neoliberal theory and some of the ways that neoliberal ideology and policies have shaped the major contemporary societal structural and institutional forces and discourses of the UK and the US, creating what Plehwe et al., (2007) refer to as a set of hegemonic constellations that seek to legitimate and promote neoliberalism domestically and globally. I focus specifically on the neoliberal structural and discursive inflection of political, economic, education, welfare, non-profit, and media-culture institutions, and suggest some of the ways this nexus

may influence the socio-cultural and political-economic schemata of contemporary urban UK and US young people.

In Chapter 2, I review the leading theories on capitalist social reproduction and media driven consumer culture. This includes the works of the classic and contemporary Frankfurt schools, the classic Birmingham School of cultural studies, and some of the key concepts and arguments from the works of Louis Althusser, and Pierre Bourdieu. In this review, I will pay close attention to the empirical validity and criticisms of these approaches to argue that a synthesis of their strengths, coupled with often neglected insights from cognitive and social-psychology is needed to comprehensively theorize and research neoliberal hegemony and its multi-faceted and wide reaching material and discursive effects. I end this chapter by setting out the theoretical guidelines and presuppositions that will inform the methodology and data analysis for the empirical component of this thesis.

In Chapter 3, I connect the discussions of Chapters 1 and 2 to the wide literature on young people and youth culture. Specifically, I utilize the lessons and considerations from the theoretical guidelines laid out in Chapter 2 to analyze four of the most prevalent themes found in contemporary literature on young people and youth culture. These include young people's agentic use of media-culture, young people's agentic identity construction, the effects of media-culture on young people's socio-cognitive/subjectivity development, and youth political and civic engagement. From this review, I identify gaps within this literature that this thesis will help to address.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the methodology used for the empirical component of this thesis. By taking all of the lessons and insights that came out of the literature reviewed in the first three chapters, I discuss the ontological orientations of my study, and lay out the research design and methodology. This consists of a broad array of qualitative inductive, critical-ethnographic, interview, and triangulation methods that were employed to collect data from a cross-sectional sample of Los Angeles and London millenials. I also describe the research sites where I carried out the study, the processes by which I gained access to them and the participants, the interviews with participants, and the ethical considerations that needed to be addressed. I end the chapter by explaining how I conducted the data analysis using a combination of grounded theory, critical discourse analytic, and socio-cognitive

inspired strategies culminating in the construction of a three-fold ‘actual’ typology of Los Angeles and London young people.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are dedicated to discussing and unpacking the major characteristics of the three classifications in my typology that I have classified as *Critical/Political*, *Artsy/Indie*, and *Mainstream*. I describe the more prevalent socio-cultural and political-economic experiences of each group, and attempt to connect these to the substantive content, i.e., the central tendencies, and cognitive, normative, and affective dimensions of these young people’s socio-cultural and political-economic schemata. Specifically, by unpacking the conceptual, semantic, and lexical associations corresponding to these young people’s interview responses, I draw out some of the ways that their dispositions, emotions, thoughts, and practices contest or reflect dominant neoliberal discourses.

In Chapter 8, I provide a brief review of the literature on critical and progressive pedagogy and discuss how the major findings from my study may contribute to the educational and political objectives of these pedagogies. Additionally, I lay out a theoretical framework and corresponding sample series of classroom activities that reflect what I will refer to as a socio-cognitive approach to critical and progressive pedagogy.

In Chapter 9, I summarize the key insights from each chapter. I also discuss some the limitations of this thesis and propose methods to address these limitations in future research.

# **Chapter One**

## **Homo Economicus in Post-Schumpeterian Society**

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*“One of the greatest mistakes is to judge a policy on its intentions rather than its results”.* – Milton Friedman<sup>3</sup>

This thesis begins from the premise that in order to develop an in depth understanding of the societies that contemporary UK and US young people inhabit, it is crucial to first document and analyze the dominant political-economic ideological paradigm that plays such a key role in shaping those societies, i.e., neoliberalism. My concern in this chapter is, therefore, to describe neoliberalism and trace its consequences. To that end, this chapter will draw out some of the main theoretical and discursive frameworks that characterize neoliberal political economy, governance, and culture. To facilitate this endeavour, I will first review the intellectual history, ontological presuppositions, evaluative dimensions, and policy implications and rationale of neoliberal ideology as conceived of, and actively promoted by, a group of elite Western intellectuals collectively known as the Mont Pelerin Society and their global ideological apparatus (Plehwe et al., 2007). Secondly, I will describe how neoliberal ideas have helped to form some of the major social policies enacted by UK and US governments since the 1980s. This includes an examination of a sample of economic, welfare, and education policies introduced by UK and US neoliberal governments during the last thirty years and their resulting aftermath. While this examination is necessarily brief, it is meant to elucidate how the implementation of neoliberal policies and practices have inflected and shaped the dominant structural, institutional, and discursive components of contemporary UK and US states, economies, and civil societies.<sup>4</sup>

It is not my intention to suggest that the views and practices of UK and US populations are determined by these components. Nor am I implying that the hegemony of neoliberalism is total or uncontested. However, contemporary UK and US young people are directly or indirectly effected and surrounded by the

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<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from:

<http://bfi.uchicago.edu/about/tribute/mfquotes.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> Such components include think tanks, state educational and welfare institutions, supra-governmental institutions, multi-national corporations, non-governmental organizations, and the mass media. Together they converge to a significant extent to help form what Plehwe et al., (2007) refer to as a set of hegemonic constellations that disseminate, promote, and legitimate neoliberal discourses, policies, and practices.



neoliberal policies and discourses which are disseminated and promoted by dominant forces in their respective societies (Boyles, 2008; McGuigan, 2010), and arguably, as noted above, more so than any other generation or population of young people. It is, therefore, necessary to document and specify what these neoliberal policies and discourses entail, how they are directly and indirectly disseminated to young people, and what their implications are for contemporary youth culture and politics.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.1 What's So New About Liberalism?**

In the influential 1992 book *The End of History and Last Man*, political scientist Francis Fukuyama famously declared that the neoliberal model for political economic organization, what he referred to as the liberal-democratic model,<sup>6</sup> represents the last stage of political-economic national and global organization. Borrowing from Marx's historical materialist and teleological view of history, Fukuyama's (1992) central thesis positions neoliberalism as a natural and historical inevitability, akin to the ecological mechanical processes of Darwinian evolution. However, such a deterministic view of history fails to consider at least two important points. First, what is abstractly, and sometimes crudely, referred to as neoliberalism is simply the latest Western incarnation of a series of human ideas that were implemented by human volition via human institutions. That is, neoliberalism is a social construct, no more natural, legitimate, or inevitable than chattel slavery or anarcho-syndicalism. The extensive cultural anthropological and political historical literature has noted how at any time and in any part of the world that humans inhabit, any number of political-economic and accompanying socio-cultural forms can take root. These are shaped in large part by the available material resources, ideas, and customs that human groups are exposed to (Diamond, 2005; Habermas, 1991; Graeber, 2004; Polanyi, 2001;

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<sup>5</sup> Although I will briefly discuss some of the internal complexities and geo-historical specificities of UK and US forms of neoliberalism, I do not have the space in this thesis to go into these aspects in too much depth. What follows, therefore, should be considered a first approximation that mostly describes the most salient and shared features of UK and US neoliberal societies, and which pays particular attention to how neoliberalism has impacted the urban and cultural landscapes of contemporary UK and US young people.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'liberal-democracy' can also refer to pre-neoliberal forms of political-economic organization that marked early 20<sup>th</sup> century UK and US societies. However, from the context of Fukuyama's (1992) arguments (as they were written as a response to the fall of the Soviet Union), it can be inferred that he is specifically referring to the neoliberal model of open global markets and representative/parliamentarian modes of democratic governance that underpinned the 1980s UK and US neoliberal revolutions (Hall, 2011; Gill, 2003).

Toqueville, 2004). However, Fukuyama's (1992) central thesis seriously underestimates the role of human agency, and ignores the fact that the implementation of neoliberalism has been an ongoing political project, spanning the last seventy years of UK and US history, which has been conceived and formulated by a group of elite Western intellectuals, businesspersons, and politicians (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). Second, Fukuyama's view of history also ignores the numerous counter-forces, some progressive and some reactionary, that continue to contest the neoliberal model. Given that current UK and US societies are still underpinned by a neoliberal framework (Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Cameroff, 2011; Hall, 2011), I will use this section and chapter to describe and elaborate on the first point, but the second point should be considered a given, and will be addressed in the following chapters.

What exactly is neoliberalism? Like post-modernism or evolution, it is a concept that is often loosely exclaimed but vaguely explained, and one which can take any number of forms and definitions rendering any attempt at an exact definition somewhat problematic. However, a cohesive framework for understanding neoliberalism, consisting of its key features, can be sketched by reviewing the genealogy of ideas of a group of self-conscious neoliberal intellectuals who in 1947 formed the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) (Mirowski & Plehwe 2009). Notable members of the original MPS among others, included prominent economists Friedrich Von Hayek, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and Michael Polanyi (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). This highly exclusive group of like-minded intellectuals sought, in their own words:

- The redefinition of the state so as to distinguish more clearly between the totalitarian and the liberal order.
- The possibility of establishing minimum standards by means not inimical to initiative and the functioning of the market.
- Methods of re-establishing the rule of law and of assuring its development in such manner that individuals and groups are not in a position to encroach upon the freedom of others and private rights are not allowed to become a basis of predatory power.
- Methods of combating the misuse of history for the furtherance of creeds hostile to liberty.

- The problem of the creation of an international order conducive to the safeguarding of peace and liberty and permitting the establishment of harmonious international economic relations (Hartwell, 1995. pp. 41-42).

To briefly put the above mission statements into historical context, after experiencing the failures of laissez-faire economics that led to the 1929 Great Depression, and the Second World War that followed, Western governments had implemented a post-war economic system of heavy market regulation. Largely influenced by the fiscal policy arguments of economists John Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White, advocates of this Western post-war economic consensus had argued that left to their own devices, markets would create large-scale unemployment, social inequalities, and volatile and unpredictable business cycles (Ellwood, 2002). Therefore, in order to avoid a repeat of the mass unemployment and discontent that contributed to WW2, governments had stepped in to regulate the market. This included the implementation of health, safety, and wage standards that businesses had to abide by, and a global system of capital controls anchored by fixed currency exchange rates (Chomsky, 1999; McNally, 2009). In addition to these regulations, Western governments had also granted concessions to organized labour, such as the rights to organize and to collectively bargain, and established a system of antipoverty welfare institutions that would guard the less fortunate against extreme poverty and destitution (Roy & Steger, 2010). However, while observing the implementation of Keynesian fiscal policies throughout the West, the members of the MPS worried about the threat of what they viewed as an interventionist nanny state that was too involved in the economy, fearing that such interventions would inevitably lead to an authoritarian Socialist state similar to the Soviet Union. Hayek (1994) and Friedman (2002) argued that any form of extensive government central planning, whether Keynesian-Capitalist or Marxist-Leninist, (however benevolent and well intentioned), creates high inflation, stagnating economies, unproductive workforces, and results in the loss of individual freedom and entrepreneurial incentives. As Polanyi (2001, p. 260), writing in direct response to the central arguments of the MPS, noted:

Planning and control are being attacked as a denial of freedom.  
Freedom and enterprise and private ownership are declared to be

essential to freedom. No society built on other foundations is said to deserve to be called free. The freedom that regulation creates is denounced as unfreedom; the justice, liberty and welfare are decried as a camouflage of slavery.

Dismissing Keynesian notions of positive liberty as utopian, or as inherently authoritarian, the MPS was instead inspired by the notions of instrumental rationality and negative liberty of 18<sup>th</sup> century classical liberalism (Curtis et al., 2007). Members of the MPS argued that society is best served by striving for economic efficiency and unfettered growth, which are best achieved when governments allow and encourage individuals to freely pursue their self-interests and assumed entrepreneurial drives. The rationale was that, according to the MPS, human beings are essentially hyper-rational (self-interested) and competitive agents that embody John Stuart Mill's conception of *Homo Economicus* (Patel, 2010). As the lauded paragon of classical liberalism Adam Smith (1776/1901, p. 31) wrote:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interests. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.

Therefore, rather than try to create a political-economic structure that tries to hinder or sublimate these basic and dominant human properties, the MPS argued that political-economic structures should instead let these dominant behavioural properties run free, premised on the belief that natural competitive market mechanisms, undistorted by excessive government intervention, will ensure rational outcomes that are beneficial to all of society. This may seem like a rather paradoxical view, but according to this logic, if people are free to pursue their own interests and desires, (e.g., prestige and/or capital accumulation), and if these desires are channeled through unrestricted competitive forces, (i.e., via the market mechanisms of supply and demand), positive societal outcomes will naturally manifest themselves. Fuel-efficient cars, effective medicines, fashionable clothing, and cheap food are all prominent examples of products that are readily available because of self-interested and competitive behaviours. The businesses that provide

these goods do so because of self-interested desires to accumulate wealth, and given that they are in competition with other businesses that are pursuing their own self-interests, we, as individual consumers, benefit from having a variety of choices at varying prices and quality, which we are free to choose from based on our calculated needs. Similarly, it is argued that individual workers will also benefit from this form of economic organization as unregulated competitive forces will ensure that labourers end up in the best working environments for the highest wages (Adler, 2009; Ellwood, 2002). As Ariely (2008, p. 239) notes:

The result is that we are presumed to be making logical and sensible decisions. And even if we make a wrong decision from time to time, the standard economics [neoclassical/neoliberal] perspective suggests that we will quickly learn from our mistakes either on our own or with the help of ‘market forces’.

Guided by their *homo economicus* ontological assumptions and unwavering faith in the role of the metaphysical ‘invisible hand’ of the free-market in correcting economic inefficiencies and market externalities, members of the MPS zoomed, narrowed, and morphed classical liberalism into a Social Darwinian version of liberalism, i.e., into neoliberalism. To wit, while classical liberals like Adam Smith and David Ricardo believed in the efficiency of unregulated market forces, they also argued that, for example, workers should be allowed to move freely between and across nation-states in search of higher paid work. Moreover, they argued that capital should be anchored in communities where the owners themselves reside, so that owners can experience the effects of their policies first hand and correct any negative externalities that may be detrimental to their society (Chomsky, 1999; Ellwood, 2002; Smith, 1776/1901). To be certain, Smith and Ricardo’s liberalism was not just based on the innate selfishness of humanity. Their liberalism was much more nuanced in that it coincided with the Enlightenment Age thinking that valued reason, creativity, and human freedom over dogma and all forms of oppressive authority which were deemed to be an affront to human dignity, and in that context, their liberalism can also be considered as largely reflecting humanist values. Smith even went as far as to argue against corporate privileges, greed, and the concentration of private wealth,

and for public education and government policies that favoured the working classes. As he stated, “when the regulation, therefore, is in favour of the workmen, it is always just and equitable; but it is sometimes otherwise when in favour of the masters” (1776/1901. p. 235). Furthermore, much of what Smith, Ricardo, and many of the other classical liberals argued for was in many ways a utopian society that could only function if it met the following key conditions.<sup>7</sup> First, truly free-market societies have to be composed of various small enterprises no larger than a pin factory (Smith, 1776/1901) that are ideally located in the communities where the owners reside. Second, these enterprises are in turn supposed to operate under what in economic terms is referred to as ‘perfect competition’- a hypothetical economic condition where no single group or person can control and distort market forces by, for instance, enjoying state sanctioned privileges that can lead to monopoly control of markets (e.g., corporate charters). Third, market equilibrium under this hypothetical competitive condition can only be reached by the self-interested behaviour of highly educated, rational, and free individuals that poses relatively ‘perfect information’ (a condition where all buyers, sellers, and workers know, or poses immediate access to undistorted knowledge about all products, services, and working conditions and wages all the time). And fourth, trade between countries must be balanced so that one country does not become dependent or indebted to another (Ellwood, 2002). The MPS, however, seemingly ignored all of these aspects, or simply did not read Smith or the cannon of classical liberalism in its entirety. Either way, they argued for, and gave primacy to, the unrestricted and transnational movement of capital and capitalists, but said little, and when presented, posed contradictory ideas about the unregulated transnational mobility of workers and their rights (Chomsky, 1999). They also mostly dismissed notions of human empathy, compassion, altruism, and basic ethics as expounded by Smith (1759/2006), to be merely quixotic ideals (Curtis et al., 2007; Patel, 2010). Indeed, as Mirowski & Plehwe (2009, p. 26) note, “notably absent [from the MPS manifestos] are the range of human and political rights traditionally embraced by liberals (including the right to form coalitions and freedom of the press)”. Humans, the MPS argues, given their *homo economicus*

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<sup>7</sup> The historical context of the classical liberal arguments must also be taken into consideration in that many of the presuppositions of prominent classical liberals are informed by their observations of a post-Feudal yet pre-capitalist Western European political-economic structure, which is another key difference between classical liberalism and neoliberalism.

ontological and existential make up, will only behave ethically or altruistically if it benefits them (Curtis et al., 2007; Patel, 2010), and therefore society as a whole should be transformed into a competitive market arena that channels these dominant self-interested drives and desires into a stable societal equilibrium. In practice, this implies that individuals should reject collectivist and humanist values (e.g., a socially conscious concern for the environment, labour rights, and human rights) in favour of market-centred norms and values such as competitiveness, entrepreneurialism, and a preoccupation with the enhancement of one's human and economic capital (Chomsky, 1999; Harvey, 2005; Patel, 2010). As Braedley & Luxton (2010, p. 8) argue:

Human rights and equality under neoliberalism are the rights and equality to compete, but not the rights to start from the same starting line, with the same equipment, or at the sound of the same gun. It certainly does not include rights to certain outcomes, such as a certain degree of health or education. Competition, because it is portrayed as an “impersonal choice” rather than structured by people's decisions, is somehow perceived fairer than direct government action in the distribution of social goods and risks.

Moreover, to the extent that neoliberalism is not the same as 18<sup>th</sup> century classical liberalism, likewise it is not the same as 19<sup>th</sup> century *laissez-faire* Western capitalism, despite their many similar ideological premises, ontological presuppositions, and normative prescriptions. That is, self-conscious neoliberal intellectuals are not calling for a total elimination of the state, as they concede that it has an active role to play in maintaining a sound national and global economy, and even recognize the need for fiscal policies to fund social safety nets (Friedman, 1948:2002; Hayek, 1994). However, they argue that the scope of the state should be reduced and that its role be redefined vis-à-vis the market (Plehwe et al., 2007). As Gutstein (2010, p. 5) notes:

Key was their belief that the market society they desired would not come about without concerted political effort and organization. They were certainly not *laissez-faire* conservatives who believed government should just not interfere in economic affairs. They were

radicals who demanded dramatic government action to create and enforce markets.

Therefore, neoliberalism is perhaps more accurately conceptualized as a sort of ‘reverse Keynesianism’ that synthesizes lessons, insights, and philosophical arguments from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Western political-economy to argue that a sound and prosperous economy necessitates government intervention that shores up markets and holders of financial capital (Chomsky, 1999; Friedman & Schwartz, 1963; Hall, 2011).<sup>8</sup> For instance, traditional Keynesian economists argue that macroeconomic policies should be concerned with aspiring to full employment via progressive taxation and government investment in education, healthcare, social security, infrastructure, and research and development. Neoliberal economists, however, argue that inflation, not full employment, should be the primary concern for macroeconomic policy, even though inflation, provided that it is kept under extreme hyperinflation levels, disproportionately impacts the wealthy, while unemployment is a more prevalent concern for the other sectors of society (Baker, 2006; Chang, 2010). As Baker (2006, p. 19) argues, in practice, combating inflation depends on, “keeping unemployment high enough to prevent inflation from rising above the rates it [the US Federal Reserve] views as acceptable. When the Fed raises interest rates to slow the economy, the people who lose their jobs are disproportionately those at the middle and bottom of the wage distribution”. However, the neoliberal economic rationale for this is that, by adopting monetary policies aimed at controlling inflation coupled with policies that lower marginal income and corporate taxes, governments and central banks can help to increase and stabilize the real value (as opposed to nominal value) of financial assets (Chang, 2010). This, according to neoliberal economists, puts more money into the hands of individual investors and entrepreneurs, and incentivizes them to make investments,

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<sup>8</sup> Hence, for example, the 2007-2008 UK and US government bailouts of troubled banks, insurance firms, and hedge funds can be seen as actually coinciding with, rather than contradicting, neoliberal theory (Mason, 2010). These bailouts included the implementation of measures known as ‘quantitative easing’, i.e., the immediate and heavily discounted injection of massive amounts of digital money into large and state-approved financial firms via central banks (Taibbi, 2010). Such measures were enacted by Federal Reserve Chair and noted Milton Friedman disciple Ben Bernanke, who was convinced by Friedman’s argument that the 1929 Great Depression was largely caused by the Federal Reserve’s failure to provide banks with an emergency influx of capital (Friedman & Schwartz 1963).



which in turn will lead to the creation of jobs and more efficient economic growth than it is possible to attain by means of government fiscal stimulus policies (Steger & Roy, 2010). Indeed, some neoliberal economists even go as far as to argue that, high tax rates actually lead to decreasing government revenues as they cause the wealthy to invest less and to work fewer hours and, hence, be taxed less. Therefore, decreasing the tax rate on the wealthy encourages them to work more hours and make investments that lead to the creation of more jobs, which will have the ancillary effect of increasing government revenues (Adler, 2010). Overall, these and other neoliberal macroeconomic prescriptions are aimed at incentivizing investment, facilitating entrepreneurship and competition, and preserving individual freedom by limiting the state's ability to intervene in how individuals choose to utilize their earned and/or inherited capital. While these policy prescriptions may not constitute an ideal free-market system, Friedman (2002:1948) argues that they can best approximate the meeting of the long-term objectives of political freedom, economic efficiency, and equality of economic power.

Throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century members and affiliates of the MPS founded and honed several influential theories which maintain and claim to empirically demonstrate that, given a choice, human beings will predominantly behave in accordance with their perceived self-interests, e.g., public-choice theory, rational-choice theory, and game theory (Spies-Butcher, 2002). They wrote extensive position papers on subjects varying from welfare and education reform, to environmental and labour standards. In every instance they argued against Keynesian, socialist, and even feminist positions (which argue that the state should play an active role in securing women's rights in the workplace), in favour of so called scientific and, thus, ideology-free, free-market solutions (Plehwe et al., 2007). Their theories and studies gained them enormous prestige and authority in the fields of sociology, political science, international relations, and particularly in economics; with several members winning Nobel prizes in economics. To spread their ideas, as part of what Harvey (2005) argues was a conscious and key strategy in their war of position, i.e., the intellectual struggle over acceptable political-economic and socio-cultural ideas (Gramsci, 1971), they formed academic strongholds at the London School of Economics and the University of Chicago. Furthermore, with the help and funding of powerful business lobbying and policy

groups like the US Chamber of Commerce, the Trilateral Commission, the Council On Foreign Relations, and the Business Roundtable to name just a few (Gill, 2003), they also founded several national and international think-tanks. These include the Institute of Economic Affairs (UK), the Heritage Foundation (US), the Fraser Institute (Canada), and the Lion Rock Institute (Hong Kong).<sup>9</sup> While some important differences exist between these think-tanks and other similar think-tanks not directly affiliated with the MPS,<sup>10</sup> the main ideas of this now extensive market-oriented think-tank network can be summarized as follows:

1. Human beings are inherently rational self-interested actors that predominantly display rational self-interested behaviours. These behaviours are best channelled through free-market economic structures (where cognitively unhindered individuals are engaged in perpetual cost-benefit analysis, and are free to choose between market allocated options and practices that will be in accordance with their perceived self-interests), in order to produce positive societal outcomes that meet all human needs.<sup>11</sup>
2. Markets must remain free from government regulation: free-market capitalism is the *par excellence* economic system that promotes technological innovation, global peace, democracy, and individual freedom and prosperity.
3. All businesses must be allowed to self-regulate, as market mechanisms will ensure punishment for businesses that behave inappropriately, e.g., by committing fraud, delivering poor service, practicing discriminatory hiring policies, or producing hazardous and dangerous products.

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<sup>9</sup> Currently, the MPS has expanded its membership from its original 38 individuals, to over 1000, acting as an umbrella organization that encompasses a well-organised global network of neoliberal think-tanks that also includes the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (US), the Liberty Institute (Brazil), and Unirule (Beijing) (Plehwe et al., 2007).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., the Cato Institute which adopts an even more right-wing libertarian position, or the Project for the New American Century which adopts more socially-conservative and militaristic views, both nonetheless arguing for the promotion of free-market economic systems and values, and both thus more or less in line with the policy prescriptions detailed above.

<sup>11</sup> The discourse of negative freedom and liberty, as advanced by classical liberalism, meant that of freedom from coercive, intrusive, and oppressive authority and social-relations of any form, not just state forms. However, the neoliberal discursive reformulation of freedom, as Gutstein (2010) and Patel (2010) argue, refers specifically to the freedom to choose between competing consumer products and services. It does not include the freedom to resist corporate rule, and specifically denies the right to challenge the sphere of private property, regardless of the autocratic powers and actions of large (or other) property owners over non-property owners (Chomsky, 1999; Patel, 2010). Moreover, the neoliberal consumerist reformulation of negative liberty and emphasis on unrepresentative technocratic government, implicitly suggests a freedom from politics and civic responsibility.

4. There should be liberalization/deregulation of domestic and international trade and commerce (i.e., financial, labour, production, commodity, and transportation markets), and relatively uniform import/export tariffs between nation-states in order for all parties involved to gain from their respective comparative advantages.
5. Natural resources should be privatized, as the private sector is better suited to take care of the management of natural resources than would governments or the commons.
6. State enterprises including education, health-services, security, and municipal services should be privatized. In such cases where state enterprises and services are not privatized or completely dismantled, they should be transformed into market apparatuses (via the implementation of neo-managerial policies and accountability metrics and targets to measure outcomes, eliminate wastefulness, and incentivize positive performances), which redefine government workers and administrators as public entrepreneurs, and citizens as consumers or 'clients'.
7. Governmental welfare institutions should be dismantled and replaced with voluntary private charities. In such cases where welfare institutions are not completely dismantled, they should be turned into market apparatuses (via the implementation of accountability metrics and targets to measure outcomes, eliminate wastefulness, and incentivize positive performances) that help to train welfare dependent individuals to be self-reliant and entrepreneurial workers that can better compete in the labour market.<sup>12</sup>
8. Taxes, including income, corporate, capital gains, and property taxes should be reduced or eliminated.
9. The government's main responsibilities are to curb budget deficits, combat inflation, ensure and protect legal contracts, copyrights, private property rights, national security, and help open up and enforce new markets, by overwhelming military force if need be.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Related to the neoliberal tenets 6 and 7, is the theory that state public sectors operating as market apparatuses can help individuals enhance their human capital by instilling individuals with a Protestant work ethic, a dedication to instrumental education, and a sense of work discipline and flexibility (Harvey 2005).

<sup>13</sup> See Klein's (2008) account of the forced market liberalization of Chile in 1973 and Iraq in 2003.

10. Formal democratic institutions where citizens vote for government representatives should be maintained, but key policy-making and implementing power should be held by an appointed and publicly unaccountable market-oriented technocratic elite (e.g., Central Bankers), that can bypass or overturn decisions made by formal democratic institutions when necessary, i.e., when they go against market principles.

Together the ideas discussed in this section form the philosophical, intellectual, and policy foundation of neoliberalism. When taken to its logical conclusion, neoliberalism is more totalizing in scope than any other previous theoretical conception of capitalism, as it calls for the extension of market logic and practices into all forms of government, civic, public, and even private life. As Lemke (2001) puts it, in a neoliberal world there is no longer a separation between the market and society; everything is economic. Nonetheless, according to the MPS, and the now global network of market-oriented think-tanks,<sup>14</sup> if governments follow the basic propositions listed above, and if individuals can embrace their self-interested nature, then a prosperous, dynamic, and self-regulating global society will emerge. Yet despite its narrow and cynical ontological presuppositions, neoliberalism, as I will explain in the following sections, has to a significant extent shaped, and embedded itself into, the political-economic and socio-cultural structural and discursive fabric of Western society, and continues to influence the perspectives and policies of UK and US governing elites.

## **1.2 Neoliberal Globalization: the End of History**

The second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century world order was characterized by a series of global crises and transformations that, among other important factors, brought about the end of Keynesianism and its system of global capital controls (Chomsky, 1999; McNally, 2009). By the 1980s, members of the MPS had gained momentum in their war of position, i.e., the move from ideological struggle to political power (Gramsci, 1971), and helped to form the political platforms and administrations of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). Once in

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<sup>14</sup> Since the 2008 financial crisis, the intellectual representatives of these institutions have been working overtime to assure both government officials and the public on the soundness and superiority of a free-market system (Mirowski, 2011).

office, and at the urging of their MPS connected economic advisors, Thatcher and Reagan implemented a host of tax cuts and deregulatory economic policies which cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy, shrank the power and size of regulatory state agencies, and loosened or lifted financial, safety, labour, anti-trust, and environmental regulations. These and other economic policies, in conjunction with the global trade policies and multi-lateral agreements spearheaded by the UK and US controlled World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, helped to initiate, facilitate, and accelerate the processes of neoliberal globalization, which are characterized by the free-flow of capital within and across nation-states, the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of national economies, and the rise and dominance of transnational corporations and financial institutions (Gill, 2003; Harvey, 2005). Successive UK and US administrations, regardless of their traditional political positions, whether left, right, or centre, continued with similarly business friendly economic policies, and spread similar policies across the globe through their control of the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization (incidentally all organizations with close ties to the MPS).<sup>15</sup> After the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, and throughout the 1990s and 2000s, neoliberal ‘globalization’ was legally cemented by multilateral international free-trade agreements like the 1994 World Trade Organization’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.<sup>16</sup> These types of agreements, in addition to ongoing World Trade Organization, European Union, and G7 negotiations, formed what Gill (1998, p. 16) refers to as the ‘new constitutionalism’; i.e., sets of:

Policies and legal measures that are intended to reinforce the rights and political representation of investors, and in so doing to strengthen the power of capital on a world scale. This process involves dominant state apparatuses in the Group of Seven, the international financial institutions, and transnational corporations, and it seeks to reproduce,

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<sup>15</sup> The imposition of neoliberal policies on developing countries via, for example, the IMF’s and World Bank’s structural adjustments programmes is also widely referred to as the ‘Washington Consensus’ (Chomsky, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> When the interconnectedness of national economies on a global scale actually occurred is a matter of ongoing debate with some authors suggesting that it started when Columbus landed in the Americas (Ellwood, 2002). For the purposes of this thesis, I am using the term neoliberal globalization to refer to the spread of neoliberal economic reforms and policies via supra-national organizations like the WTO, World Bank, and IMF (Gill, 2003; Harvey, 2005).

politically and legally, disciplinary neo-liberalism and the main discourse and strategy for creating what Karl Polanyi called the 'stark Utopia' of a market society on a world scale.

Consequently, this has led to the commodification of seemingly everything e.g., rain water, plant seeds, public utilities, organs (Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Patel, 2007), and to the global consolidation of markets whereby a handful of oligopolies control the majority of the world's manufacturing, financial, transportation, communications, commodity, cultural production, and (increasingly) education markets (Coghlan & MacKenzie, 2011; Patel, 2007; Roy, 2012; Vitali et al., 2012). These economic policies have had a number of domestic effects on UK and the US, chief among them being the deindustrialization of their economies, as they allowed and effectively encouraged Western corporations to bypass domestic labour markets and outsource their operations to other nation-states with abundant cheap labour and even fewer regulations (Ellwood, 2002). As a result, since the 1980s the UK and US economies have transformed from an industrial to a post-industrial service sector economy. (As of 2011, the service sector comprised 77.7% and 76.7% of the UK and US GDP respectively). Neoliberal globalization is far too complex a phenomenon to be discussed at any further length in this thesis. Nonetheless, it merits mention since it sets the context and justification for the socio-economic restructuring of the UK and the US of the last thirty years, in that major social policies since the 1980s have been premised on the discourse that the liberalization of global market forces is inevitable and beyond the control of any one nation-state (Friedman, 2004; Giddens, 1998; Gill, 2003). Therefore, in order to survive in the new global economy, i.e., maintain market credibility and attract foreign direct investment, UK and US governing, intellectual, and media elites have argued that the major components of their respective state, economy, and civil society need to facilitate market operations and help prepare citizens to better compete in the global markets. In the following section, I briefly examine a set of UK and US welfare and education policies from the last thirty years that are premised on the above argument, and I pay particular attention to the discourses used to justify these policies in order to help set up what

I refer to as discursive barometer that will help with the empirical component of this thesis, and that I will elaborate on in Chapter 4.<sup>17</sup>

### **1.3 Neoliberal Governance (We Will Force You To Be Free)**

Central to the neoliberal domestic project was and is the transformation of the welfare state. Upon taking office, Thatcher and Reagan began the dismantling of welfare institutions, arguing that they produced generations of lazy welfare-dependent citizens that were a drain on the economy (Harvey, 2005). Extolling the virtues of markets and competition, Thatcher and Reagan urged citizens to wean off their dependence on welfare services and invest in the property owning democracy (Hall, 2011). As Larner (2000) argues, the 1980s UK and US neoliberal discourses of the minimal state and individual responsibility marked the beginning of ‘market governance’, where both individuals and institutions are encouraged, if not coerced, to conform to the norms and values of the market. The subsequent Blair and Clinton administrations took a more moderate ‘third way’ approach, and implemented some important social reforms. These included increased funding to public education and the implementation of the minimum wage (in the UK), and the raising of the federal minimum wage (in the US). However, their ‘third-way’ approach stressed the importance of economic growth and entrepreneurship in solving social problems (Giddens, 1998),<sup>18</sup> and hence both governments continued the transformation of welfare by reducing its scope, and by transforming welfare institutions into market apparatuses that force welfare-dependents into the labour market (Cloward et al., 2001). In 1996, promising “to end welfare as we know it”, Clinton passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Act, which among other provisions included: ending welfare as an entitlement

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<sup>17</sup> While I am aware of, and sympathetic to, the critique that neoliberalism is filtered through, re-constituted, and contested across different localities, making the top-down ideal-typical description that I am describing in this chapter contestable (Wilson, 2004), I maintain that this critique overlooks the reality of the fact that no matter how unpopular and contested certain neoliberal policies may be, UK and US governing elites at both the national and local/city level have nonetheless implemented them, e.g., the UK’s higher education tuition fees that took effect in 2012, and the US’s 2008 unprecedented Wall St. bailout. For UK and US city level examples see Hayes & Home (2011) and Pedroni (2011). Overlooking this fact by overly focusing on minor instances of resistance that have not, to be blunt, really changed anything, seriously underestimates and even mystifies the role of elites and powerful vested interests in crafting and carrying out important and consequential policies.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Giddens’s “third way” can be considered a type of second-wave neoliberalism that unlike the first-wave neoliberalism of Thatcher and Reagan, emphasizes social justice discourses, but maintains that social justice can only be accomplished through competitive market mechanisms and concordant neoliberal policies (see Steger & Roy, 2010).

programme by requiring recipients to begin working after two years of receiving benefits, and placing a lifetime limit of five years on benefits paid by Federal funds. The following Bush administration passed into law the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act, which further increased the numbers of hours that welfare recipients are required to work in order to qualify for benefits (Parrott et al., 2007). While in the UK, in 1998, the Blair government passed the New Deal policy. This primarily focused on helping or ‘empowering’ welfare recipients to gain employment and enhance their human capital by providing state subsidized job training programmes, employment, and employment-derived tax incentives (Cochrane et al., 2001). The Brown government that followed continued with the Blair’s tax-credit incentive schemes, believing that welfare recipients can be financially incentivized to work and save to lift themselves out of poverty (Field, 2002). Overall, British welfare, Cooper (2008) argues, along with the nation state itself, has been transformed in accordance with the principles of neoliberalism. As he puts it, “contemporary welfare policy is that the work of welfare is now to produce, maintain, and if possible repair a workforce that can help this market-state be a contender in the new economic order of the 21st century” (2008, p. 36). This turn in welfare policy is known as workfare in the US, where the traditional Keynesian system which allotted rights-based benefits has been replaced with a Schumpeterian workfare-state that according to Jessop (1995) better suits the post-industrial neoliberal economy. While the old Keynesian system was designed to accompany an industrializing economy and was ambiguous about the causes of poverty, the current Schumpeterian system is meant to accompany a post-industrialized service economy where poverty is held to be the fault of the individual – one that can and must be remedied by individual effort (Cloward et al., 2001). In a neoliberal society, there are no social problems, only individual hurdles and challenges. Hence, while the Keynesian inspired governments of the post-war period could be thought of as having a paternalistic relationship with their citizens, neoliberal governments, according to Rose (1992), govern by enabling individuals to govern themselves and making them responsible and accountable for their own life choices and actions. As Gibson (2008, p. 12) puts it:

In summary, the Keynesian welfare state was to be dismantled and replaced by a Schumpeterian workfare, one where the state’s role is to



create the structures for the successful operation of the market in which individuals will increasingly need to compete and plan for themselves as individuals, or as individual family units.

Furthermore, along with welfare reform policies, education systems, argue Boyles (2008) and Gibson (2008), have become one of the primary carriers of the neoliberal political-economic project, such that, the UK and US governments of the last thirty years have maintained the neoliberal position that state institutions should both resemble corporate structures and facilitate market operations. Since Thatcher and Reagan, public education has been presented as failing to adequately prepare students to compete in the global market. To remedy this crisis, UK and US education policies, including the UK's 1988 Education Reform Act and 2008 Education and Skills Act, and the US's 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, and 2009 Race To The Top Initiative, have been implemented and had the effect of significantly marketizing and commodifying education. In both subtle and overt forms, these policies orient students, parents, teachers, and school administrators towards market subjectivities and neoliberal discursive practices of competition, consumption, and performativity. For example, the UK's 1988 Education Reform Act, and the US's 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, began the ranking and public listing of schools' performance measured primarily on completion rates (in the US) and by how well students perform on standardized tests (in the UK and the US). The supposedly objective measures produced by standardized testing are meant to provide parents with the necessary information to make a sound and rational choice of which schools best serve their children's needs. The rationale is that public funding for schools should be allocated based on market principles of cost effectiveness, accountability, and satisfying customer demand (i.e., parental demand for a quality education for their children). For example, Lawy & Tedder (2011, p. 2) argue in the UK context that, since 1997:

Further Education Colleges no longer received block grants but were funded on the basis of numbers and completion rates. Managers were now no longer solely concerned with the curriculum and pedagogy, but were charged with achieving effectiveness and efficiency at lower costs in a competitive and heavily marketised environment.

Additionally, in the US, contemporary education policies have also allowed for the growth of business-school partnerships where businesses and corporations provide funding to underfunded schools in exchange for publicity and advertisement space (Boyles 2005). Hewitt (2005) argues that this, can go a long way to fostering within students an unquestionable faith in, and inherit benevolence of, the corporate world. In anything from curriculum creation to fund-raising, corporations have and continue to step in where the state has neglected or been unable to fund services, and, in the US in particular have turned many schools into shopping malls where parents can purchase anything from chocolates to wrapping paper (Breault, 2005). As Molnar notes (1996, p. 25), “the problem with this is that students and teachers become subsumed in market logic that, in part because of its pervasiveness, appears (therefore becomes) impervious to critique”. Recent education acts like the UK’s 2010 Academies Act and the US’s 2009 Race to the Top initiative take the corporate infiltration of public schooling even further, and strongly in line with the neoliberal voucher conception of education, have facilitated the privatization of education where schools are entirely run by private institutions. These privatized academies or free-schools in the UK, and charter schools in the US, have the ancillary benefit of being able to hire non-unionized teaching staff, which if their expansion continues, may have the spiraling effect of depressing wages for all teachers and school staff.

In brief, these acts, which have been largely influenced and in some cases directly crafted by unelected business leaders, neoliberal think-tanks, and venture capitalists (Lipman, 2011), serve as pointed examples of neoliberal policy and governance, and have to varying degrees in respect to the UK and US education systems:

- Narrowly defined education values giving primacy to economic/instrumentalist purposes, and viewing education as job training for the global market (Robinson, 2000).
- Marketized schools, by making school rankings public, and expecting parents and students to become rational and responsible consumers of education (Gutstein, 2010).
- Corporatized schools, by introducing neo-managerial organizational strategies and accountability metrics where schools are to be run like

corporate entities, in part by having to compete with other schools for funding, and have their success and accountability measured by how well their students perform on standardized tests (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000; Valli et al., 2008).

- Begun the privatization of public schools, where entire schools are reconstructed on profit models, or where selective school functions are outsourced to the private sector, e.g., school-business partnerships (Boyles, 2005).

Other state institutions, like the UK and US criminal justice systems and military apparatuses, have undergone similar neoliberal reforms and transformations (Graham, 2010). I have chosen to specifically highlight the neoliberalization of UK and US welfare and education, in part because as stated earlier, the reformulation of these public institutions is central to the neoliberal domestic project (Braedly & Luxton, 2011; Gutstein, 2010), and because these institutions arguably most directly impact the lives of my youth participants. For instance, even if some of my participants do not in any way directly benefit from welfare provisions, they, unlike previous generations, have been surrounded by an unprecedented mass-media-led anti-welfare/state discourse that essentially stigmatizes the poor and unfortunate, and promotes a very unsympathetic and anti-empathetic disposition that is a key feature of neoliberal ideology as described in the previous sections. Education, which should also be seen as a sub-branch of the welfare-state, has undergone an extensive restructuring that has primarily impacted the lives of the post-1980s generations. That said, while there are numerous similarities between the UK's and US's neoliberal public-sector reforms, there are several key distinctions. For example, even with the recent election of Conservative David Cameron, the UK still has, compared to the US, a fairly generous welfare state that includes a universal healthcare system and relatively affordable higher education (although this may soon change given the current political climate). Conversely, the US, even under the recent half-hearted attempts by the Obama administration, failed to institute a single-payer universal healthcare system, and the costs for higher education continue to rise making it realistically unattainable for working-class families, and increasingly unattainable for middle-

class families as well.<sup>19</sup> However, it should also be noted that both administrations, in light of the current global recession, continue to resort to neoliberal policies. These include, among others, the implementation of quantitative easing to stabilize major banks and financial markets (Mason, 2010), the lowering of taxes on the wealthy, and the implementation of fiscal austerity measures that are cutting state funding for their welfare and education institutions (McNihol et al., 2010; O’Grady, 2010). In the final two sections of this chapter I describe some of the ways that neoliberalism has impacted the urban landscapes and cultural spheres that are inhabited by contemporary UK and US young people.

#### **1.4 Neoliberal Urbanization and Non-Profits**

The implementation of the UK and US neoliberal policies that I have described thus far, have had a particularly noticeable and transformative effect on the landscape, social structures, and economies of UK and US cities. Extolling the neoliberal virtues of ‘decentralization’ and ‘localism’ post-1980s UK and US central governments, including the current Cameron and Obama administrations, have rolled back state funding in favour of decentralized approaches. According to these discourses, local city and town governments have to make do and figure out their budgets with less federal monies, based on the theory that decreased federal funding will generate civic enterprise and social responsibility (Featherstone et al., 2012). In the UK, Featherstone et al., (2012, p. 177) describe the Coalition government’s 2010 Green Paper as:

A radical shift in the way in which the local is envisioned in UK policy discourse and practice. This underlying agenda for a ‘truly radical localisation’ (Conservative Party 2010, 14) lies at the centre of the UK Coalition government’s political agenda, with decentralisation ‘described as the biggest thing that government can do to build the Big Society’ (HM Government 2010, 2). This articulation of localism is taking place in a climate of pronounced austerity as the Conservative-led Coalition government has enacted a programme to dramatically curtail government spending.

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<sup>19</sup> University tuition in the US has increased dramatically during the 1981-2005 time frame. For example, state universities have increased their tuition by 472%, while private universities have increased their tuition by 419% (Adler, 2010).

Moreover, as industrial jobs were being outsourced from cities like Detroit and Manchester to developing countries due in large part to neoliberal trade policies, city governments during the last thirty years have, nonetheless, turned to neoliberal policy prescriptions to restructure their fledgling economies (Harvey, 2005). For example, in an effort to attract financial capital, policies implemented in major world-cities like London and Los Angeles neglected much of their industrial sectors, and instead offered tax breaks and subsidies to non-industry based corporations, curbed their budget deficits to appease the bond and credit agencies, outsourced many of their municipal (and increasingly their education) services to private companies, and instituted an elaborate system of private-public partnerships (Brenner, 2006; Featherstone et al., 2011; Harvey, 2005). This has led to the current division of major cities along class lines, where the city's wealthy residents enjoy extravagant and increasingly gated communities, private municipal services, and twenty-four hour armed protection. As Adler (2010, p. 70) describes in the US context, "City governments across the country now provide packages of services and taxes in the form of Business Improvement Districts, which are tailored to the means of the neighbourhoods that finance them, so that no subsidization of the poor by the wealthy occurs". Meanwhile, the majority of urban dwellers have to pay increasing fees and taxes to municipal services with declining quality, and deal with ever increasing rent, food, and transport costs as their wages stagnate or decline, and as unemployment and crime rise. Incidentally, the discourses of responsibility, individualism, and freedom that neoliberals invoke often obscure the more authoritarian and disciplinary arm of neoliberal policies, which have largely criminalized poverty and anti-corporate democratic dissent (Graham, 2011). For example, the US boasts the highest incarceration rate in both the developed and developing world, while the UK has, after the US, the highest incarceration rate in the developed world.<sup>20</sup> Armed with the latest military technology and surveillance equipment, sold to them by private corporations, police forces across UK and US cities monitor, track, and target urban dwellers of mostly non-elite backgrounds, and continue to militarize urban space (Graham, 2010). As Davis (1992, p. 155) in describing Los Angeles argues:

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<sup>20</sup> Retrieved from:  
<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/30/zakaria-incarceration-nation-2/>

We do indeed now live in “fortress cities” brutally divided into “fortified cells” of affluence and “places of terror” where police battle the criminalized poor. [...] The old liberal attempts at social control, which at least tried to balance repression with reform, have been superseded by open social warfare that pits the interests of the middle class against the welfare of the urban poor. In cities like Los Angeles, on the hard edge of postmodernity, architecture and the police apparatus are being merged to an unprecedented degree.

In between these militarizing enclaves exist a number of non-profit organizations that have proliferated since the onset of neoliberalism. Strapped for funds, and preoccupied increasingly with security, the non-profit sector has stepped in where the state has rolled back. Offering services ranging from healthcare to youth gang prevention, the demand for the services that non-profit organizations offer has increased as the effects of neoliberal policies become more apparent. Increasingly, however, the non-profit sector has itself undergone neoliberal inflection, as in a constant struggle for funding, a significant number of non-profit organizations have adopted the organizational methods and logics of for-profit corporate structures (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). This includes, for example, the use of excessive marketing strategies to secure funding from large corporate donors (Franklin, 2002; Kerlin, 2006), which for those non-profits working with youth, often means touting their college prep and job training programmes that offer to prepare disadvantaged young people to compete in the ‘business world’. This shift to neoliberal market-based solutions to social problems positions the non-profit sector as yet another cog in the neoliberal machine, which, as Dempsey (2009) argues, takes our attention away from viewing social problems as structural problems in need of systematic and collective solutions. While some non-profit organizations can resist this shift, and offer a space for community and non-market solutions to social problems, a significant portion of the non-profit sector has yielded to market pressures. This trend is likely to be amplified by the ongoing economic recession and cuts to public spending.

## 1.5 Contemporary Youth Culture Under Neoliberalism

Lastly, neoliberalism has also significantly shaped the youth cultural sphere that contemporary young people are predominantly exposed to, and voluntarily engage with. Facilitated in large part by a combination of neoliberal deregulation and trade policies, as described above, and economic imperatives, transnational corporations have conglomerated and become so massive that they are now themselves part of the cultural zeitgeist. The McDonalds arches, the Nike Swoosh, or the Apple logo, for example, are now permanently embedded into the collective cognitive framework of the majority of Western and increasingly non-Western consumers (Beader et al., 2009; Jun et al., 2007). And, to be certain, even a casual read of the last fifteen or so years of the leading business newspapers, magazines, and academic journals, e.g., the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and the *Journal for Consumer Marketing*, will indicate that this has been a deliberate marketing strategy on the part of corporations and marketing firms. As Klein (2000) argues, the 1980s neoliberalization of the US (and I would add the UK) economy and accompanying recession, forced hitherto prominent corporations to compete with cheaper big box stores who were selling their own generic products. As a result, marketing companies restructured their approaches, and promoted their corporate clients not as producers of everyday commodities, but as unique sellers of dreams, experiences, and lifestyles (Klein, 2000). Many commercial industries like fashion, sports, car, and food corporations operate under what economists refer to as an oligopoly: a competitive market condition in which a handful of firms produce nearly identical products as that of their competitors. Therefore, to stay in business, individual corporations have to differentiate themselves through brands, labels, and mass advertising. For example, H&M, TopShop, Zara, American Apparel, and the Gap all sell relatively similar clothing to youth demographics: what is different, however, are mostly the labels and marketing approaches. For, in order to maintain their market share, these companies have to keep the costs of production low, but also have to market ideas and identities, not products; the manufacturing of which is outsourced and contracted out to elaborate networks of second and third parties, e.g., free trade or export processing zones (Klein, 2000). Thus, Starbucks, for example, does not sell coffee like Dunkin Donuts or Pret does; it sells community and ambiance, i.e., 'the third space'. Nike does not sell shoes; it sells athleticism and competitive drive. Furthermore, while financial investment in

traditional forms of manufacturing and infrastructure has dramatically declined during the neoliberal era, Harvey (2005, p. 158) points out that “interestingly, the main arenas of production that gained were the emergent cultural industries (films, videos, video games, music, advertising, art shows), which use IT as a basis for the innovation and the marketing of new products”.

What this all means for youth culture is that contemporary culture industries have merged to labyrinthine extents with a plethora of non-media commercial industries to create an omnipresent consumer media culture that relentlessly targets youth demographics (Kenway & Bullen, 2001), and co-opts all forms of youth styles, trends, and music. From sponsoring art exhibits, music concerts, and fashion shows, to enforcing legal restrictions over the use of trademarked cultural artefacts, to deciding on the content and distribution of music, films, books, and television shows, there are fewer and fewer spaces left in contemporary UK and US society where youth cultural production is not controlled or mediated by a handful of transnational corporations (McGuigan, 2010a). Correspondingly, the discourses disseminated by this corporatized media-culture tend to overwhelmingly valorise self-interestedness, competition, upward mobility, individual wealth, entrepreneurialism, and consumerist forms of political and civic practice, all of which are congruent with neoliberal political-economy (McGuigan, 2010). As a result, today’s young people are subject to a constant bombardment of branded sounds, images, and even tastes and smells that entice them to consume and tell them what to aspire to and believe in, but not to question the night-time production of those branded commodities or to examine their underlying ideological discourses. With perhaps some hyperbole, it can be claimed that most young people are literally immersed in this culture. As Klein (2000, p. 131) describes:

The Kinkos, Starbucks, and Blockbuster clerks buy their uniform of kakis and white or blue shirts at the Gap; the “Hi! Welcome to the Gap!” greeting cheer is fuelled by Starbucks double espressos; the resumes that got them the jobs were designed at Kinko’s on friendly Macs, in 12-point Helvetica on Microsoft Word. The troops show up for work smelling of CK One (except in Starbucks, where the colognes and perfumes are thought to compete with the “romance of coffee”



aroma), their faces freshly scrubbed with Body Shop Blue Corn Mask, leaving apartments furnished with IKEA self-assembled bookcases and coffee tables.

This is not to suggest that young people are shaped inexorably by this rampant and omnipresent corporate media-culture. The 1930s hypodermic needle or magic bullet model of the media has been largely discredited, but that said, at least two things need to be taken into consideration. The first is that contemporary corporate media and advertisements are unprecedented in scope, size, space, and scientific development and in no way resemble the corporate advertising of the past. By conservative estimates, Western populations are now exposed to anywhere from 1500-3000 scientifically honed corporate messages a day (Fogel, 2006), while corporations continue to research, enhance, and use psychological marketing and publicity strategies that target individual consumers at the unconscious and subliminal level so as to incite desire, and override their rationality in order to mold them into eternal and loyal consumers (Crisp, 2004; Olson, 2009; Patel, 2010). As Rowan (2008) reports, corporate-sponsored neuroscientists are in hot pursuit of the holy grail of marketing; the buy button. Researchers are using MRI machines (originally meant to scan for tumours and brain damage) and other sophisticated tests and instruments to carve out the most objective ways to predict which logos, sounds, and adverts will most trigger an unconscious/automatic cognitive response from consumers. Given that advertising and these types of research cost corporations billions of dollars, an Occam's razor deduction would conclude that corporations would not spend billions on it if it did not work to gain them a competitive advantage and satisfy their bottom line. In other words, modern advertising and media does not work like a magic bullet fired from the media gun directly into the consumer, it works more like a sawn-off shotgun, scatter shooting multiple messages in the direction of the consumer with hopes of hitting a target. Hence, the potential socializing effects of media-culture should not be underestimated.

## **1.6 Political Messages: There is No Alternative**

*“The role of the media in contemporary politics forces us to ask: What kind of a world and what kind of a society we want to live in, and in particular in what sense of democracy do we want this to be a democratic society”. –Noam Chomsky (2002, p. 9)*

*Democracy is in the worst interest of national goals and the modern world is far too complex to allow the man or woman on the street, to interfere in any way with its management. - Time Magazine (1996)*

In addition to disseminating consumer ideologies, contemporary media-cultural oligopolies, monopolies, and conglomerates also disseminate the ideology that free-market capitalism and republican forms of democracy are the only viable political-economic arrangements. Thus, media-cultural corporations help to perpetuate the hegemony of neoliberalism by circumventing criticism of it on at least two levels. At the first level they saturate audiences with discourses and practices that affirm and legitimize capitalism and hierarchical forms of institutional organization. Such discourses stress self-interestedness, competition, greed, an appeal to and valorisation of corporate hierarchy and authority, and an overall uncritical culture of hyper-consumerism. In contemporary neoliberal societies, this hyper-consumer culture stretches to the extent that even political and civic participation is conflated with consumerist practices like voting heavily marketed candidates into power, or other acts of what can be termed as politics from a distance, e.g. digital petitions, donations to NGOs, or ethical consumption. As Chomsky (2002, p. 22) argues:

The people in the public relations industry aren't there for the fun of it. They're doing work. They're trying to instill the right values. In fact, they have a conception of what democracy ought to be: It ought to be a system in which the specialized class is trained to work in the service of the masters, the people who own the society. The rest of the population ought to be deprived of any form of organization, because organization just causes trouble. They ought to be sitting alone in front of the TV and having drilled into their heads the message, which says, the only value in life is to have more commodities or live like that rich

middle class family you're watching and to have nice values like harmony and Americanism. That's all there is in life.<sup>21</sup>

At the second level, if the first level of inculcation is not achieved, and individuals become critical of the established order, then, in constantly promoting the idea that there is no alternative to the established societal order, and in reducing political discourse to images, sound-bites, catchphrases, vacuous slogans, and personalities, media-culture corporations help to stymie the political-economic imagination of the public. This is not to suggest that corporate media outlets are uncritical, but rather that the field of criticism is narrowed and constrained by the opposing views of elite interests and dominant groups (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Western mainstream media debates over major issues like war and education, financial, or welfare reform, for example, are framed and inflected by state-corporate interests that often obscure non-elite criticisms, alternatives, and minority voices (Chomsky, 2002; Coleman, 2012; deMause & Rendall, 2007; Goodman & Goodman, 2007; Jackson, 2011).<sup>22</sup> Alternatives to hierarchical institutional organizational forms such as workplace democracy are rarely showcased by mainstream media with the occasional exception featuring a usually condescending story about an upstart worker's co-op.

However, it is not the case that political-economic alternatives are non-existent, or that Francis Fukuyama (1992) is correct in famously declaring the end of history. Millions of individual activists and organizations both in Western and non-Western countries continue to actively struggle against neoliberal hegemony, in some cases in the face of outright violent state-corporate repression. For example, Klein (2000), Graeber (2009:2004), and Patel (2010) point to several anarchist and anti-neoliberal groups from all over the world which are not only fiercely anti-neoliberal, but which are also made up of dedicated practitioners of alternative political-economic practices based on values of altruism, generosity,

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<sup>21</sup> Chomsky (2002) draws this conclusion from reviewing state policy papers, business literature, and influential papers by leading theorists of 20<sup>th</sup> century US democracy including Walter Lippman, Edward Bernays, and George Kennan (all of whom showed contempt for the general public, and saw propaganda as an essential tool needed to check the democratic impulses of the masses).

<sup>22</sup> In the US, for instance, studies by the media watch-group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), have repeatedly shown that mass-media news outlets like major newspapers and television news shows tend to predominantly invite elite pundits, academics, and politicians to debate and discuss major policy issues. These people tend to express opinions that favor elite interests which often go against public opinion (see <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=12>).

cooperation, and direct/participatory and non-hierarchical forms of democracy and economics. Other alternative and recent political developments include the election of, and popular support for, several South American left-leaning Presidents who are staunchly opposed to the Washington Consensus. Alternative institutional organizational projects continue to spring up all over the Western and Non-Western world from the factory takeovers in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to the participatory budgeting practices of the residents of Porto Alegre Brazil, to the workplace democratic practices of IT firms in California (e.g., SemCo Enterprises). However, even if one does not agree with these or other non-elite criticisms and alternatives, their erosion from or demonization by mainstream mass media (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) has, as stated earlier, a potentially debilitating effect on the public's political and economic imagination, and on their abilities to conceive of a genuine alternative to the dominant neoliberal model. As Habermas (1991) and McChesney & Nichols (2009) argue, our democratic public spheres continue, and at a historically unprecedented pace, to be co-opted, cheapened, and stripped of substance by media conglomerates, all while the lively, diverse, open, and free presses that informed generations of radical democratic activism throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries continue to disappear, be bought out, or worse still, turned into manufacturers of ridiculous infotainment that celebrates the opulence of the rich and famous. One can hardly go a day using the tube or buses in London, for example, without spotting leftover Sun or Metro newspapers featuring the latest celebrity gossip. And in Los Angeles, for example, and as likely in other parts of the US, there are at least four evening television shows specifically dedicated to celebrity gossip in daily circulation across the channels of the major television networks (e.g., Fox's *TMZ*, NBC's *Access Hollywood*, NBC's *Extra*, and CBS's *Entertainment Tonight*). The few independent non-corporate media that report non-elite interests and voices are marginalized, constantly under-funded, and often have to compete with the highly psychologically developed and far reaching spin of state departments and their ever expanding corporate media conveyer belts (Goodman & Goodman, 2007). It cannot be stressed enough that the range of ideological messages that publics are exposed to via mass media is becoming narrower and narrower (McGuigan, 2010:2010a). As Kellner (1998a, p. 11) in the US context argues, "giant media

conglomerates are producing a new world culture that is in fact a rather shallow reflection of the American Way of Life”.

How contemporary UK and US young people engage with, reject, or are influenced by this neoliberal consumer media-culture at the micro subjective and socio-cognitive level will be theorized, explored, and discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. For now, it is sufficient to argue that at the macro-level, neoliberalism, in addition to the economic, welfare, and education institutions, urban landscapes, and civil society institutions thus far discussed, has also, and to a significant extent, inflected the major cultural institutions and cultural and political-philosophical discourses which they disseminate, and which UK and US young people are largely surrounded by.

### **1.7 Summary**

In sum, I have briefly reviewed some of the intellectual history of neoliberalism, and described how neoliberal theories and ideology have inflected some of the major societal structures, institutions, and discourses of the UK and the US, creating a plethora of hegemonic constellations that converge to a significant extent to legitimate and promote neoliberal discourses and practices. The contemporary world that UK and US young people inhabit is underpinned by a rather disconcerting and astonishingly pervasive political-economic and socio-cultural structure that values unrestrained capital accumulation and self-interest above all else, and which jealously pushes away alternative modes of thinking (Patel, 2010). Hence, despite the current global crisis in neoliberal capitalism, the reports of the demise of neoliberalism have been greatly exaggerated (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). Neoliberal intellectuals, international business leaders, and the other components of the hegemonic constellations described, have, at least for now, won the wars of position and movement (Hall, 2011). However, it is not my intention to argue that the disparate institutions that I have discussed, and the people that manage or work for them, or even the everyday people that they subject, have completely and without contestation adopted neoliberal ideology. As Gramsci (1971) argues, society is marked by a constant dynamism of competing forces. Indeed, many factions and individuals operating within the political, economic, education, and media-cultural spheres, disagree with the neoliberal paradigm, and actively work against it. Examples of this can include: nationalist

elites who push forward protectionist economic policies that fly in the face of the free-market globalization paradigm, conservative educationalists who believe education should emphasize the classic humanities instead of a narrow economic pedagogy, and left-leaning artists who navigate through the corporate controlled culture-industries to spread counter-hegemonic messages.

However, while neoliberal hegemony is being constantly contested by both internal and external social forces, it is still the dominant paradigm of contemporary UK and US society, which is puzzling given that the benefits of neoliberal policies have gone mostly to the wealthy sectors. To be certain, the last thirty years of neoliberal policies are strongly correlated to increasing levels of global and domestic social inequality where the highest UK and US earners continue to make record incomes, while those on low incomes continue to see their wages fall and their benefits cut. For instance, in the UK, Elliot and Curtis (2009, p. 1) report that:

Overall, the poorest 20% saw real income fall by 2.6% in the three years to 2007-08, while those in the top fifth of the income distribution enjoyed a rise of 3.3%. As a result, income inequality at the end of Labour's 11th year in power was higher than at any time during Margaret Thatcher's premiership.

And in the US, a study by economist Emanuel Saez (2009, p. 2) reports that, “the top decile share in 2007 is equal to 49.7 percent, a level higher than any other year since 1917, and even surpasses 1928, the peak of the stock market bubble in the ‘roaring’ 1920s”. Congruently, union membership in both the UK and US continues to dramatically decline (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2008; Greenhouse, 2011), and unions have lost much of their historic bargaining power and hard won benefits as the majority of industrial jobs continue to be outsourced to developing countries. In the US for example, a study by Bronfenbrenner (2009) reports that US employers have been emboldened by the current economic recession to take more aggressive and punitive actions against workers attempting to organize.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> According to Bronfenbrenner (2009), more than 70% of employers hold one-on-one closed-door meetings with employees during a unionization drive. 54% of employers threaten workers in such meetings, while 57% threaten to close the worksite. Moreover, 34% of employers fire workers

Incidentally, both the UK and the US currently rank amongst the lowest in measures for socio-economic mobility in the developed world, where young people in particular are finding it difficult to climb the social ladder as compared to populations from other developed countries that have implemented less extreme neoliberal reforms (Elliott, 2010; Harvey, 2005).

Thus, as mentioned in the preface to this thesis, this begs the question, why is it that the majority of the UK and US population have not mobilized to seriously challenge the neoliberal order, even though significantly high proportions of those populations continue to be disadvantaged by neoliberal policies and practices? In the following chapter, I outline a series of theories that can be used to explain how neoliberalism came to be supported, or at least not significantly contested, by a majority population, and lay out a theoretical framework that is designed to comprehensively investigate the reproduction of neoliberal discourses and practices.

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during a union campaign, 47% of employers threaten to cut wages and benefits, and 75% of employers bring in outside anti-union consultants.

## **Chapter Two**

# **Towards A Theory of Neoliberal Social Reproduction**

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*“Our task, surely, is to examine how consciousness, sentiment, and attachment are constituted under prevailing conditions; why class has become a less plausible basis for self-recognition and action when growing disparities of wealth and power would point to the inverse”.* (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000, p. 300)

*“For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it”.* -George Eliot, Middlemarch

In the previous chapter, I briefly described some of the broad and converging dimensions of neoliberalism that help to explain its hegemony at the macro-structural and institutional levels. However, this provides an account of only one side of the hegemonic coin. To understand how hegemonic political-economic forms endure and reproduce themselves, it is important to understand how it is that everyday people, particularly those of non-elite backgrounds and those who are not situated within the upper-income brackets of society, consciously and unconsciously recreate social discourses and practices that maintain, support, and ultimately reproduce specific forms of political-economic organization. In other words, we need a theory of social reproduction that can help to describe and explain how the current neoliberal conjuncture has been accepted, or at least not significantly contested at the micro-subjective level, by the majority of the UK and US population.

To this end, this chapter will chronologically review, critique, and assess some of the key arguments from some of the more prominent theoretical frameworks of the last seventy years of Western social theory. These can be used to describe, explain, and research the phenomenon of capitalist ‘social reproduction’, where social reproduction is defined as, “all the mechanisms, processes, and practices by which multiple social hierarchies, divisions and relations of wealth, power, and influence are sustained and re-created over time” (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009, p. 86). The theoretical frameworks under review in this chapter can be loosely categorized as following three broad approaches. First, the political-economy approach, represented here by the classic Frankfurt School, is concerned to explore the dynamics between the state, the economy, and dominant cultural institutions and their socializing effects on individual subjects. Second,



the culturalist approach, represented here by the classic Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, is concerned with a micro analysis of how individuals produce, decode, use, and interpret media culture. The third, is what Kenway & Bullen (2000, p. 28), refer to as a, “both/and approach, which is sensitive to the vertical dimensions of power and ideology and to the horizontal dimensions of contexts and everyday life”, represented here by Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu. These three overarching approaches can be used to explain and describe different aspects of how the current neoliberal conjuncture came to be supported and reproduced by majority populations, and can be used to investigate the micro level effects of neoliberalism on contemporary UK and US young people. By drawing on all three approaches, this chapter will propose a reformulated ‘both/and’ approach that utilizes and synthesizes lessons, arguments, and theoretical concepts from each approach, and couples them with specific socio-cognitive and political philosophical insights and concepts that are often overlooked, yet I would suggest crucial to a more comprehensive understanding of neoliberal social reproduction. This reformulated approach will serve as the theoretical guide for the rest of this thesis, and will inform the research methodologies and data analysis discussed in Chapter 4.

## **2.1 False Consciousness and the Frankfurt School: The Relevance of Dead Germans**

*“Socialism never took root in America because the poor see themselves not as an exploited proletariat, but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires”.*

-John Steinbeck<sup>24</sup>

*“Why do certain definite changes of man’s character take place from one historical epoch to another? Why is the spirit of the Renaissance different from that of the Middle Ages? Why is the character structure of man in monopolistic capitalism different from that in the nineteenth century? Social psychology has to explain why new abilities and new passions, bad or good, come into existence”.*

-Erich Fromm (2001, p. 9)

During the 1930s, a group of exiled German sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, and literary scholars collectively known as the Frankfurt School fled to the United States. Disheartened by what they saw as the totalitarian nature of both German and US societies, members of the Frankfurt School sought to explain

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Wrigth (2006, p. 177).

why the working classes of the industrialized West failed, among other things, to instigate a proletarian revolution. By combining the psychological insights of Sigmund Freud with the historical-materialist perspective of Karl Marx, the Frankfurt School developed and coined 'critical theory'- a broad interdisciplinary political-economy approach that analyzes how macro-power structures shape and mediate the cultural practices, experiences, and consciousness of individuals. What follows is a brief overview of some of the main arguments that are most relevant to contemporary Western society, as presented by leading members of the classic Frankfurt School - Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse - who explained US capitalist hegemony in terms of interrelated ideological, structural, and psychological factors.

In 1944, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno published their seminal piece *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the landmark chapter titled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they argued that post-war US capitalism has in essence created a techno-bureaucratic Weberian 'iron cage' that attempts to trap individuals (particularly those of the middle- and working-classes) into perpetual cycles of alienating work and consumption. US popular culture, they argued, in the form of television shows, films, fashion, literature, art, and music, is for the most part industrialized, standardized, and commoditized state-corporate propaganda that promotes consumer capitalism and societal conformity while simultaneously distracting the public from the source of their economic hardships and alienating work. Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1993, p. 1) opened the chapter by arguing:

The sociological theory that the loss of the support of objectively established religion, the dissolution of the last remnants of pre-capitalism, together with technological and social differentiation or specialization, have led to cultural chaos is disproved every day; for culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system.

In the rest of the chapter Horkheimer and Adorno described how market logic creates systemic rules that inflect cultural values, artefacts, and aesthetics to the needs of capitalism, thereby helping to turn critical individual citizens into a mass of intellectually passive consumers. Starting from the classic Marxist idea that ideological obfuscations are rooted in the material structures of capitalist production (Villa, 2008), Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1993) argued that culture and media industries, like film, music, and television, disseminate an array of ideological discourses that serve to reinforce the capitalist order and agenda while eroding alternative political-economic possibilities. The formulaic Hollywood films, generic pop-music, and banal television shows, they argued, are saturated with affirming US state-capitalist ideal discourses of rugged individualism, private property, financial success, meritocracy, and anti-communism. Audiences of these texts are therefore left with a rather narrow, distorted, corporatized, and conformist reality; characterized by the presumption that one should not resist or challenge the political-economic order since there exist equal opportunities for all to prosper from. As Villa (2008) argues, anyone that thinks that Horkheimer and Adorno overstated this claim need only look at contemporary Western movies and television shows which continue to pronounce the explicit American Dream thesis that with enough hard work, persistence, and a little luck, absolutely anyone can become rich and famous regardless of their race, class, or gender. Access to success is perceived to be democratic (i.e., open to everyone), and, therefore, supersedes structural inequality. As Villa (2008, p. 154-155) argues, “with one ideological catchphrase-endlessly recycled in TV and movie dramatizations of individuals who ‘overcome the odds’, the grounding myth of society is established. An entire landscape of structural inequality and injustices is banished from our horizon”.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/1993), while the ideological dissemination of the culture industries is meant to be manipulative and serve ruling class interests, the individuals that run these industries are guided by structural imperatives, not by malice or necessarily by conspiratorial coordination.<sup>25</sup> As a rule, corporations are structured to behave in a strictly

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<sup>25</sup> Culture industries, like other modern corporations, are legally structured in such a way that their managers have to uphold practices that promote the interests of their respective corporations and their shareholders ahead of competing interests. In practice this translates into decisions made by

instrumental rationalist pursuit of what they perceive as their own self-interests that require constant economic growth and the elimination of the competition. The corporate structure thus exerts a metaphysical level of agency that guides the behaviour of the individuals that run it to actions that will ensure its survival amongst competing interests, and secure its owner's profits. Cultural-media corporations, argued Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/1993), are no different, and are embedded with these same economic structural drives that lead to monopolistic behaviours (e.g., the merging of Warner Brothers with Time Inc. to create Time Warner), interlocking directorates with other business corporations, and the dissemination of self-serving ideologies.

The dependence of the most powerful broadcasting company on the electrical industry, or of the motion picture industry on the banks, is characteristic of the whole sphere, whose individual branches are themselves economically interwoven. All are in such close contact that the extreme concentration of mental forces allows demarcation lines between different firms and technical branches to be ignored (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1993, p. 2).

The subsequent and highly influential theses of Mills' (1956) *The Power Elite*, and Herman & Chomsky's (2002) *Manufacturing Consent*, tease out and further empirically validate different aspects of this argument,<sup>26</sup> but like Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1993), Mills (1956) and Herman & Chomsky (2002), essentially argue that mass media-cultural corporations monopolize and/or become interlocked with other private and state institutions. These in turn are all structurally driven and designed to spread ideologically charged discourses that consequently endorse, legitimate, and promote the interests of the ruling classes,

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corporate executives that have and continue to lead to mass lay offs, and to a disregard for regulations concerning securities fraud, human rights, worker safety, public health, and or environmental standards (Achbar et al., 2003; Patel, 2010; Taibbi, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Mills (1956) analyzed the concentration of power in the US, demonstrating that the control of the major executive, economic, and military branches lies with a handful of interlocking elite families and individuals. Herman & Chomsky (2002) argue that the corporate news media in the US effectively act as a propaganda arm for the state and US Pentagon that serves to protect, justify, and legitimate the interests of society's elite. These same arguments apply to all contemporary capitalist societies controlled by a now mostly transnational capitalist class (see Domhoff, 2009; Rothkopf, 2008; Sklair, 2000).

which happen to own and control most of society (Domhoff, 2009; Rothkopf, 2008).

In addition to arguing that structural imperatives push corporations to disseminate consumer ideologies that are in tune with their economic interests, Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994) argued that culture industries work on a psychological dimension to target individuals at the unconscious libidinal level. This Freudian inspired aspect of critical theory was developed further by Herbert Marcuse to describe the social-psychological component of capitalist hegemony. In his classic text *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse (1964) argued that media and culture industries prey on the individual's libidinal psychological drives in order to elicit consumerist and conformist behaviours. According to Marcuse, the seemingly omnipresent, insidious, and subliminal advertising produced and spread by profit oriented media-culture industries is designed to incite desire in audiences for any number of manufactured wants and needs. These manipulative and highly psychologically developed advertisements thus attempt to socialize individuals into consumptive modes that, Marcuse argued, can trap people in perpetual cycles of arousal, desire, consumption, and frustration. Marcuse termed these perpetual traps of consumption 'repressive desublimation'— a social-psychological process that is promoted and generated by late capitalist societies, and internalized by their members. To wit, while early capitalist societies were characterized by a protestant work ethic that promoted ascetic values and sublimating practices, late capitalist societies implicitly and explicitly encourage their members to give in to their unconscious and repressed libidinal desires, but only through socially sanctioned consumerist practices; such as the consumption and fetishization of commodities like jewellery, clothing, pornography, sports cars, or violent video games. However, once purchased and used, these consumer goods fail to fully deliver the satisfaction and gratification that followed from the initial point of purchase, leaving consumers perpetually frustrated, and requiring them to consume more and more items in order to fulfil their initial consumptive high.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, according to Marcuse (1964), desublimation via consumption is inherently repressive because it generates a condition that incapacitates critical

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<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that terms like shopaholism and shopping therapy have become popular concepts in Western societies, while compulsive buying is now considered a growing and global psychiatric disorder which researchers specifically attribute to the cultural norms, values, and mechanisms of market-based societies (Black, 2007).

thought by fostering the illusion of material well-being, individual originality, creative self-expression, and freedom. Hence, Marcuse (1964) noted that, rather than resisting state-corporate rule, Western populations, and in particular Western working-classes, are instead manipulated by the hypnotic powers of mass media, and washed in a state of 'euphoric unhappiness', mistakenly conflating the freedom to choose between products in the market, with more genuine and substantive freedom.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, the environmental impact, labour exploitation, or structural inequalities associated with the production and consumption of those goods and services should at best be an afterthought.

Whatever critical culture does develop to challenge the corporate-state order, like the 1960s environmentalist, feminist, and civil rights movements, Marcuse (1964) warned that the inclusive and economic rationalist nature of the culture industry means that it co-opts even counter and sub-cultures, strips them of their revolutionary potential, and sells it back to the public in sanitized or banal forms. Thus, according to Marcuse (1964), if not fully resisted and refused, the continuing corporate standardization and sanitation of culture, coupled with the spreading of repressive desublimation via insidious and psychologically honed consumerist discourses of mass media, may lead to a one-dimensional society of alienating work and vapid consumption. In this one-dimensional society, consumer ideology becomes so cognitively ingrained into the public, and thus hegemonic, that an appetite for critical resistance to it becomes non-existent, or what little of it remains becomes ineffective in changing or seriously challenging the status quo. Therefore, instead of creating a state of genuine freedom, advanced capitalism and the consumer ideology and practices that it generates, disseminates, and depends on represent merely another and even more effective form of totalitarian social control; i.e., a form of totalitarianism that is largely self-imposed and more reminiscent of Huxley's *Brave New World* than Orwell's *1984*, as individuals in some form or another become complicit in, and content with their own domination. According to Marcuse (1964, p. 7-8) this form of totalitarianism

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<sup>28</sup> Among the other central interests of the members of the classic Frankfurt School, was a focus in exploring the specific kinds of freedom that advanced capitalist societies practiced and promoted. They generally argued that capitalist societies and their corresponding consumerist norms and values were premised on negative liberty (freedom from external restraints e.g., the state, church), but at the cost of positive freedom (freedom to fulfil one's potential) which is significantly inhibited by the social inequalities inherent in, and caused by, capitalist economic structures and social relations (Fromm, 2001).

consists of an environment where all human relations are mediated by commodity and exchange relations and values, and where:

Liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination. The range of choices open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but what can be chosen and what is chosen by the individual. Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of alienation. And the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy, it only testifies to the efficacy of the controls.

Overall, the major insights from classic ‘critical theory’ that I have discussed, as developed by Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, in summary, are that the state-corporate nexus operates on an ideological, structural, and psychological level to inculcate the public with a false consciousness; creating a state of cultural hegemony that mostly benefits the interests of the state-corporate elite. By distracting the public (with a variety of mostly manufactured and false needs and mundane entertainment) from the source of their economic hardships, the capitalist ruling class maintains power and domination over an otherwise aloof, apathetic, and complicit mass that is mostly accepting of, or comfortable with the status-quo.

There is certainly much to critique about the classic Frankfurt School thesis. For instance, their theories take an overtly pessimistic outlook that all but denies the possibilities for popular culture to serve as a force for progressive social change. Their over-reliance on elaborate theoretical constructs comes at the expense of comprehensive empirical support. And most notably, they seem to under appreciate the role that human agency and more emancipatory forms of reason like communicative rationality play in influencing socio-structural and institutional arrangements (Habermas, 1991), relying instead on a deterministic view of the role of instrumental reason in shaping modern societies. However, for all of their faults, pessimism, and rhetorical exaggerations, there are a number of things that the classic Frankfurt School got right, which for the purposes of this

these are worth taking into consideration.

First, as they predicted, the corporatization and consolidation of media-culture is unprecedented in scope with only a handful of corporations controlling just about everything that Western and increasingly non-Western audiences read, listen to, and watch (Shah, 2009). Second, the content of most media-culture artefacts is predominantly composed of discourses that promote rigid individualism, narcissism, consumerism, competition, and fame, and is seemingly devoid of discourses that valorise community, empathy, altruism, and genuine forms of democracy (Babe, 2009; DeWall et al., 2011). For example, the contemporary UK and US reality television shows listed below (which vary in popularity) all depict working and middle-class contestants (many of whom are not especially gifted, talented, or educated) in cut-throat competition for the lure of fame, money, and/or materialistic gains:

UK Shows		US Shows	
X-Factor	Gladiators	American Idol	True Beauty
The Apprentice	Fame Academy	The Apprentice	Joe Millionaire
The Dragons' Den	Ladette to Lady	America's Next Top Model	Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?
Big Brother	Shipwrecked	Survivor	I Love Money
Britain's Got Talent	Britain's Next Top Model	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire	Survival of the Richest

Third, as the classic Frankfurters warned it is certainly the case that oppositional and resistance cultural artifacts in many instances serve as fodder for the selling of commodities whose production comes at the expense of exploited workers and the natural environment (e.g., Apple Inc.'s use of Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez images under their motto of 'think different'). As McGuigan (2010a) argues, it is a vital feature of contemporary neoliberal 'cool capitalism' that cultural signs and symbols of rebellion and resistance are themselves incorporated into the neoliberal economic system of production and exploitation, consequently excluding genuine opposition to it, and ensuring its hegemony. Finally, critical theory's psychological arguments, and in particular Marcuse's (1964) concept of repressive desublimation, offer a convincing account that in many ways describes and explains many of the seemingly unconscious 'shopaholic' consumer practices



rampant in contemporary Western societies. Neoliberalism as a practiced political-economic system certainly depends on eternal, perpetual, and self-interested consumers. Moreover, it is well known that contemporary corporations fund research in search of the elusive ‘buy button’- a hypothetical cognitive reflex that when triggered by specific commercial mediums will completely override individual autonomy (Rowan, 2008). Nonetheless, it may be impossible to fully investigate what the unconscious effects of insidious and sexually charged media and advertising may be, and equating perpetual consumerist behaviours with a means to satisfy repressed sexual needs may risk a charge of unsubstantiated pop-psychology. Therefore, what I want to draw on is not the Freudian inspired aspects of classical critical theory, but rather its attention to psychology in the first place. As I will elaborate in section 2.5, the unfalsifiable Freudian arguments can be replaced with the more empirically grounded concepts of cognitive and social-psychology, but arguably not since or after the classic Frankfurt School has there been a body of sociological theory that so explicitly tried to incorporate the much needed insights of psychology to the study of capitalist social-reproduction. Therefore, I will maintain that the classic Frankfurt School’s critical theory offers a powerful and comprehensive theoretical descriptive and explanatory model that has continued relevance, and that I will tweak and build on in the following sections.

## **2.2 The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies**

What of resistance to capitalism? How can progressive social change occur given the totality of corporate control as described by classic critical theory? Around the 1960s-70s, in reaction to what was viewed as the elitist and overtly pessimistic social theory of the earlier Frankfurt School, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies rejected its more totalizing claims. Leading members, including Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, and Paul Willis, argued that far from being merely passive and manipulated cultural dupes, consumers of popular media-culture are active agents that often demonstrate resistance to capitalist hegemony. The classic Birmingham School drew their inspiration from Gramsci’s (1971) more open concept of hegemony which views culture as a continuously contested terrain, rather than a fixed or determined and determinizing structural entity. Whilst classic ‘critical theory’ can be read as an

open and shut case which suggests that capitalism has created a totalizing hegemonic culture which has trapped, or will trap us all into its instrumentalist grasp, Birmingham theorists were skeptical of such deterministic outlooks. Instead, they were more interested in examining instances of counter-hegemony (i.e., those instances where individuals demonstrate forms of critical consciousness and practices that run counter to established societal norms and values), and they sought to document how ordinary individuals resisted, interpreted, reformulated, and used popular media-culture. Indeed, Western capitalist societies were never as homogenized and 'massified' as the classic Frankfurt theorists implied them to be (Kellner, 1998), and in fact contained a number of subtypes, subcultures, and critical public-spheres that had not been co-opted by commercial interests. Hence, the classic Birmingham School set out to salvage the Marxist normative political agenda, and the working-class consciousness that the Frankfurters had all but abandoned.

Classic texts, like Willis' (1977) *Learning To Labour*, and Hall's (1980) *Encoding/Decoding*, argued that institutional and media-culture socialization processes are not as totalizing as classic critical theory logically implies. Willis' (1977) detailed ethnography of a group of working-class lads showed that institutional capitalist socialization (disseminated by the school the lads attended) could be circumvented and ignored. Rather than conforming to school rules, and blindly accepting the standard capitalist discourse that financial success followed from academic merit, Willis' participants were well aware that their chances for upward mobility were hindered by their ascribed social positioning. Thus, rather than conform to school rules and values that they believed would not benefit them anyway, they displayed an array of anti-school dispositions and behaviours; preferring instead to develop values that would prepare them for their future working-class jobs. Hall (1980), on the other hand, focused his seminal work on individual media interpretation, and argued that while hegemonic ideology is inscribed as the 'preferred reading' in most media-cultural texts, not all readers automatically adopt such a reading. The social positioning and historical contexts of individual readers/consumers of media-cultural texts may lead them to adopt readings different from the intended meaning and they can adopt a range of stances towards the texts. These can range from accepting, negotiating, or completely opposing the intended intended messages. These and other classic

Birmingham works demonstrated the importance and significance of focusing the gaze of cultural studies onto the micro-subjective and contextual level. In doing so, they provided valuable insights into exactly how individuals living within capitalist societies interpret and live out the discourses and practices that they are surrounded by, and how they can resist and reformulate them.

However, for all their differences, the classic Frankfurt and Birmingham schools have a number of affinities. Many of the Birmingham theorists agreed with many of the basic positions of the classic Frankfurt School. For instance, both schools agreed that mass culture was playing an important function in integrating the working classes into existing capitalist societies, and that a new consumer and media culture was forming a new mode of capitalist hegemony (Kellner, 1998). As Kellner (1998) argues, despite their differences from and criticisms of the Frankfurt School, the Birmingham School's version of critical theory can arguably be seen as a complementary addition to classic critical theory. In other words, what the Frankfurt theorists overlooked, i.e., the in-depth investigation of media-culture readership and active cultural production at the individual level, can be remedied by applying Birmingham ethnographic approaches to contemporary social-reproduction research that takes an overtly structural approach. Nonetheless, the fact remains that despite all of the instances of counter-hegemony documented by the Birmingham School, neoliberal discourses have, as described in the previous chapter, won the wars of position and movement (Harvey, 2005; McGuigan, 2010:2010a; Patel, 2010). Hence, purely macro or purely micro approaches to explaining the current neoliberal conjuncture which, however nuanced, are nonetheless mired in the Marxist ghost of false-consciousness, will simply not suffice. As Bourdieu (2000, p. 172) argues in reaction to the Marxist academic pre-occupation with consciousness:

Another effect of the scholastic illusion is seen when people describe resistance to domination in the language of consciousness as does the whole Marxist tradition and also the feminist theorists who, giving way to habits of thought, expect political liberation to come from the 'raising of consciousness' ignoring the extraordinary inertia which results from the inscription of social structures in bodies, for lack of a dispositional theory of practices.

In the next section, I discuss approaches that attempt to surpass this ‘either/or/consciousness’ dilemma and move towards a theory of cognitive dispositional and rationalizing practices.

### **2.3 Beyond Consciousness: The French Turn**

*“But there is something in our worldview, something about the lens we look through that keeps us from building something new that’s better for all of us.”*

-Ryan Harvey<sup>29</sup>

In the 1970s, around the same time as the initial flourishing of the Birmingham School, a number of French social theorists developed influential theoretical approaches to the study of culture and capitalist society. Of particular note are the works of Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu. Like the classic Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools, Althusser and Bourdieu were concerned with how capitalist social arrangements reproduced themselves, and constructed nuanced understandings of ideology and socialization. The concept of hegemonic ideology as discussed by the Frankfurt school conceived of ideology as something that is disseminated and legitimated from above by dominant social institutions and groups to obscure an otherwise objective class reality. Therefore, individuals are assumed to consciously consent to the dominant order, no matter how stratified or unjust, because they cannot conceive of alternatives to the capitalist system, and/or because they believe that upward class mobility, despite nearly insurmountable structural constraints, is within grasp given enough hard work and effort; i.e., they are the victims of false consciousness. However, Althusser (1971) invites us to think of capitalist ideology as the sum of material structures and practices, which works at a fundamentally unconscious level, growing naturally from our everyday mundane practices. For example, when paying rent, buying food, or depositing a check, all of which further cement and reproduce the capitalist order, we are not consciously or falsely consenting to capitalism, but rather are behaving in a habitualized, ritualized, and largely unconscious manner. As Althusser (1971, p. 158) explains:

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<sup>29</sup> Lyrics from *Tea Party*, by Ryan Harvey.

To take a highly ‘concrete’ example, we all have friends who, when they knock on our door and we ask, through the door, the question ‘Who’s there?’, answer (since ‘it’s obvious’) ‘It’s me’. And we recognize that ‘it is him’, or ‘her’. We open the door, and ‘it’s true, it really was she who was there’. To take another example, when we recognize somebody of our (previous) acquaintance (*(re)-connaissance*) in the street, we show him that we have recognized him (and have recognized that he has recognized us) by saying to him ‘Hello, my friend’, and shaking his hand (a material ritual practice of ideological recognition in everyday life – in France, at least; elsewhere, there are other rituals).

Althusser (1971) notes that this kind of unconscious habituation, or ‘interpellation’ as he terms it, is the result of an individual’s exposure to ‘ideological state apparatuses’, like the family, the media, and the education system that expose individuals to the discourses and practices of those systems, and as a result we are always immersed in ideology. An individual is said to be ‘ideologically interpellated’ when his or her social identity/subjectivity reflects the discourses and practices of the ideological state apparatuses (i.e., social institutions) that he or she has interacted with, and/or been largely exposed to. As Auogustinos, et al., (2006, p. 297) argue, “Althusser suggests that our lived relations are largely unconscious and affective in nature. In this way ideology becomes a spontaneous, unconscious, and affective way of responding to our lived relations, a way of being which has a strong affinity with the recent work of automaticity in social cognition”. While this theory of ideological interpellation can be read as deterministic since it entails that ideology is inescapable and pervasive, Althusser (1971) also argues that there are multiple breaks, contradictions, and points of contestation between different ideological state apparatuses that leave room for critical distance, agency, and resistance. For example, individuals who refuse to join repressive state forces because they come from religious and pacifist backgrounds, or conscientious objectors who refuse to take up arms, or feminist and anti-racist activists signify that, as Van Dijk (2011, p. 380) notes, “ideologies as we define them, may be used not only to dominate or to oppress others, but also in order to resist and struggle against such domination”. Dominant ideological

interpellation is, therefore, never fully totalized and always contested by the complexities and variances of multiple social systems and sub-systems that expose individuals to any number of different, and in some cases, conflicting ideologies. This allows room for individual agency, as subjects are thus free to negotiate, and to some indefinite extent, consciously choose between the ideologies and practices that they have been exposed to. Interpellation, as I will argue in the following section, can therefore be coupled with insights from more contemporary theories of social cognition, in particular schema theory, to form a more context and agent sensitive theory of socialization that can be employed for the exploration of neoliberal social reproduction.

Pierre Bourdieu developed very similar arguments to Althusser's interpellation theories, but was less concerned with ideology and more focused on describing and investigating the everyday habits and unconscious behaviours of individuals that make up and reproduce society. Bourdieu's (1977) 'habitus' is a term used to describe the sum of an individual's acquired schemes of thoughts, dispositions, tastes, and perceptions that guide their actions, and that result from exposure to and interaction with autonomous structured social spaces like schools, courts, and work. In occupying various social spaces or 'fields', an individual mentally internalizes any number of observed and experienced discourses and practices, which form generative schematic structures of unique cognitive and embodied dispositions that enable him or her to learn, follow, and modify the rules of those spaces. However, while generative, those same internalized 'structuring structures' are also 'durable structured structures' that predispose subjects to unconsciously act in accordance with the knowledge and experiences that they have been predominantly exposed to. Therefore, for Bourdieu, submission to and reproduction of the dominant order is a matter of habitus not consent, as individuals are so unconsciously immersed in everyday social practices that they may view them as natural, or are more likely completely unaware of them, and are thus unable to recognize how those practices may reproduce social inequalities (Burawoy, 2008). Thus the enforcement of the dominant order is not primarily reliant on overt and repressive state forces, but is rather a more subtle and mostly dispositional cognitive process enforced through what Bourdieu (1990, p. 1-2) refers to as, "symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels

of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling". For example, racist or sexist attitudes are in many instances implicit. These can be stimulated and manifested in subliminal ways that negatively affect persons from dominated social groups, but that neither the holder of these attitudes or their victims are able to perceive or recognize as racism or sexism (e.g., job or housing discrimination). In this sense, therefore, symbolic violence enforces what can be understood as socio-cognitive domination, whereby individuals unconsciously conform to their own domination. While Bourdieu's theories in many ways resemble the structural socialization theories of the classic Frankfurt school and Louis Althusser, they help to erase the problematic distinction between structure and agency, and unite them as a simultaneous and reciprocal social process (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009). In engaging in everyday practices, we in effect reproduce social structures "in a system of circular relations which unite structure and practices" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977. p. 203). Hence, habitus is simultaneously structure and agency.<sup>30</sup>

However, Althusser and Bourdieu's theories are even more pessimistic about the prospect of social change than the Frankfurters ever were. In a nutshell, their theories seem to suggest that capitalist socialization is so ingrained into the psyche of individuals living in capitalist societies that social change is essentially a moot point. Nonetheless, I argue that socio-cognitive domination via symbolic violence and/or ideological interpellation is a necessary component for understanding the micro subjective side of the hegemonic coin that can be used to describe and explain different aspects of how neoliberalism comes to be supported and reproduced by majority populations. More specifically, as will be discussed in the following two sections, the sociological concepts of interpellation, and habitus can be coupled with ideas from cognitive and social psychology to form a more comprehensive theory of social reproduction that accounts for both conscious and unconscious emotions, thoughts, and practices, and their key roles in the

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<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu's (2000), concept of agency is not one that tends to emphasize conscious actions, but rather one that lays stress on how the seemingly volitional strategies that agents employ in their everyday practices stem from unconsciously primed dispositions (Burawoy, 2008; Gerrans, 2005). Bourdieu seems to reserve conscious agency for the few that are privileged enough to have the time and luxury for deep reflective thinking (Bourdieu, 2000). For instance, in response to notions of false consciousness, Bourdieu (2000, p. 172) argues, "While making things explicit can help, only a thoroughgoing process of countertraining, involving repeated exercises, can, like an athlete's training, durably transform habitus".

enactment and maintenance of existing macro-structures. As Ridgeway (2006) argues, it is in the coupling of socio-cognitive theories with sociological theories that we can begin to better understand, explain, and explore how individuals internalize, reproduce, modify, and alter macro-level social patterns, such as dimensions of stratification, social institutions, or widely shared cultural norms and values.

#### **2.4 A Schematic Reconciliation**

Developments in the fields of socio-cognition and cognitive psychology offer a middle ground that can help to resolve the consciousness/unconsciousness dilemma that is left unresolved by the available sociological theories of social reproduction. To wit, while the French and German theorists thus far discussed took seriously the role that the unconscious plays in social reproduction, the cognitive dimension of social reproduction remains under-theorized in their work. For instance, Althusser never elaborated on his cognitive theoretical presuppositions, while Bourdieu seemingly underplays the conscious dimensions of agentic practice (Gerans, 2005), and the Frankfurt School adopted a largely unfalsifiable and overtly classical Freudian psychosexual approach that reduces consciousness to economic and biological determinants. To move beyond these limitations, the concept of schema/schemata (also known as schemas, mental models/modules/representations/states, scripts, frames, and domains) developed by cognitive and social psychologists offers a theoretical solution that accounts for both conscious and unconscious cognition, and can also help to provide a more thorough explanation of what a habitus actually is and how it works. Schemata, according to cognitive and social psychologists, refer to subjective, generative, and mentally stored knowledge frameworks that provide a means to organize memories, and ideas about a concept, its attributes, and its relationship to other concepts, as well as facilitate learning by enabling the rapid integration of new associations linked to incoming information. These are stored in episodic, working, and long-term memory, are acquired throughout a person's life via their exposure to socio-environmental experiences and stimuli, and function as heuristics that help guide the way individuals consciously and unconsciously perceive, interpret, synthesize, and react to all of the various forms of socio-environmental stimuli that they encounter as they navigate through their daily lives (Baars & Franklin,



2003; DiMaggio, 2002; Maqsood et al., 2004; Ren et al., 2013; van Kesteren et al., 2012).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, schemata also embody an individual's cognitive representations of his/her self-awareness, on the one hand, and the shared beliefs, norms, and values of his/hers respective social group on the other (Hull et al., 1988). Congruently, these culturally shared cognitive representations can be networked with and activated by other schemata, which can thereby contribute to cultural reproduction and stability. As Sperber & Hirschfeld (2004, p. 6) note:

Representations belonging to a complex system such as a religion (which involves not only representations but also practices, artifacts and institutions) need not be all anchored in one and the same cognitive module [or schema]. On the contrary, multiple anchoring in several cognitive mechanisms may contribute to the cultural system's stability.

Schemata also incorporate or consist of elaborate networks of event structures, discourse processing structures, semantic structures, situational/context structures, emotion/affect structures, and motivation structures (Izzard, 2007; Salzman & Fusi, 2010; Sutton, 2006; Van Dijk, 1997; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2007), which in an aggregate form, generate and contain sets of corresponding, embodied, and transposable dispositions. Dispositions, in the socio-cognitive context, refer to an individual's unconscious or implicit yet context-specific attitudes, emotions, orientations, expectations, and behaviours which have been learned or acquired via exposure to specific socio-environmental experiences and stimuli, and which manifest automatically according to specific stimuli (Cerulo, 2010; Edwards et al., 2002; Fishbach & Shah, 2006; Raney, 2004; Sheperd, 2011, Swartz, 2003; Vaisey, 2009). As Baumeister & Bushman (2008, pp. 151-152) note with reference to the automaticity of dispositional schemata, "their pervasiveness, interconnectivity, and accessibility are largely determined by the frequency by which they are encountered, imagined, and used. With great frequency, even complex knowledge structures can become automatized - so over learned that they are applied automatically with little effort or awareness". Moreover, dispositions are also, in

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<sup>31</sup> Additionally, schemata are hypothesized to be mental correlates that are enabled and encoded in physiological and interconnected neural networks located in the pre-frontal cortex, medial temporal lobe, and amygdala structures of the brain (Salzman & Fusi, 2010; van Kesteren et al., 2012).

effect, the empirically observable and articulated manifestations of unconscious schemata in that they can to some extent be inferred from people's automatically manifested emotions, thoughts, practices, and body language (Bohner & Dickerl, 2012; Bourdieu, 1990; Danna-Lynch, 2010; Rydell et al., 2006; Van Dijk, 1997). To put it more simply, all of our experiences, social understandings, and acquired knowledge lie at an unconscious or dispositional state, and are organized in specific schemata. However when stimulated, and depending on the context of the stimulant and stimulation, these schemata can guide our emotions, thoughts, and practices to manifestations that are either dispositional or reflective (Lodge et al., 1991; Ridgeway, 2006; Rydell et al., 2006). As Damasio (1999, p. 332) puts it:

All our memory, inherited from evolution and available at birth, or acquired through learning thereafter, in short, all our memory of things, of properties of things, of persons, of places, of events and relationships, of skills, of biological regulations, you name it, exists in dispositional form [...] waiting to become an explicit image or action. Note that dispositions are not words. They are abstract records of potentialities.

Although schema theory informs Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, and indeed an argument can be made that a habitus is simply the aggregate set of an individual's socially acquired schemata as I will suggest in Chapter 4, its application by cognitive and social-psychologists differs in that schema theory distinguishes between, and explores both, automatic and deliberative forms of cognition (DiMaggio, 1997); that is, cognition is seen as operating on an automatic level when triggered by socio-environmental stimuli, but can also operate on a conscious level, e.g., in the form of reflective thought and the conscious restructuring of existing schemata. This is especially the case when people are exposed to new information and experiences that run counter to their established expectations or beliefs, which can trigger an instance of cognitive dissonance that pushes individuals to consciously engage with the expectations, attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies that make up their pre-existing schemata, and which may then lead to the reification or modification of those pre-existing

schemata (Briñol et al., 2009; Gawronski & Strack 2004; Ramaprasad, 1993).<sup>32</sup> As Allison & Allison (1993, p. 132) explain:

As such they (schemata) can serve as mental templates for imposing conceptual order on complexity, for linking isolated pieces of information together into more coherent wholes, and for recognizing non-obvious patterns in situations. Prolonged exposure to a given knowledge or action domain can reasonably be expected to provide opportunities for individuals to acquire information about phenomena, processes, and problems characteristic of that domain. Information captured through such experience forms the raw material, as it were, for the construction, modification, or elaboration of schemata, which then function to guide future perception, interpretation, and action.

Schema theory, and more generally, the theorization and exploration of an individual's cognitive processes of categorization, contextualization, framing, perception, interpretation, meaning making, rationalization, and collective memory, which in turn guide individual identity-construction and behaviours (DiMaggio & Markus, 2010; Van Dijk, 1996), are often ignored in contemporary social reproduction studies. Equally overlooked is the fact that social structures are also cognitive structures, or what Zeruvabel & Smith (2010) refer to as thought communities (e.g., schools, nations, and political movements). These disseminate, but are also structured, reproduced, and constrained by the prevalence and dominance of specific ideas/discourses, within a specific socio-historical and geographic context. While durable, they can be altered or changed through the volitional actions of groups and individuals who, in the first instance, reinterpret and reframe a given set of specific ideas and discourses. I will argue that schema theory and other insights from the cognitive sciences (e.g., cognitive dissonance) offer sociologists and other social scientists concerned with the phenomenon of social reproduction a more systematic way of making sense of the human mind and how it has been influenced by the social world. More specifically, it offers, I

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<sup>32</sup> Unlike the Freudian psychodynamic model of the unconscious, the unconscious as conceptualized by cognitive and social psychologists is conceived of as an information processing centre made up of countless and interconnected schemata, as Riso et al., (2007, p. 12) note, "schemas exert their influence through unconscious information processing, rather than through unconscious libidinal and instinctual drives".

suggest, a set of organizing principles from which to map out an individual's interpellating experiences and corresponding practices in a way that is more open to empirical investigation than standard and classical sociological conceptions (e.g., false consciousness, interpellation, and habitus), but which can complement and strengthen them, as I will attempt to briefly demonstrate in the following section, and in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

## **2.5 Political-Economic Formation: Habitus and Cognitive Dissonance**

*Rather my point is that the pursuit of interest (understood in its most vulgar and unmediated form) has become so ingrained in our political culture and character that it has made other, more authentically political attitudes and practices all but impossible. By universally taking up an exploitative, instrumental, and fundamentally strategic approach to politics and political action, we have rendered the public sphere an unfit place for human habituation (Villa, 2008, p. 6).*

In most sociological and social-psychological accounts, including the ones discussed in this chapter, and regardless of their specific theoretical background or epistemological emphasis, it is generally agreed that the maintenance and reproduction of social structures and institutions of a given society is dependent on most of the members within that society consciously and/or unconsciously accepting and reproducing dominant and widely shared and specific discourses and practices (Bourdieu, 1990; Gill, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Ridgeway, 2006; van Dijk 2003). Therefore, in the context of neoliberal reproduction it is important to note, as discussed in Chapter 1, that neoliberal discourses promote a specific form of political-economic organization and corresponding conception of human nature, which can have a significant influence on the formation of people's political-economic schemata and concomitant imagination. For example, in the context of democratic theory and practice, dominant UK and US social institutions, and mass media in particular, seemingly take for granted that most people of Western inhabitation know about the many variations of democratic philosophy, and prefer representative/consumer strands of it, even though these tend to concentrate power in the hands of representatives of mostly elite backgrounds, or in the hands of those that mostly serve elite interests. As Babe (2009, p. 37) notes, "commercial

media rarely call for picketing or boycotting; rather, voting (for pre-selected and heavily marketed candidates) is set forth as the hallmark of democratic expression”.

I suspect, however, that most from neoliberal societies know as much about democratic philosophy and its broad canon and organizational and institutional application, as they know about neoliberal theory, i.e., very little. I could of course be terribly mistaken about this, but contemporary media-cultural, political science, and social reproduction research has lagged in exploring this very crucial hegemonic aspect of neoliberal societies. What little work does exist on how UK and US non-elite people - viz., people of working and middle-class backgrounds - conceive of, interpret, and reproduce democracy (of whatever strand) is often relegated to fringe historical or anthropological accounts that are not particularly concerned with the role of socio-cognition (e.g., Graeber, 2009:2004; Thompson, 1993; Zinn, 2003). However, tentative and I would argue necessary points of convergence between political-philosophical discourses and practices and socio-cognitive development can be drawn and laid out for future empirical exploration. For instance, according to cognitive linguist Lakoff (2007), repeated exposure to the same political messages via mass media can form deep and unconsciously held schemata, which predispose people to think and act in accordance with those repeated political messages. Therefore, it theoretically follows that repeated exposure to the ‘there is no alternative’ discourse, as disseminated by mass media and as discussed in section 1.6, can a) predispose individuals to solely and automatically conceive of political-economic organization in neoliberal terms that now frame the left/right political spectrum, which in the current UK and US representative forms usually manifests as voting for the lesser of two or three evils, and/or b) generate a sort of cognitive dissonance prompting those who are disadvantaged by neoliberalism to rationalize their misfortunes in ways that directly correspond to neoliberal discourses (Jost et al., 2003).<sup>33</sup> Dias et al. (2009)

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<sup>33</sup> For example, in a study of how Canadian elders are dealing with cuts to social services, Luxton (2010) found that many of her participants, despite having paid taxes and worked hard their entire lives, nonetheless blamed their personal choices for their impoverished situations rather than expressing a more structural analysis of the complex structural factors that significantly contributed to their hardships. The strong emotions that their responses evoke, hint to a pronounced inclination on the part of these participants to want to rationalize their existing condition and quell their internal dissonance, even if that entails entirely blaming themselves, and thereby inadvertently reproducing neoliberal discourses. Luxton (2010) suggests that her participants reflect a form of false consciousness whereby they have internalized the neoliberal discourse of rugged

argue that human beings have both a conscious and unconscious tendency to avoid internal dissonance. Whether this is a natural or learned human cognitive predisposition, it follows that individuals who have throughout their lives been overexposed to neoliberal ideas (or any other) will seek to consciously and unconsciously avoid alternative or conflicting ideas and rationalize their existing beliefs, which in effect, contributes to social continuity.

This thesis starts from the position that research on neoliberal social reproduction must take into account and investigate where and how non-elite Western inhabitants constitute, practice, rationalize, and reproduce democracy and democratic institutions of whatever variety, and how dominant social institutions, and mass media in particular, help to shape and inform those specific individual and shared cognitive frameworks and their underlying ontological presuppositions of human nature. As Jost (1995, pp. 413-414) argues:

Of course, the question of whether some (or most) people do indeed possess highly sophisticated and integrated systems of political beliefs is a valid and useful empirical question [...] but it is important also to recognize the opposite, namely the degree to which errors in social cognition serve as an impediment to accurate and useful representation of the political world.

## **2.6 Towards Yet Another Third-Way: A Reformulated Both/And Framework**

Thus far, I have reviewed and critiqued the last seventy years of some of the more prominent social reproduction theories as they apply to Western capitalist societies, with specific references to the UK and the US. In sum, these comprised: 1) the political-economy approach, as employed by the classic Frankfurt School, and others, which argues that societal structures disseminate a market-centred hegemonic ideology that significantly shapes and frames the socio-cultural

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individualism. However, false consciousness alone does not account for the strong reactive and emotive dissonant cognitive processes that can pressure people to convince themselves of their existing beliefs. Hence, in order to better explain how individuals hold and reproduce discourses and practices that run counter to their interests and that contribute to theirs and their group's disadvantaged social position, both external socio-structural ideological mechanisms and internal cognitive processes must be looked at together (Elster, 1982; Jost, 1995). In other words, cognitive dissonance is a phenomenon that, in addition to the other cognitive factors identified above, can contribute to neoliberal false consciousness and unconsciousness, but as I will discuss in Chapter 8, can also contribute to contesting it.

experiences and socio-cognitive development of individuals living in capitalist societies; 2) the culturalist approach as employed by the Birmingham School, which argues that individuals are active agents in the interpretation and use of media-culture; and 3) the both/and approach, employed by Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu that calls for a rejection of the structure/agency dichotomy, and that pays attention to the role that socio-cognitive dispositions play in reproducing society. All of them have useful ideas that can be synthesized and coupled with insights from cognitive and social psychology and political philosophy to create the kind of more holistic both/and synthesis needed to theorize, study, and research the multi-faceted, insidious, and surreptitious effects that neoliberalism levies on contemporary young people.

Therefore, in order to move beyond the proverbial *cul de sac* in social reproduction theory and towards a reconciliation of the key insights from all of the ideas described in this chapter, it is sufficient to argue the following: dominant social structures and institutions work to interpellate individuals through a hegemonic and discursive set of norms and values which, if internalized, can form into a durable habitus comprised of cognitive schemata and corresponding dispositions that can predispose agents to beliefs, attitudes, emotions, orientations and practices that reproduce those same dominant social structures. A key task for social science is to empirically investigate how, if at all, this hegemonic and discursive set of norms and values has been cognitively interpreted, framed, negotiated, rejected, rationalized, and/or contested by individuals living in neoliberal societies. In the current UK and US context, this implies that dominant social structures work to interpellate individual agents through a neoliberal habitus, and therefore, this investigation requires that research on neoliberal social reproduction takes the guidelines below into consideration. These guidelines do not constitute a theory per se, but rather offer an orienting conceptual framework from which to critique, situate, and synthesize existing theories and develop new ones:

- The examination of everyday contexts, social positioning, and cultural practices of individuals must be balanced with equal attention to and exploration of how existing power structures create and disseminate self-

serving ideological obfuscations meant to distract, manipulate, and interpellate social subjects through neoliberal discourses and practices.

- It is important to analyze and document how far and in what ways the public sphere is being contaminated and inflected by neoliberal interests and discourses, and to investigate how corporate mass media and other dominant social institutions might influence the political-philosophical cognitive frameworks and corresponding practices of audiences.
- It is important to couple any critique of neoliberal culture and political economy with an analysis of oppositional cultures - in part by investigating and documenting counter-hegemonic movements and groups, and studying the history and habitus of individuals from those movements and groups. This can help to guide research away from deterministic or reductionist approaches and conclusions.

While these are admittedly broad guidelines with perhaps overly ambitious aims, I will to varying degrees attempt to apply them in the following chapter which critically reviews the existing literature on Western and urban young people and youth culture. Additionally, and by drawing on the lessons discussed in this chapter, I will operationalize these guidelines in the empirical component of the methodology for this thesis, which is described in Chapter 4. This operationalization consists of a critical ethnographic, inductive, and discourse analytic methodology that incorporates the study of macro power structures and ideologically charged discourses, the micro processes and contexts of everyday life, cultural and textual analysis, political-philosophical critical analysis, and socio-cognition inspired depth-investigations into discourses, audiences, and effects.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Young People and Neoliberalism**

### **What We Don't Know**

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This chapter uses some of the insights and considerations from, and the guidelines outlined at the end of, the previous chapter to critically examine the substantive empirical literature concerning (mostly Western and urban) young people and youth culture. My aims here are to identify some of the gaps in this literature, and to point to some of the ways that this thesis will attempt to fill those gaps. The literature on young people and youth culture is broad and encompasses a variety of academic disciplines, however, some of the most prevalent and central themes within it, and those most relevant to this thesis include 1) young people's agentic engagement with media-culture, 2) young people's agentic construction of their identities, 3) the effects of media-culture on young people's cognitive development and subjectivities, and 4) youth political and civic participation. In the following sections, I will review and critique the literature relating to each of these themes separately. I end the chapter with a summary of some of the lessons that this broad literature has to offer. While aware of the debates around how to classify teenaged young people (e.g., adolescents, youth, young people, emerging adults etc.), in which some scholars argue that terms like 'adolescent' denote a pejorative developmental stage, I will sidestep these concerns on pragmatic grounds, and use different terms to classify young people interchangeably according to the disciplinary background of the studies being reviewed. As stated above, the literature reviewed in this chapter, encompasses a variety of disciplines from sociology, to psychology, to political science, each with their own assigned terminology, which I use accordingly but in a neutral and non-normative manner.

#### **3.1 Cultural Populism: There Is No Such Thing As Society**

From the 1980s onwards, the mainstream of youth cultural studies diverted its attention away from more political engagements, and became increasingly focused on the exploration of how audiences manipulate cultural-media texts for personal enjoyment. Influenced by French post-structuralist theorists like Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean Baudrillard, this new wave of cultural studies, now loosely referred to by McGugian (2000) as 'cultural populism', shifted the

ontological approach from what can be considered a critical realism of the past traditions mentioned in the previous chapter, to a radical subjectivity/interpretative approach (Babe, 2009). Popular works like Fiske's (1988) *Television Culture* and Angela McRobbie's (1994) *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, exemplify this post-structuralist turn in cultural studies. These seek to demonstrate some of the various ways that audiences manipulate and make their own meanings out of the cultural texts that they engage with free from the manipulative influence and vested interests of the culture industries and other social institutions. In other words, unlike the classic Birmingham theorists who were interested in the influence of political-economic and socio-cultural structural constraints on audience reception, cultural populist works seem to dismiss such constraints in favour of an optimistic and overt celebration of audience autonomy (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2006), and/or a celebration of audience consumption and sub-cultural practices as sties of political resistance (Gibson, 2000). As cultural populism continues to be a dominant and influential strand in the contemporary literature on youth cultural studies, it merits attention and consideration. However, in this section, I shall only review a brief sample of recent case studies that are representative of the cultural populist approach, and pay more attention to critiquing it, as this thesis is largely a reaction against this field of academic work.

Among the most dominant characteristics of the cultural populist literature is a redefinition of the term political, which is manifested in the ways cultural-populist researchers draw on post-subcultural and neo-tribe theories in order to extract political meaning from the banal cultural practices of young people. For example, in a case study describing the electronic dance music (EDM) youth culture in the UK, Riley et al., (2010) argue that youth cultural practices, such as raving and clubbing, should be viewed as examples of 'everyday politics' that highlight how young people demonstrate sovereignty over their own existence. According to Riley et al., (2010), the traditional conceptions of political activism and practices as tied to social change agendas is problematic, as political participation does not have to entail dedicated projects aimed at changing society. Since the EDM culture is seen as autonomous and bottom up, directed and created by young people themselves, it is, therefore, according to the authors, political as although it may not change the world, it does offer a means for young people to escape from the complacency and conformity of mainstream neoliberal society. In

a similar study on the Psytrance music community, Greener & Hollands (2006) argue a similar point, stating that Psytrance music provides a space for autonomy and aloofness that should be recognized as examples of 'everyday politics'. As they note:

In contrast to earlier counter-cultural movements, for whom political protest was seen as intrinsic to the invocation of social change [...] the communal utopian ideologies of the virtual psytrance community point to the idea that simply living a psytrance lifestyle is a powerful tool for social change and transformation of human consciousness [...] Although the meanings given to psytrance music do not directly lead to political protest or activity that challenges society directly [...] they do offer some form of challenge to modern hegemonies by offering psytrancers a means of escape or 'transcendence' from regular society. (2006, pp. 403-405).

Taking this line of thought even further, Beck (2001) and Farthing (2010) argue that contemporary generations of young people have internalized modes of democracy that are entirely different from those of previous generations. These modes are generally invisible to most theorists and adults whose only conception of political falls along a spectrum from active political participation to apathy. Instead, Beck (2001) and Farthing (2010) argue for a third conceptualization that views young people as what they refer to as 'radically unpolitical'. According to this alternative view, young people's withdrawal from engaged and participatory forms of politics in favour of lives of self-actualization, is itself a deliberate political act that characterizes the new politics of fun that contemporary young people are creating in the current globalizing environment. As Farthing (2010, p. 190) argues:

Young people who refuse to engage in traditional politics, but instead watch *The Simpsons* and buy Nike, are perhaps unintentionally acting very politically by depriving politics of their attention and labour, and ultimately challenging its monopoly of power. Issues of power, the core of politics, are effectively dealt with by simply staying away.

The works described above explicitly argue for a political reinterpretation and recognition of youth cultural practices. However, in other parts of the cultural populist literature, there is sometimes a conscious and explicit omission of political-economy in favour of a seemingly exclusive focus on the shared cultural content and experiences of young people (Babe, 2009; McGuigan, 2010). Take, for example, Booth's (2008) textual analysis of users of the social-networking site MySpace. In this analysis, Booth (2008) documents how dedicated fans of popular media texts not only co-opt and rewrite media texts, but in doing so also reinvent a more interactive form of fandom. While traditional notions of fandom paint fans as passive and doting recipients, Booth's (2008, p 517) analysis indicates that new media forums allow fans to, "create personas of fictional television characters, and through role-play with these characters, identify with, and insert themselves into, the narrative of that show". According to Booth, these new digital practices of contemporary audiences necessitate a shift in the focus of the analysis of audiences away from concerns about political-economy and towards a critical analysis of shared cultural content. Other recent examples of this exclusive focus on shared cultural content include works by Demant & Ostenguards (2007) and Deadman (2011). In Demans & Ostenguards' (2007) anthropological account of what partying means to Danish young people aged 14–16, they observed that partying and drinking for their youth participants is an integrated part of their lives that serves to reaffirm friendships and create new meanings; while Dedman's (2011) ethnography of UK hip-hop and youth grime subcultures offers an account on how groups of young people create and protect the authenticity of their independent music scene, and details the differences between casual and dedicated practitioners. In rejecting mainstream hip-hop, Dedman (2011) argues, those dedicated practitioners, who he terms 'purists', claim a sense of ownership and connection to their unique variant of hip-hop music.

Admittedly, this has been a brief review. However, the vast majority of what can be considered cultural populist or 'post-subcultural' research, in some way or other makes similar overall arguments, and draws similar conclusions on youth cultural practices to the ones described above (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2006). Like the classic Birmingham School before them, the cultural populist literature offers useful and in depth accounts that demonstrate young people's inherent agency and creativity. However, as Babe (2009) and McGuigan (2000:2010) note,

unlike the Birmingham School approach, this now dominant trend in contemporary youth cultural studies often takes an apolitical stance that completely ignores the constraints of power, culture, and macro structures, or seemingly denies that these factors have any influence on individuals whatsoever. As Gill (2008, p. 3) notes in direct reference to the cultural populist literature, “A paradoxical aspect of the current ‘critical’ writing on this topic is that it reduces culture to a mere epiphenomenon, rather than seeing it as a collection of practices that can and do have real, material effects”. If taken to their logical conclusion, cultural populist arguments imply that individuals are completely sovereign and autonomous agents that are impervious to structural manipulation and fully conscious of the cultural practices and beliefs that they exhibit.

Furthermore, in narrowing the analytic lens to the interpretation and personal manipulation of cultural texts and artefacts, the fact that the night-time production of cultural commodities is done by workers from the developing world, often in deplorable and slave-like conditions, gets completely ignored (Klein, 2000). It is no exaggeration to claim that the luxury for Western consumers to interpret signs and symbols, which are embedded in material commodities, is reliant on the exploitation of third-world workers (often children) and the natural environment. This fact can potentially and understandably be left unnoticed by Western audiences, as all corporatized culture presents them with are finalized products and enticing advertisements where the exploitation is hidden. Worse still, not only are these political-economic realities ignored by cultural populist approaches in their valorisation of audience interpretations and uses, but they are in some cases replaced by disconcerting and overly relativized notions that seemingly read any individual use of popular culture and youth style as political (Barker, 2011). The fact that young people can in some cases produce their own culture rather than ceding it to the market, underpins this central cultural populist argument that seems to claim that media-culture consumption can be, or is indeed, politically revolutionary (Holt, 2002), as hinted at by the Riley et al., (2010) and Hollands (2006) studies described above. However, as Holt (2002, p. 89), inspired by the classic Frankfurt School arguments, notes:

Consumers are revolutionary only insofar as they assist entrepreneurial firms to tear down the old branding paradigm and create opportunities

for companies that understand emerging new principles. Revolutionary consumers helped to create the market for Volkswagen and Nike and accelerated the demise of Sears and Oldsmobile. They never threatened the market itself. What has been termed “consumer resistance” is actually a form of market-sanctioned cultural experimentation through which the market rejuvenates itself.

Therefore, and as noted at the end of the previous chapter, while it is important to document how audiences consciously interpret and use culture, the cultural populist approach is problematic because it is exclusively centred on micro and individual contexts, and that does not take into account how large macro forces are at play. We may never know how we internalize socially constructed ideas, and make them authentically our own, but there is an explicit danger in completely ignoring the socializing effects of mass media and culture in favour of arguments for the fully active and fully sovereign consumer (McGuigan, 2010:2010a). Such notions, argue Gill (2008) and McGuigan (2000), mirror neoliberal ontological claims of the fully rational and free-choosing agent, and ignore the manipulative ideological intent of power elites. Therefore, if neoliberal social reproduction is to be more comprehensively researched, it is crucial to take a more reflective and humble stance that acknowledges manipulation, and to investigate and recognize the ways in which contemporary social institutions influence, condition, and manipulate our everyday practices and conceptions of the social world. As Babe (2009, p. 4) argues:

To study culture without taking into account either the influence of the political-economic base or the political-economic consequences of cultural activities is to be naïve in the extreme. These oversights can cause one to misconstrue oppression as pluralism, persuasion as democratic, and elite control as popular freedom.

### 3.2 Beyond Identity: So What?

*We wanna live for now, wanna live while we're young, want money to go out with, wanna go with women now, wanna have cars now.*

-Joey (in Willis, 1977, pp. 97-98)

The second, and equally dominant strand in post-structuralist research on young people focuses on youth identity construction. While the concept of 'identity' is often used in vague, abstract, and theoretically convoluted ways (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009), post-structuralist/constructivist accounts tend to define 'identity' as a fluid, multiple, and fragmented product of competing discourses, whereby young people actively construct their identities around the competing socio-cultural discourses available to them (Barbosa, 2008; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009; Nila & Feixa, 2006). Like the cultural populist literature discussed in the previous section, these post-structuralist accounts also draw on the theoretical contributions from the landmark works of the classic Birmingham School. In this section, I will review and critique a selection of ethnographic accounts that are representative of this work.

A prevalent concern in this literature is the documentation and critical examination of how marginalized young people develop a sense of self in reaction to oppressive institutional constraints. For example, in a study of minority ethnic working-class identities and schooling, drawing on interviews and focus groups with 20 pupils from an inner-city secondary school in London, Archer and Yamashita (2003) highlight the conflict between active youth identity construction and academic success, arguing that their participants, being aware of their devalued and subordinate societal position, resisted normative White middle-class discourses of the 'good student'. Instead, their participants drew on a number of available discourses that ranged from anti-school 'bad boy' identities, to Black Caribbean identities as a means of being recognized and valued against a backdrop of societal disenfranchisement. In a similar study on working-class minority ethnic young women, Archer et al., (2007) documented how working-class female students resisted instances of symbolic violence through agentic practices such as 'speaking my mind'. According to this account, the female participants rejected gendered, racialized, and classed norms and acted loudly and combatively against their teachers as a means of gaining visibility and worth for themselves within the school. As Archer et al., (2007, p. 558) note:

In this sense, we would suggest that gender, class and ‘race’ relations between teachers and pupils mean that schools can be experienced as alien spaces for ‘other’ femininities. The girls’ data also conveys the impossibility for working class girls to attain valued (and respected) forms of middle class female ‘goodness’— which remained a desired yet refused subject position. The girls also appeared to be constrained by the lack of a discursive space within which to enact an acceptable, or accepted, ‘bad girl’ femininity.

Hollingsworth & Williams (2010) provide yet another corroborating analysis in their study of the ‘chav’ subculture. Exploring the class and racial dimensions of (this ‘chav’) subculture, they argue that white working-class pupils identified as ‘chavs’ as a means to symbolize what they viewed and valued as a more authentic ‘whiteness’ that is otherwise lost in the normative middle-class discourses of the good student.

Other researchers have focused on the role that space and place play in helping young people shape their own identity as they transition into adulthood (Blackman, 2007; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). For example, in an ethnographic study that explored how a group of young people used a secluded area in a public park in London, Robinson (2009) argues that, in between the increasingly commodified and heavily surveilled public spaces, other public spaces like parks can function as a site of agency and empowerment for young people. Her youth participants, Robinson (2009) noted, were able to carve a sense of history and self-identity away from the more constraining, authoritative, and regulated youth centres and after-school programmes. Moreover, in addition to physical space, recent research explores how new media forums accessed via the Internet have created virtual spaces, providing contemporary Western young people with yet another site to engage with and develop their identities, one that is unique to the post-1980s generation. For example, in a study on the discursive dialectical dynamics between female teen identities and fashion blogs, Chittenden (2010) draws on open-ended email interviews with ten teen girls (mostly from the US), and argues that the Internet provides a virtual space which facilitates social patterns, conversation discovery, and which allowed her participants to signal meaningful cues about themselves. Other studies have noted how the Internet, and



in particular social networking sites like Facebook, provide Western youth entering universities with the discursive space to build on their existing identities as they try to negotiate between keeping their old friendships, and forming new friendships as they navigate through their university experiences (Abeebe & Roe, 2011; Stephenson-Aberz & Holman, 2012). As Stephenson-Aberz & Holman (2012, p. 189) argue:

Facebook is not a window into students' inner, fixed selves, but a puzzle where the anticipation of responses from varying "others" connects with culturally constrained understandings and students' own contextual desires, constructing and communicating a meaningful picture. Perhaps our new media relationships have fully "saturated" ourselves [...] leading us to a more complicated fragmentation of the self, as we are constantly and often contradictorily defined by a saturation of interactions.

These studies all make convincing cases that demonstrate that young people are not 'docile subjects' that are determined and permanently socialized according to the ideals of their respective societies. However, they, and in particular those concerned with marginalized youth, still do not provide a sufficient answer or explanation for the classic question posed by Golding and Murdoch (1977): how is it that the gross injustices and inequalities of contemporary capitalism come to be understood as natural, inevitable and legitimate by those who benefit the least from them? That is, while the marginalized young people discussed in some of the above accounts recognized their subordinate social positioning to be the result of racial, class, and/or gender inequalities, it does not follow that their recognition of structural inequalities, and the consequent recalcitrant attitudes and behaviours that they developed as a result of such recognition, represent genuine resistance. Resistance has a revolutionary overtone, it implies actions directed at changing and overthrowing established social-structures and institutions. It was not clear that the young people in these studies constructed anti-school identities for the purposes of social change; particularly as such identity constructions are unlikely to change school culture. In fact, these studies produce no in depth insight into these young people's politics, or of their knowledge or conceptions about their

respective political-economic systems, or how they think they can change or influence those systems. And in the case of Archer & Yamashita's (2003) and Hollingworth & Williams' (2010) studies, their male participants' active construction of the 'bad boy' or 'chav' identity included practices of conspicuous consumption (e.g., the wearing of jewelery and stylish clothing) that actually serve to sustain and perpetuate global systems of economic and environmental exploitation. Is the fact, that the branded clothing and accessories, which are central to their sense of masculinity, are mostly produced by exploited workers from the developing world for the profit of a few corporations and their upper-class owners acknowledged, or in any way addressed by these marginalized youth? Furthermore, is the 'bad boy' or 'bad girl', or even 'chav' identity really an authentic, organic, and unique expression of localized anti-school rebellion, or is it yet another commodified signifier cribbed from popular media-culture? As Walker (1985) argues, in direct response to the 'resistance interpretation' attributed to Willis's (1977) landmark study, marginalized young people are not usually resisting oppressive school authorities when they adopt anti-school attitudes and practices (an explanation which carries political connotations); in the vast majority of cases, they are simply being recalcitrant for any number of non-political reasons (e.g., to seem cool or to fit in better with friends).

It is not my intention to devalue the complicated ways in which the young people described in these studies navigate their ways through oppressive social settings to find a sense of self. However, these active constructions of the self, operate on a mostly symbolic level that does not threaten the political-economic material system that generates those oppressive social settings. As Hebdige (1980, p. 84) argues:

Youth sub-cultural styles [or identities] are meaningful mutations capable of embodying a symbolic refusal of the social consensus upon which Western democracies depend. But in the end, no amount of sub-cultural incantation can alter the oppressive mode in which the commodities used in a sub-culture [or to signify an identity] have been produced.

A more critical approach to youth identity construction is offered by Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2011) ethnography of Latino immigrant street vendor youth in Los Angeles. Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2011) study sought to answer the question of why it is that youth street vendors, despite being taunted by their peers and chased by the police, consented to such work. Drawing on participant-observation and in-depth interviews, they argue that the young people in their study dealt with the experiences of stigma, shame, and humiliation associated with their work by constructing affirming identities around what Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo call intersectional dignities (i.e., inversions of popular negative stereotypes of marginalized groups). For example, some participants identified as hard-working Mexicans in direct contrast to those Latino youth that they viewed as lazy cholos [gangsters] and fresitas [spoiled princesses]. While these identity constructs served to create a sense of pride and self-worth in their work, Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo explicitly stopped short of viewing such constructions as resistance. They note, "their counter-narratives of intersectional dignities will probably help them in the long run, fortifying self-esteem, but in some ways, the narratives reify negative stereotypes of others, and in doing so, reproduce ideologies that uphold social inequalities" (2011, p. 125). In other words, a focus on identity construction and its symbolic meaning, which seems to always lead to the conclusion that social subjects actively position themselves around contingent identities that fluctuate across different social settings, lacks, if not ignores, a coherent and important political-economic/material context in which these identities are constructed; particularly one necessary to make the claim of resistance more valid. Drawing on Hebdige's (1980) and Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2011) analysis, I argue that it is more important to focus on young people's socio-cultural and political-economic dispositions, thoughts, emotions, and practices (which are situated within a socio-cultural and political-economic context and which may, or may not, be related to an identity); and to explore the extent to which young people are cognizant of the link between their values and practices, and the perpetuation or challenging of existing and unjust social structures. The literature on the anti-neoliberal globalization movement gives examples of this by providing accounts that move beyond youth identity/socio-cultural symbolic agency, to descriptions of material, and I would argue,

genuinely resistant youth political-economic agency (e.g., Graeber, 2009; Klein, 2000).

For instance, Graeber's (2009) ethnography describes his participant-observation of a group of young anarchist activists. In this account, Graeber notes how the group members reified their anarchist identities through their experiences and practices protesting and organizing against the 2001 Free Trade Area of the Americas Summit and other neoliberal institutional events. He details how and why the anarchists differed from the more liberal and authoritarian socialist groups. But rather than giving primacy to what the young activists chose to identify as, Graeber's concern is to describe the group's decision making processes and actions (informed by a principled political philosophy of direct democracy), that demonstrated both material resistance and alternatives to oppressive social structures, and not just 'partial penetration' or symbolic resistance. More to the point, Graeber points to a crucial distinction between lifestyle anarchists, who are revolting against alienation, and those revolting against oppression. The former enact a drop-out culture of dumpster diving, squatting, and train hopping as a direct rejection of the mainstream capitalist culture (note here the parallels to the young people who are the focus of the identity construction studies), while the latter are more preoccupied with building alternative institutions than with image and identity. The dilemma for revolutionary coalitions, Graeber (2009, p. 240) argues, is how to synthesize the two:

As anarchists and revolutionaries, therefore, they are faced with the same dilemma: whether to try to create an alternative culture of their own, or to concentrate on alliance work, supporting the struggles of those who suffer most under the existing system, but who are also willing to work with them as allies. To put it crudely: they have to choose between whether to focus on their own alienation or others' oppression.

Klein's (2000) more journalistic account, on the other hand, reviews how the neoliberal political-economic processes of the last thirty years have inflected Western youth culture, and describes several actions that young people from across the US and Canada have taken against the ongoing corporatization of their

culture and public spaces (e.g., culture jamming, street reclamations, and strategic anti-corporate boycotts). Of particular note, she describes how a group of social-workers from the ghettos of New York City educated hitherto Nike obsessed impoverished Black and Latino boys about Nike's contribution to the loss of US manufacturing jobs and exploitation of overseas workers. This led to a city-wide campaign demanding that Nike address the charges of labour exploitation, culminating in a large demonstration with several teenage boys tossing their Nike trainers at Nike's flagship store in Manhattan. While recognizing that impoverished youth wear Nike clothing as a way to feel important, Klein (2000, p. 156) notes:

The African-American and Latino kids outside Nike Town on Fifth Avenue, the ones swarmed by cameras and surrounded by curious onlookers, were feeling pretty important, too. Taking on Nike "toe to toe," as they said, turned out to be even more fun than wearing Nikes. With the Fox News camera pointed in his face, one of the young activists, a thirteen-year-old boy from the Bronx, stared into the lens and delivered a message to Phil Knight: "Nike, we made you. We can break you".

From both Graber's (2009) and Klein's (2000) accounts, we get an insight into marginalized young people's politics, their knowledge and conceptions of their respective political-economic systems, and how they think they can change or influence those systems. They help to provide such insights by situating young people's cultural agency within larger political-economic concerns, and in that regard, move beyond an overemphasis on the fluidity and fragmented nature of identity construction, to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of counter-hegemony. While the anti-neoliberal globalization movement may constitute a unique case of young people's cultural and political agency, the majority of the literature on youth identity construction all but ignores questions about young people's political-economic knowledge and sense of political efficacy providing little insight into the possible future political trajectories of contemporary young people. And in particular, there is a relative inattention given to how certain manifestations of youth agency reproduce and reinforce unequal

power structures, and whether or not young people are aware that their views and concurrent practices may contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of social structures that generate social inequalities. My primary interest in this thesis is thus to move the focus of sociological exploration of young people from identity construction to specific accounts of social reproduction and social change. To wit, I am interested in how young people cognitively process and frame both the socio-cultural and political-economic discourses that they are exposed to, and how far these cognitive processes and frameworks are reflected in unconscious dispositions and practices that affirm, maintain, and reproduce existing social structures, and/or into conscious practices that directly challenge, and seek to replace existing social structures. This is not to suggest that research on young people should abandon identity construction all together, but rather that accounts of identity construction need to be situated within a larger political-economic context if they are to avoid mirroring the ‘Neo-Romantic’ trappings of cultural populism.

### **3.3 Media-Culture Effects: Cognitive and Others**

*“Neuropsychology has proven that whenever rational thinking conflicts with emotion, emotion will win - if harnessed this can be a very powerful tool for marketing.”* (London Kid Power Market research conference, 2002)<sup>34</sup>

Media-culture is at the centre of the majority of Western young people’s leisure activity, if not their lives. The recent advancements in communications technology have made it possible for contemporary Western young people to draw on a range of cultural artefacts from which to create their unique sense of cultural identity. From the Morrissey obsessed ‘cholos’ in East Los Angeles, to the trend-setting hipsters in Shoreditch London, contemporary Western youth culture is a bizarre amalgamation of past and present styles, music, art, and literature drawn from seemingly all over the world. The UK’s Channel Four sponsored an in-depth nation-wide quasi-ethnography that identified twenty-four separate ‘youth tribes’, e.g., the ‘get paid crew’, ‘indie scenesters’, ‘trendies’, ‘young alts’, and ‘sports junkies’. According to this extensive, albeit non-academic and corporately motivated, research, each of these twenty-four subcultures consist of young people

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<sup>34</sup> Marketer cited in Beader et al., (2009, p. 47).

with specific shopping, viewing, listening, and dressing practices and a correlated set of values and aspirations. Members of the ‘get paid crew’, for example, are mostly disadvantaged youth who wear Nike trainers, read the *Financial Times*, and aspire to take business study courses and be wealthy and famous. Their biggest influences/role models include rap moguls Jay Z and Damon Dash, and television personality and business mogul Alan Sugar. In this section, I will look at academic studies that, like the UK’s Channel Four Youth Tribes research, are concerned to describe some of the influences and effects of mass consumer media culture on young people’s subjectivities and practices. Rather than representing a return to a deterministic structuralism that posits young people as passive recipients of media discourses, this nascent literature offers more sophisticated insights on the interplay between media-culture, socio-cognition, and subjectivity.

To return to the discussions in Chapters 1 and 2, it is important to note that the post-1980s generation of young people’s socio-cognitive development has been underpinned by an unprecedented exposure to corporatized media-culture (Beader et al., 2009; Linn, 2004). Additionally, constant exposure to specific socio-environmental stimuli can have a significant influence in shaping an individual’s socio-cognitive schemas and dispositions (Achenreiner & John, 2003; Fishbach & Shah, 2004; Lewicki & Hill, 1987). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the powerful advertising and discourses of consumer media-culture are to some extent succeeding in turning large numbers of youth into what Brookes & Kelly (2009) refer to as ‘artefacts of consumption’. Several studies seem to suggest that, faced with such culture, most of today’s young people are hard-pressed to significantly refuse it (Beader et al., 2009; Becker, 2004; Hamilton, 2012). For example, a US study on the effects of food advertising on children by Story & French (2004) found that there is a strong correlation between the food industry’s intensive and increasing media marketing of fast-food, sweets, and soft-drinks, and the rising rates of diabetes and obesity. According to the findings, 15% of US young people are overweight, as compared to only 3% in 1980 when regulations on marketing to young people were stricter. In another example, a survey study of 79 UK secondary school students by Cassidy and Schijndel (2011) explored the effects of ‘cool marketing’ on teenage identity development. The authors drew on a developmental model of identity, which categorizes teenagers as passive (if they display traits of low self-esteem and low social adjustment), or

active (if they display traits of high self-esteem and are socially mobile and active). Their methodology consisted of a questionnaire that, in part, included questions about participants' taste in music, subcultural identification, peer influence, and sense of community. According to their findings, 62% of the respondents expressed passive traits, which corroborated their hypothesis that most of the Western teenage demographic is passive. Cassidy and Schijndel (2011), described passive teenagers as the primary target of cool marketers who seek to manipulate and take advantage of their insecurities:

The findings, though limited to only one locality, show that the majority of the sample was identified as being passive, implying that the majority of these teenagers were aspirational in their quest for cool. In addition, more of the participants felt a part of web-based communities such as Bebo than of their local community. The study suggests that marketers, ethically or otherwise, are able to target the passive majority by encouraging feelings of being un-cool encouraging the empty self to then profit from the sales of a cool fulfilling product (p. 163).

It bears repeating that this does not suggest that the majority of young people who are beholden to consumer media culture, lack agency. The research discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this chapter, clearly refute this. However, it is imperative to recognize that contemporary young people are faced with a seemingly infinite slew of influential celebrities telling them to wear certain jeans, skirts, shirts, shoes, as well as a barrage of overt and subliminal adverts via music, film, television, and the Internet that tell them that how they look and what they have is inadequate. Any claims to young people's agency must be qualified by this fact. For example, a content analysis of the popular and tween girl oriented Australian magazine *Dolly*, conducted by Brookes & Kelly (2009), revealed that, despite their targeted readership being only 10-13 years old, *Dolly* issues contained highly sexualized representations of slim and attractive young women. Describing the tween phenomenon as a pre-adolescent stage, Brookes & Kelly (2009) argue that appearance magazines like *Dolly* make extensive use of young celebrity pop and



movie stars to situate the tween identity within consumerist and commodified discursive spaces:

Our proposition is that the resources *Dolly* presents to its readership, including tweenies, are powerful, commodified and pre-packaged, and, at the same time, limited in scope and form. Tweenies can fashion an active, healthy, attractive self from these resources, but this self must take a particular form (p. 606).

Other researchers are beginning to explore the relationship between subjectivity and media culture. For example, DeWall et al., (2011) conducted a psycholinguistic and statistical analysis of the lyrics from the US's Hot 100 Billboard songs from the years 1980-2007. The researchers found that, since 1980, the use of words like 'I' and 'me' have appeared more frequently in popular music, while words like 'we' and 'us' are used less often. DeWall et al., (2011) argue that the statistically significant rise in the self-cantered and narcissistic discourses found in popular music correlates with several large-scale psychometric survey results indicating that contemporary young people are more narcissistic than ever before. DeWall et al., (2011) are not making a direct link between the music and narcissistic subjectivities, but rather, as they put it, "these findings offer novel evidence regarding the need to investigate how changes in the tangible artefacts of the sociocultural environment can provide a window into understanding cultural changes in psychological processes" (p. 200). Two other recent studies by Uhls & Greenfield (2011) and Twenge et al. (2012) draw similar conclusions. In the former, Uhls & Greenfield (2011) conducted a mixed quantitative and qualitative study to explore how popular media are interpreted by a cross-sectional sample of preadolescents from Los Angeles, and how those interpretations relate to their media practices and life aspirations. Drawing on a theory of human development and social change, which predicts that as societies become more technologically developed, urbanized, educated, and wealthier, psychological development should follow a direction of increasing 'individualism', Uhls & Greenfield (2011) argue that the advancements in communications technology, and particularly the Internet found in Western countries are driving a cultural shift towards individualism. Specifically, the researchers found that 'fame', as a discourse that is historically

more cognitively accessible to current Western youth via media-culture, is the most sought after goal by the highest percentage of their participants. They conclude that, “adolescents and young adults have, over the decades, become more focused on the self, unrealistically ambitious, and oriented toward material success—all individualistic values that resonate with the value of fame,” (2011, p. 1). The Twenge et al., (2012) study, examined two sets of extensive longitudinal surveys that gauge American high school and university freshman respondents for intrinsic values (e.g., self-acceptance, community) and extrinsic values (e.g., money, fame). They compared the responses from three generations; the Baby Boomers (born 1946–1961), GenX’ers (born 1962–1981) and Millenials (born after 1982). While not offering an explanation as to why, Twenge et al., (2012) conclude that the Millenials express more extrinsic values than the previous generations, and contrary to popular notions, are less caring, community oriented, and politically engaged than previous generations.

Overall, the studies described in this section suggest that the effects of popular media-culture on young people’s subjectivities cannot be underestimated. Notably, they suggest that there exists a significant correlation between the consumerist and self-cantered discourses disseminated and valorised by mass media-culture, and the values, concerns, and aspirations that contemporary Western young people who are entering adulthood, express. This can partly be explained by the fact that popular music, magazines, television shows, movies, and websites have vast interpellating potential, and help form or shape contemporary young people’s aesthetic agency, identity, and biography (Boyles, 2008). To be certain, media-culture *videlicet* in the form of music which lies at the centre of media-culture,<sup>35</sup> has a powerful semiotic affect that can help to conjure up past experiences, or to reinforce one’s beliefs, aspirations, and identity (De Nora, 2007). However, like the post-structuralist accounts discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the studies discussed in this section also fail to

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<sup>35</sup> Contemporary popular music is mutually interwoven with other mediums of popular media culture, including films, television shows, magazines, newspapers, adverts, and the Internet, making it the centre of popular culture. Recent advancements in technology mean that the sheer amount of music readily available at the click of a button is staggering and unprecedented in history. An iPod for example (a staple accessory of a significant portion of Western youth) can carry anywhere from 500-40,000 songs depending on the model. Other types of mp3 players offer similar capacities. These technological advancements alone mean that a significant portion of Western young people who own iPods or other kinds of mp3 players are probably more exposed to popular music than to any other forms of media culture like films, television, or magazines.

adequately connect their participants' accounts with the wider neoliberalization of Western societies that has occurred over the that last thirty years. That is, they do not make the connections between the materialistic and hyper self-interested and self-cantered discourses promoted by neoliberalism and neoliberal institutions as discussed in Chapter 1 and those self-interested and self-cantered values expressed by their participants. The Uhls & Greenfield (2011) study drew on Greenfield's (2009) theory of human development. This theory takes a technological deterministic view of social change, and conflates individualism (e.g., self-reliance and independence in thought and self-expression) with self-centeredness and self-interestedness (e.g., a preoccupation with one's image, needs, and advantages without regard for others), which, reminiscent of Fukuyama's (1994) central thesis, sees the progression of societies towards marketization and self-interested values as natural and, therefore, inevitable. There is, however, a nascent literature that, *ala* the classic Frankfurt School, is beginning to explore the relationship between the dominant socio-cultural values of market societies and psychological traits and distress (Black, 2007; Hamilton & Dennis, 2005; James, 2007:2008; Kasser et al., 2007). The central premise of this growing literature is that the selfish and materialistic values overly promoted by market societies are highly correlated with an increase in psychological distress and disorders, as, in a never ending race for the accumulation of wealth and commodities, individuals become alienated and unfulfilled. The literature reviewed in this section sensitizes us to some of the values that current young people may hold. It also highlights the need to situate the effects of media-culture on an individual's subjectivity within a historically specific political-economic context. As Erich Fromm (2001, p. ix) (one of the major psychologists from the classic Frankfurt School) argues:

The basic entity of the social process is the individual, his desires and fears, his passions and reason, his propensities for good and for evil. To understand the dynamics of the social process we must understand the dynamics of the psychological processes operating within the individual, just as to understand the individual we must see him in the context of the culture which moulds him.

### **3.4. Civic/Political Participation**

In addition to the literature thus far described, there is another substantive body of work that focuses on the processes of young people's political socialization, i.e., how young people come to understand and participate in the political and civic institutions of their society. Unlike the cultural populist accounts described in the earlier sections of this chapter, the term political in this literature has a specific and non-elastic definition. It is generally used to denote those contesting or supportive interactions with the state and its institutions that include individual actions as well as those collectively undertaken with fellow community members around matters of shared concern (Flannagan & Faison, 2001; Roogers et al., 2012). In this section, I will review a sample of studies from this literature in order to draw out the main insights these studies offer into how young people today practice politics.

One of the more prevalent issues in the literature on youth politics concerns young people's disengagement from formal democratic institutions, where democracy is practiced through the ballot box (Edelstein, 2001). For instance, US authors, Liu & Kelly (2010) argue that there is a generation gap between past and present voters, with contemporary young people having a lower voting rate than previous generations. In an effort to explore how to address this gap, Liu & Kelly (2010) conducted a service learning study. As part of this study, students from their upper division political sociology class (equivalent to 3<sup>rd</sup> year university level course in the UK) were required to serve some of their time at a non-profit community centre, and apply what they were learning in the classroom to real life political situations. Their study coincided with the 2008 US presidential election, and students were placed in an organization that focused on voter drives. The authors noted that getting young people to be civically engaged in this fashion proved to be a rather difficult task, as, out of the 35 plus students originally enrolled for the class, only half stayed and agreed to the service-learning requirement. For the ones that stayed, the authors argue that the process of democratic engagement, as messy and difficult as it is, is facilitated by direct involvement in the local community. According to Liu & Kelly, their students used their technological savvy to spread voter initiatives, and through their use of technological mediums, gained a lasting sense of civic empowerment. As one student in the study wrote:

After my experiences in this course, I have implemented a lot of these elements into my daily life. I have increased my knowledge in the political process. I have changed my mind set and have become more open to other beliefs and ideas. I have also encouraged those closest to me, to exercise their civic duties by voting. In addition, I understand the power in numbers. We as citizens do have the power to make a difference (p.12).

Other research focuses on the effects of a political and civics formal and informal education on young people's political socialization. This body of work attempts to understand the extent to which educating young people about political and civic issues influences their long-term political beliefs and practices. While there is no consensus on what amount of civic and political exposure, and at what age, leads to a significant rise in the politicization of young people, at least four factors are agreed upon. First, the current level of civic and political education offered to Western young people is minimal. Second, even minimal exposure can lead to young people being politically involved. Third, the longer the exposure the more likely is it that they will form lasting politically active dispositions. And fourth, political and civics education, both formal and informal, is most effective when the lessons are put into practice, and when young people are treated as active citizens and allowed a meaningful role in decision making (Davies et al., 2005; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Vromen & Collin, 2010; Youniss et al., 2002). For example, Davie et al., (2005) conducted a project in a local education authority in the north of England aimed at developing a comprehensive civics programme that would train young people in more participatory forms of democratic action. Among other initiatives, the researchers organized events that involved "large numbers of young people and adults, provided opportunities for young people to learn by doing in a structured environment, e.g. class debate, voting on a topical issue, and facilitated opportunities for young people to get involved for real, e.g. shadow voting at local, General and European Parliament elections" (p, 5). At the conclusion of their project, Davies et al., (2005) concluded that a formal civics education programme where young people are allowed meaningful and active input in their civics education can effectively help to train young people to act as

responsible citizens within and beyond schools. A similar conclusion is drawn by Vromen & Collin (2010), who, in the Australian context, argue, based on their discussions with youth groups and policy makers concerned with youth political engagement, that participation and active involvement in civic and political decision making is meaningful for young people when it is youth-led, fun, informal, and relevant to their everyday experiences. Rogers et al., (2012) argue, in their review and analysis of young peoples as organizers in marginalized communities across the US, that youth organizing that goes beyond formal politics (e.g., voting) has the potential to enhance civic learning and development amongst marginalized young people, and can foster norms that promote the public good in distinctive ways. However, while these studies advocate for young people's engagement in participatory forms of democracy, the explicit teaching of theories and ideas of participatory/direct democracy is not suggested. For example, while the young people in the Davies et al., (2005) and Rogers et al., (2012) accounts were given outlets to practice direct forms of democracy, there was no mention in these accounts of whether or not young people were exposed to the corresponding theoretical perspective that could have informed them of how what they were doing is different from the standard form of representative democracy. For example, Torney-Purta et al., (2001) conducted a survey study of students' knowledge of formal democratic institutions and practices (e.g., voting, political parties) in twenty-eight countries. The researchers found a consistent correlation across all countries between the use of democratic practices in the classroom, such as open and respectful discussion of political issues, and young people's knowledge of representative forms of democracy, which was, in turn, correlated with students' intention to vote. As in all the other accounts discussed in this section, Torney-Putra et al., (2001) take voting and the representative forms of democracy that they generate and sustain for granted, and neglect to explore the extent of students' knowledge of other forms of democracy e.g., consensus, demarchy, direct. The informal participatory practices that these researchers advocate are ultimately more important, and can in theory lead young people to uncover for themselves how their experiences differ from the standard approaches, as advocated by Liu and Kelly (2010). But as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8, a more direct engagement and education in political-philosophy, and in the broad canon of democratic theory in particular, might help to contribute to that

end. However, research on how young people's knowledge and understanding of different types of (non-liberal democratic) political-economic systems and practices contributes to their individual political practices is largely absent. The empirical component of this thesis will attempt to explore this area.

Related to above literature is the existing developmental psychology research that explores the initial formation, crystallization, and durability of young people's political attitudes. A minority of studies suggest that political beliefs and attitudes are fluid and can change with relative frequency throughout a person's life. However, the bulk of this literature, at least from my initial meta-analysis, argues that adolescence is the crucial age when young people start to form political dispositions and attitudes that once formed are relatively stable, and will guide their political orientations throughout their lives (Eckstein et al., 2011; Krosnick & Alwin, 1991; Loughlin & Barling, 2001; Sears & Levy, 2003). This is referred to as the 'impressionable years hypothesis' described below by Krosnick & Alwin (1988, p. 416):

According to the impressionable years hypothesis, the socializing influences individuals experience when they are young have a profound impact on their thinking throughout their lives [...]. The historical environment in which a young person becomes an active participant in the adult world shapes the basic values, attitudes, and world views formed during those years. Once the period of early socialization has passed, this hypothesis argues, its residuals are fixed within individuals, and these core orientations are unlikely to change.

Finally, a nascent but growing topic in the youth civics and political participation literature focuses on how new media technology is changing the modes of political participation amongst young people. This literature argues that, contrary to the supposed crisis in democracy whereby Western young people are presented as largely apathetic, social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are new tools that provide contemporary young people with new means with which to be politically engaged that differ from the more traditional forms (Coleman, 2006; Harris, 2008). For example, Harris (2008) explored young women's use of online do it yourself culture, social networking sites, and blogs to

open up questions about what counts as politics, and what political practices are possible for young women at the present moment. In this exploration, Harris (2008) argues that contemporary young women's use of media-technology signifies a shift away from conventional civic and political spheres and into a virtual public sphere where young women often position themselves as neoliberal consumer subjects, but where they can also develop new modes of political activism and subjectivity. As Harris (2008, p. 492) notes, "it is important to recognise the ways that simply participating in online cultures and networking is a form of developing citizenship skills, regardless of any specific involvement in political causes". However, while this nascent literature gives insights into the new modes to which young people are turning to be civically engaged, Morozov (2011) argues, that we should not romanticize the role of the Internet as many young people are still mostly using it to watch pornography. In fact, the Internet "makes it harder, not easier to get people to care, if only because the alternatives to political actions are so much more pleasant and risk free (Morozov, 2011. pp. 74-75)". To be certain, the use of such media, however social it may be, and despite its potential to be a democratizing agent, is still practiced from the confines of an individual and private space, one that, as Gibson (2000, p. 262) argues, "continues to pose a serious challenge to the project of building progressive social-democratic movements, since historical experience indicates that genuinely oppositional practices must at some point connect with alternative social movements to become politically effective". Therefore, the political exploration of media use must be linked to actual, by which I mean non-digital, practices. This is something I will attempt to do in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

### **3.5 Lessons relevant for this thesis**

The literature concerning youth covers a vast array of topics and spans several disciplines. By reviewing and critiquing studies that focus on youth identity construction, the effects of media culture on youth cognition and subjectivity, and youth civic and political participation, several useful lessons emerge. Among these are, first, that descriptions of identity/cultural construction need to avoid a neo-romantic emphasis on agency, and be situated within the wider political-economic context within which identities are constructed. Without meaning to sound irreverent, the fact that young people actively construct their



identities by making use of available discourses is so well established that it borders on sociological cliché, and offers few insights into young people's awareness of their central roles as agents of social reproduction or social change. Second, psychological and socio-cognitive inspired approaches to audience readership and effects need to also be situated within wider political-economic contexts. The discourses presented to, and relentlessly pushed onto, young people by the omnipresent media consumer culture are not ideologically neutral. As I have discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, they are the direct product of the neoliberal paradigm, and serve to spread and reify neoliberal hegemony. And third, an exploration of young people's politics and political use of media should, in addition to the investigation of the various political practices that young people engage in, also explore young people's political-economic knowledge and attempt to uncover the relationship between the two, if one exists.

One of the major reasons why culture is such an important terrain for young people is because it is one of the few 'social facts' that they have some autonomous and relative control over. They do not get to pick which families, political, or economic systems they are born into, and in many instances, and for the majority of their youth, they cannot even choose which schools to attend. While it is true that they do not have control over which culture they are born into either, they do have a choice over which cultural forms to accept or reject regardless of the culture they were born into. Contemporary media-communications technology has facilitated this choice for the majority of Western young people, giving them several options to use to combat the alienation incurred by the on-going corporatization of their culture and geography. How far these hybrid, fluid, and fragmented cultural forms and corresponding identities serve as explicit political tools with which to challenge societal oppression and work for social change, or are meaningful, but ultimately apolitical expressions aimed at battling alienation, which do not threaten the perpetuation of oppressive ideologies and social structures, will be explored in this thesis.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodology**

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So far in this thesis, I have described some of the key mechanisms and practices that constitute and maintain the contemporary neoliberal societies of the UK and the US, focusing specifically on their implications for the socio-cultural environment young people inhabit. By combining a critical political-economic analysis, derived from the Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools, and the works of Althusser and Bourdieu, with some of the presuppositions and insights from recent developments in cognitive and social-psychology, I have suggested that the hegemony and durability of neoliberalism depends on the convergence of power elite interests in addition to structural and socio-cognitive factors. I have noted, in particular, that contemporary UK and US young people are subject to an omnipresent barrage of neoliberal discourses, which can, in theory, interpellate them in ways that can predispose them to enact discursive practices that reproduce neoliberalism. However, I have also noted that the sociological and psychological literature on identity construction and socio-cognition suggests that, while durable, a person's self-identity and associated cognitive schemata are not fixed and static, but are subject to change given exposure to different socio-environmental experiences and reflective thought (Barbosa, 2008; Bohner & Dickel, 2011; Cerulo, 2010; DiMaggio, 1997; Kesebir et al., 2010; Maqsood et al., 2004). The purpose of this thesis is not to offer yet another pessimistic and totalizing account about the hegemony of neoliberalism, nor to overemphasize the agentic and creative manipulation of self-identities and cultural artefacts by young people. Rather, this thesis is concerned with a third way that offers an exploratory account on how neoliberal discourses are influencing, or being contested by, contemporary urban UK and US young people who are entering adulthood, and who will have to deal with the more negative consequences of ongoing neoliberal policies and practices.

In this chapter, I will synthesize the lessons derived from the approaches discussed in the previous chapters, and explain how they have informed my methodological approach. The chapter is divided into three main segments. The first segment deals with the overall research framework, and explains my

ontological position, political stance, and approach to designing the research. The second segment deals with the process of fieldwork, including my choice of research sites, how I negotiated access and entry, how I selected participants, my relationships with them, the interview process, and ethical considerations. The third segment discusses the process of data analysis and interpretation.

#### **4.1 Methodological Orientations: Critical This and That**

In the tradition of the classic Frankfurt School's 'critical theory' that originally inspired this thesis, the exploratory aims and methods described in this chapter are underpinned by a critical realist ontological perspective of the social world. This perspective holds that positivist notions of value-free observation and interpretation of the social world, and post-structuralist notions of a radical subjectivity that seemingly deny the existence and/or the socializing influence of an objective social reality, are both insufficient in their ontological foundations. Instead, critical realism takes a dialectical middle ground where it is accepted that objective social phenomena like class structures, converging elite interests, and forms of government are objectively real, have material implications that effect and affect human beings, and can be observed and documented (Bashkar, 2008). However, critical realism also holds that the interpretation of objective social phenomena is necessarily subjective, as the researcher's social positioning and biases will, to a significant extent, guide how he/she will observe and interpret objective social phenomena. This implies that researchers should be as reflective as possible about how their own social positioning and biases may influence the way that they gather and interpret data in a more intellectually honest effort to attempt to approximate objectivity. Furthermore, critical realism recognizes that the social scientist is researching a second order world that has been acted upon, shaped, and created by human agents (Bashkar, 1998). Therefore, the ongoing flux and fluidity of the human world requires provisional, contingent, and conditional theorizations that seek to describe and explain historically contextualized instances of social reality. For the purposes of this study, critical realism allows for a limited generalization, abstraction, and presupposition of the underlying unobservable and observable psychological and sociological phenomena (e.g., cognitive schemata, socialization processes, social institutions) that generate social practices and

discourses (Houston, 2001), which can in turn lead to the continuity or changing of existing political-economic and socio-cultural realities.

#### **4.1.1 Research Design: Operationalizing a Both/And Approach**

Following the reformulated both/and theoretical guidelines discussed at the end of Chapter 2, and the critical realist ontological presuppositions that underpin it as discussed above, the data collecting methods used for this study consisted of an improvised form of critical ethnography. Critical ethnography, as Thomas (1993) argues, is the research implementation of critical theory that seeks to extract ideology from action, and understand the socio-cognitions and practices of research subjects within historical and socio-cultural frameworks. Unlike standard approaches to ethnographic research, critical ethnography proposes that researchers do not merely document and interpret culture, but actively critique and situate it within dominant and ideological power structures (Anderson, 1989). This gives an impetus for the researcher to explore how cultural forms may perpetuate dominant and oppressive practices and ideologies (Madison, 2011). While this study is not fully ethnographic in the traditional sense, as I could not dedicate the months long participant-observation that is the *sine qua non* of a standard ethnographic exploration, critical ethnography, nonetheless, captures the general research approach and political objectives that guide this study. That is, my concern in this research is to both explore the possible socio-cognitive effects of neoliberalism on young people and their socio-cultural institutional settings, as well as to propose points of intervention that may help to disrupt its more negative consequences. As Madison (2011, p. 5) argues:

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. [.....]. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they could be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity.

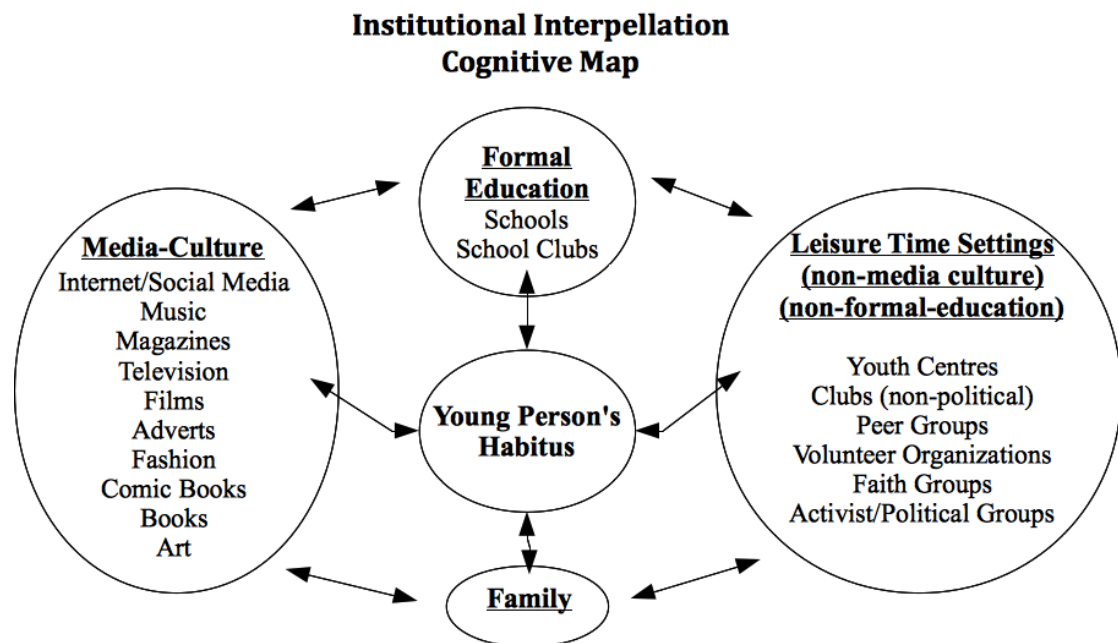
My improvised form of critical ethnography incorporated socio-cognitive insights to help operationalize my both/and guidelines by documenting and

analyzing UK and US young people’s socio-cultural and political-economic schemata. This improvised form mostly consisted of individual in depth semi-structured single and focus group interviews, and documents some participant observations of youth centres, music concerts, and online social networking sites. In this section, I present a series of figures that help to illustrate and describe the rationale for, and underlying presuppositions of, the construction of an interview schedule designed for the documentation of UK and US young people’s socio-cultural and political-economic schemata and corresponding experiences.

#### 4.1.2 Institutional Interpellation: Habitus and Schema Theory

Prior to entering the field, I first had to decide on what specific socio-cultural institutional settings I would need to take into consideration. Figure 4.1, below, describes the institutional settings that this research explored.

**Figure 4.1:**



\*The two-sided arrows represent the potential institutional interpellating influence and the relaying mechanisms - i.e., the various means by which individual agents actively and implicitly negotiate between discourses in ways that can maintain, modify, or significantly challenge and alter existing social structures, institutions, and discourses.

These settings were selected on the grounds that they are the ones that the majority of young people are exposed to the most. Moreover, these settings are each independent fields with interpellating potential, but in many cases these fields are

not mutually exclusive, and interact, interrelate, and reinforce each other in various ways. An individual learns, adopts, and negotiates between the discourses and practices of those fields, and, given the generally relatively limited life experiences of young people, these are likely to inform the bulk of most young people's socio-cultural and political-economic habitus. Figure 4.1, like all of the subsequent figures in this section, offers a rough conceptualization, but one that helped me to select my initial research sites. As discussed in Chapter 2, 'interpellation' signals a process by which an individual's subjectivity and unconscious beliefs and practices are influenced by their exposure to ideologically-charged discourses that are disseminated by society's systems and multiple sub-systems. The multiple ruptures and variances that exist within social systems allow individuals some degree of agency over the discourses and practices that they articulate and adopt, as they may experience, and therefore have to choose between, competing, contesting, and/or conflicting discourses and practices. However, not all of these choices are consciously made. Institutional interpellation refers to the socio-cognitive processes by which an individual unconsciously and consciously acquires, develops, and forms their individual identity and underlying habitus through their exposure to specific socio-environmental experiences. This process is a life-long and fluid phenomenon, during which an individual interacts with and becomes shaped by their social environments. However, basic and durable socio-cultural and political-economic schemata begin to crystallize around adolescence (Eckstein et al., 2011; Krosnick & Alwin, 1991; Loughlin & Barling, 2001; Sears & Levy, 2003). As Eckstein et al., (2011, p. 9) argue in their study that explored the developmental trajectories of German young people's attitudes toward political engagement and their willingness to participate in politics:

The correlation analyses pointed to significant interrelations at each measurement occasion. From a theoretical point of view [...] it can be assumed that attitudes toward a certain behaviour predict people's behavioural intentions. Correspondingly, Diener, Noack, and Gniewosz (2011), for example, showed that attitudes toward political behaviours actually predicted changes in young people's intentions to participate in politics. However, irrespective of the relation between both

behavioural orientations, the results of the developmental trajectories and stabilities of the present study confirmed the adolescent years to be a crucial period in life for the development, emergence, and consolidation of political points of view.

My study, employed more in-depth interviews than Eckstein et al., (2011), coupled with some participant observations. However, like Eckstein et al., (2011), I will make very tentative and provisional claims on the current and possible future political-economic trajectories of my participants. Namely, whatever sort of political-economic attitudes, knowledge, and practices they expressed and/or displayed during my research, and given their 16-19 age range, will likely, although not certainly, I will suggest, orient them towards those same or similar political-economic attitudes, beliefs, and practices in their futures.

Following figure 4.1, and as also discussed in section 2.3, Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, in some interpretations, can be read as a closed-loop theory of social practice that dismisses conscious thoughts and actions (Burroway, 2008; Lizardo, 2009). Moreover, Bourdieu's (1990) empirical application of the habitus concept has been overtly and primarily concerned with people's socio-cognitive dispositional practices, with little attention given to people's dispositions and more conscious socio-cognitive thoughts and emotions. However, as the concept of habitus is significantly informed by schema theory (Bourdieu, 1990), its theorization should equally incorporate and emphasize the conscious or reflective elements of social practice and cognition, and its empirical application should thus more explicitly incorporate an exploration of both the dispositional and more conscious dimensions of people's cognitive frameworks of the social world. As van Dijk (1998, p. 47) argues:

The concept of 'disposition' in the definition of this concept is psychologically inadequate, if not circular, because it defines cognitive structures in terms of their 'output' (such as social practices) which precisely need to be explained in terms of other, cognitive representations. For instance, prejudice as a social habitus should not be described as a 'tendency to discriminate', but be analysed in terms of mental structures in such a way that discrimination, verbal

derogation, disclaimers (We are not racist, but...), as well as many other manifestations of prejudice can be explained.

Therefore, habitus, in my theoretical application, is used to represent the aggregate set of socially acquired schemata, and their corresponding dispositional and reflective content, that, while durable, are subject to change given exposure to new socio-environmental experiences and/or reflective thought.

As I argued in section 2.4, schema theory offers sociologists and other social scientists concerned with the phenomenon of social reproduction a systematic way of analyzing human thought, how it has been influenced by the social world, and how that might lead to specific practices. Simply put, as Lodge et al., (1991, p. 1358) argue, “the cognitive message is clear: if we want to understand why people act as they do, we must understand how they picture the world around them”. My concern, therefore, is in using the concept of schema/schemata to investigate and map out my youth participants’ memory-stored cognitive frameworks of the social world, which can manifest and be articulated as both dispositions (viz., automatic or habitual attitudes, emotions, inclinations, and practices) or more conscious or reflective thoughts and practices, which, as I will explain in section 4.3.3 of this chapter, can, to a significant yet provisional extent, be gauged and inferred by analyzing their discursive, facial, and emotional responses to my questions.

#### **4.1.3 Neoliberal Institutional Interpellation: Meet Homo Economicus**

The guiding assumption for this study is that contemporary UK and US young people are surrounded by, if not directly exposed to, neoliberal discourses via their positioning within neoliberal societies. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the hegemony of the neoliberal political-economic system depends on its ability to inflect major societal structures and institutions with a rigid market logic and discourse where all forms of human organization and decision-making are expected to be economic. With this in mind, I found it useful to tease out how the major institutional settings that young people are exposed to would operate under an ideal neoliberal system, as well as to construct a concomitant ideal neoliberal habitus. Figure 4.2 below, is meant to elucidate how some of the major societal structures, as described in Chapter 1, that are most prevalent in the lives of contemporary UK and US urban young people, are



supposed to operate under an ideal neoliberal system. The four distinct societal institutions shown in this figure, in contemporary practice, operate according to neoliberal discursive lines to varying degrees as described below. Major cultural and education institutions for example, as a result of government policies and corporate imperatives, have been mostly transformed to meet the demands of neoliberalism (Boyles, 2008; Gewirtz & Ball, 2001; Harvey, 2005), while oppositional discourses and practices can be more readily found amongst different sections of civil society and individual family units (Graber, 2009; Klein, 2000). Nonetheless, Figures 4.2 and 4.3 (described in the following paragraphs) depict what can be considered a discursive barometer or set of sensitizing concepts that helped me to focus my investigation and guide my subsequent data analysis. Specifically, they serve as a reference point from which to compare the actual institutional experiences and corresponding socio-cognitive frameworks of my youth participants.

Figure 4.2

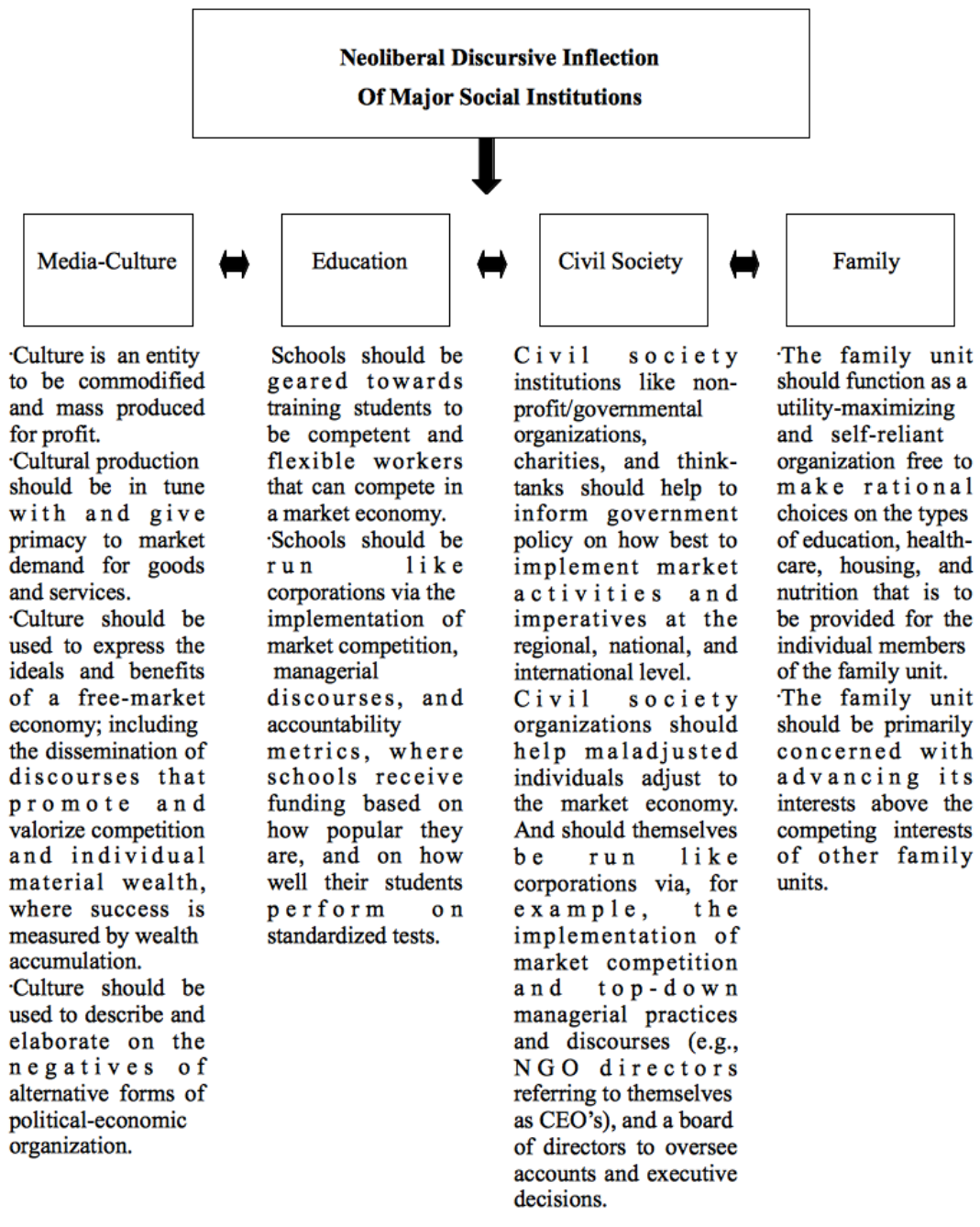


Figure 4.3 below, details some of the specific dispositions and reflective thoughts (e.g., values, attitudes, beliefs, and inclinations) and concomitant practices of an ideal neoliberal habitus, which correspond to neoliberal discourses that are disseminated via ideal neoliberal institutions, as described above in Figure 4.2. Of course this is a theoretical composite, which describes how ideal neoliberal subjects think and behave according to the principal tenets of, and socio-cultural and political-economic framework generated by, neoliberalism. In so doing, as in

the Weberian tradition, it sacrifices the subtleties and complexities of social reality for an heuristic device, which can be used to explore and compare how and why real cases diverge from or converge with the ideal (Lopreato & Altson, 1970). f

The conceptualization of this ideal neoliberal type has been facilitated by the observation that the last thirty years of the neoliberalization of UK and US societies have generated a historically unique socio-cultural discursive framework that brings together neoliberal discourses on education, politics, economics, and civil society (Harvey, 2005; McGuigan, 2010a). This dominant framework offers a specific worldview that exalts and promotes rational consumption as the primary human activity which satisfies all human needs. Therefore, this logically implies that a pure neoliberal subject thinks and behaves as an embodied corporation, i.e., a hyper-rational, competitive, and utility-maximizing consumer who chooses between products, services, jobs, schools, interpersonal relationships, and even politicians according to which will best serve his/her self-interests (Curtis et al., 2007; Friedman, 2002; Hayek, 1994; Klein, 2008; Patel, 2010). Moreover, the neoliberal system, in more subtle ways, possesses an undercurrent of authoritarianism, which orients neoliberal subjects to think in terms of hierarchical notions of upward mobility, status, and uncritical submission to authority. In other words, for example, while not everyone will become a CEO, the pure neoliberal subject works and aspires to become a CEO, as the rewards for such a position, in addition to a higher wage, also include status and power over subordinates. One can consider this neoliberal self-actualization, where hard work and rational choices are rewarded with financial, social, and even sexual power (Penny, 2010). In sum, neoliberal political-economic systems generate and promote a supporting set of socio-cultural discourses and practices that stress, “the maximization of short term individual gains, submissiveness, obedience, and an abandonment of the public arena” (Chomsky, 1989; p. 22). Therefore, a rough composite of an ideal neoliberal subject’s habitus, as can be extrapolated from the literature that I have discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 3, displays the following attitudes, beliefs, values, inclinations and corresponding practices, all of which can manifest in more involuntary/dispositional and/or more reflective forms.

**Figure 4.3: Ideal Neoliberal Habitus**

Dispositional and/or Reflective Attitudes, Values, and Inclinations	Corresponding Practices
<p>-An uncritical acceptance of capitalism as the only viable economic system.</p> <p>-A dismissal of alternative political-economic systems</p>	<p>Practices that maintain or do not challenge capitalist economic structures.</p> <p>-E.g., a primary or significant preoccupation with consuming/acquiring commercial goods, services, and/or property.</p> <p>-E.g., supporting financially, and/or through the electoral process, free trade and anti-union government policies.</p>
<p>-A 'me-first' self-interested tendency in which an individual is primarily concerned with his/her own needs, often with a great disregard for the needs of others.</p>	<p>-Uncritical consumption of goods and services regardless of their possible exploitative production and/or negative environmental impacts.</p> <p>-Overtly competitive, particularly in the pursuit of social aspirations and upward mobility, often with a great disregard for those he/she is competing with.</p> <p>-Instrumentalist/consumerist approaches towards the selection of schools, friends, politicians, and cultural artefacts.</p>
<p>-A person-blame outlook towards social problems and overall negative/judgmental attitudes towards welfare recipients and those that do not enjoy the benefits of capitalism (e.g., the working poor).</p>	<p>-Callous actions towards the homeless and/or other individuals suffering from poverty.</p> <p>-E.g., supporting welfare reform policies that place more stringent conditions on the amount of benefits that welfare recipients can claim.</p>
<p>-An acceptance of hierarchical and corporate structures of power and authority.</p>	<p>-Uncritical submission to and/or enforcement of work and state authority.</p> <p>-Uncritical support for elitist forms of government.</p> <p>-E.g., supporting either through financial means or via the electoral process liberal-democratic and/or more authoritarian forms of government that prioritize order, stability, and the</p>

	enforcement of property rights over human and civil rights.

#### 4.1.4 Research Sites and Interview Schedule Design

To then be able to explore how the actual and more complex and dissonant habituses of my young participants would compare to the ideal-neoliberal characteristics described above in Figure 4.3, and taking into account the socio-cultural institutional settings described in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, I elected to conduct in depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a cross-sectional sample of young people ages 16-19 across schools and youth centres in LA and London. The specific demographic makeup and research sites are explained in the next section. The age range 16-19 was selected based on the age of available participants and because it falls within the period when young people begin to crystallize their socio-cultural and political-economic perspectives (Eckstein et al., 2011; Loughlin & Barling, 2001; Sears & Levy, 2003). Using Figures 4.2 and 4.3 as a guide, I constructed a thematic interview schedule consisting of subsets of various open-ended questions that corresponded to the following themes (see Appendix A for full interview schedule):

- Views on education
- After school activities
- Consumption practices
- Opinions on socio-economic issues and politics
- Leisure time and family life
- Media-culture interests and interpretations
- Personal aspirations

By organizing my interviews along these thematic lines, I sought to elicit data that would provide a descriptive and in depth insight into my young participants' habituses, and some of the main influences on these. For example, the questions relating to the media culture interests and interpretations theme, ask young participants about their interpretations and the significance of their preferred songs, films, media outlets/Internet sites, and other media-cultural artefacts, which in turn helped me to build up a detailed picture of the nature of the

key media images and messages to which they are exposed and potentially influenced by. I did not simply pull questions out of Figure 4.3 - e.g., do you have a negative attitude towards recipients of welfare provisions? Such a format would have been too leading. Instead, the questions were designed to be as neutral as possible in order to provide spontaneous free-recalls - e.g., what do you think about government benefit/welfare programmes? Moreover, while I did not employ the more controlled methods and settings employed by cognitive and social-psychology schema theorists (they typically rely on structured surveys, computer programmes, and incorporate more controlled laboratory settings), the open-ended questions of my interview schedule coupled with in depth non-leading interviewing can be reasonably expected to elicit data that reflect participants' socio-cultural and political-economic schemata (see e.g., Danna-Lynch, 2010). As Lodge et al., (1991, p. 1372) note, "schemas presumably affect the retrieval of information from memory; thus the content and structure that appear in recall statements should reflect the abstract impressionistic representation of this information in memory".

Furthermore, by organizing my interview schedule around the above thematic lines, I was able to more easily organize my participants' responses and analyze the data. I will elaborate on this in the data-analysis section of this chapter. Lastly, for purposes of triangulation, I also conducted in-depth one to one interviews with youth workers and asked them about their observations, and interpretations of the cultural and political environments inhabited by the young people with whom they work (see Appendix B for interview schedule). Additionally, I also participated in youth club meetings, attended music concerts, and listened to, watched, or visited, some of the songs, films, TV shows, and Internet sites that my participants divulged to me, in order to get a feel for aspects of the cultural milieu in which they were immersed.

#### **4.1.5 Putting it all Together: Final Research Objectives**

The ontological orientations that underpin this study take a critical realist perspective that views the social world as something that is shaped and constructed by human agents, but that is nonetheless an objective phenomenon that can to some extent be documented and explained. Therefore, the improvised methodological approach discussed in this section, operationalized the

reformulated both/and theoretical guidelines outlined at the end of Chapter 2, in order to elicit data that can offer provisional insights on the influence of neoliberal discourses on the socio-cultural and political-economic cognitive frameworks of UK and US young people, and what this might mean for the social reproduction or contestation of neoliberalism. Specifically, this improvised methodological approach is designed for the exploration and documentation of thought processes, dispositions and their outcomes, and the relationship of these to specific institutional settings. In sum, by drawing on the lessons and insights from Chapters 1, 2, and 3, these methods are designed to gather provisional accounts to help investigate:

- How far and in what ways the socio-cultural and political-economic dispositions, emotions, thoughts and practices of contemporary urban young people in London and LA are infused or inflected by neoliberal discourses and practices.
- What critical educators dedicated to progressive social change can learn from a socio-cognitive approach to the analysis of youth culture and politics.

#### **4.2 Entering the Field: Los Angeles and London**

Having lived in both LA and London, and being familiar with their demographics and geographies, I elected to use these cities as the urban settings for my research. But in addition, LA and London are both neoliberal alpha world-cities that share similar education policies, corporate conglomerates, uniquely cross-sectional and multi-ethnic populations, and cosmopolitan cultural structures that, especially in the field of youth culture, directly influence one another (Brenner, 2006; Fairbanks 11 & Lloyd, 2011), making them ideal locations for my research. In this section, I will give details of each of the specific research sites within LA and London where I conducted my research, how I was granted access, how I selected my participants, the interview process and relationships with participants, ethical considerations, and the limitations of my sample populations. Additionally, where relevant, I will also provide ethnographic descriptions of some of the educational and non-profit institutional settings that most of my youth participants spent time in, and were selected from. I begin with a description of

each of the LA research sites, as they were the first ones that I visited, and then move on to a description of the London sites.

#### **4.2.1 South-Central LA: Collecting the Data**

After fine-tuning my interview schedule as described earlier in this chapter, I elected to begin my research in my hometown in South-Central LA. Prior to flying over, I had contacted one of my politically conscious relatives who self-identified as an anarchist, and who was eighteen years old at the time. I explained my study to her, and asked if she knew of any political young people around the ages of 17-18 who might be interested in volunteering for my study. I specifically asked her to help me recruit political young people, because I was only going to be in LA for a month, and wanted to interview a sample of LA young people who were overtly political rather than rely on purely random sampling methods in the hopes of encountering them by chance. Furthermore, as part of my both/and framework calls for the investigation of counter-hegemonic groups and individuals, a sample of leftist political youth were key to my research. She agreed, and told me that I could meet up with them at her house during one of their usual weekend hangouts. However, as I will describe in later sections, only two of the four participants that I interviewed there expressed overtly political dispositions.

On the day of the first interviews, I dressed in casual attire consciously attempting to utilize my relatively young age and appearance to downplay any authoritative aura that I may otherwise give off in order to try to create a more relaxed atmosphere so that my participants would feel comfortable talking to me (Scott & Usher 1999). When I arrived at my relative's house, I was introduced to four young people, all of whom resided in and grew up in the working-class district of South-Central LA and attended their nearby high-schools with the exception of one who attended a more privileged school in West LA (the full demographic makeup of all of my participants is provided in section 4.2.9 and Appendix C). After introducing myself, I explained the general nature of my study telling them that I wanted to explore their views on politics, consumption, their taste in music, and what they do in their free time. I was originally going to give them a pre-interview schedule and arrange meetings with them at a later date. However, I decided against this as this as I thought it might stifle spontaneity and lead to more modified and tailored responses. Once I finished describing my



research, I asked them if they would like to volunteer for it, while also telling them that they were under no obligation to do so, and that I would be digitally tape-recording the interviews. Once they all agreed, I gave them all information sheets regarding my study and consent forms. I also explained to them that if they did not wish to answer any of my questions or at any point during the interview wanted to opt out for any reason then they were entirely free to do so and no explanation on their part would be required. Lastly, I ordered a few pizzas to further lighten the mood, as well as to give them a small token of my appreciation for their time, and began an impromptu focus group discussion. About half way through the process, one of the participants had to go, but arranged an individual interview appointment with me for a later date. Overall, the focus group ran smoothly, with my interview schedule working to guide the conversation from one topic to the next, whilst not disrupting the free-flowing stream of consciousness that my participants expressed as I moved, for example, from questions about consumption to questions about politics. I did not ask every single question from the schedule, but instead employed a more fluid approach cutting some questions out because of time limitations, and in some cases my participants would launch into the next topic without me having to ask anything. As all the young people knew each other, and perhaps because none of my questions were particularly personal, the focus group discussion format, as frequently recommended in research with young people (e.g. Thomas & O’Kane, 1998), was effective in sparking a lively conversation in which the participants appeared comfortable sharing their views with me. Evidence of this is suggested by the fact that throughout our conversation the participants would joke around, and occasionally interrupted each other and started offshoot conversations as I simply sat back and observed. The whole procedure lasted about an hour and a half, after which I thanked them for their time.

#### **4.2.2 North Hollywood Zoo Magnet**

My second research site was my old high school. Having maintained a good friendship with my old English teacher who had since become the magnet coordinator [head teacher] for the school, I emailed him and asked him if he would allow me to recruit participants at his school. He agreed, and informed some of the teachers who teach juniors and seniors [the US equivalent of A-level students]

about my research, and asked them if it was okay for me to recruit participants from their classes, and subsequently pull students out of their classes should they volunteer. I arrived at the school on a Monday, and introduced myself to the teachers who agreed to allow me to recruit in their classrooms, and throughout the day visited four different classrooms where I explained my research to students as I had done with the South-Central group, and arranged interviews with sixteen of them throughout the week. The following day, the magnet coordinator provided me with an empty classroom to hold the interviews, and I pulled students that had volunteered out of their classrooms throughout the day and for the rest of the week. The interviews consisted of a mix of one to one interviews and focus group discussions. Before each interview, I took a few minutes to engage in small talk with my participants in an attempt to create a friendly and safe environment, as well as to explain to them the basic interview process and nature of my study. As with all of my interviews, I gave them information sheets regarding my study, consent forms to sign, and explicitly informed them that the interviews would be tape-recorded, and that they were under no obligation to answer any of my questions if they did not want to, that their teachers would not be given access to their responses, that their names would be changed during the transcription process, and that they could opt out of the study whenever they wished and with no need to give an explanation. Overall, the interviews with these sixteen participants ran smoothly, and it seemed that they felt comfortable during the discussions, although some of them commented that they had never been asked about some of the subject matter that I probed them about, and thus abstained from answering certain questions, or would simply nod in agreement to what some of the other participants would say. This was a situation that occasionally recurred in some of my interviews across LA and London, and that I account for in the next chapter concerned with data analysis. Moreover, as the focus group discussions were varied in size from two to four participants, and despite being allowed two hours with each participant or set of participants, I decided that three participants was the most that I should allow for future focus groups discussions when possible, as anything larger is much too time consuming and does not allow for sufficiently in depth conversations. Most of the participants from this site come from low to upper middle class backgrounds and reside in middle-class neighbourhoods from the San Fernando Valley, or the Los Feliz area, with the exception of two

participants that reside in South-Central LA and are from working-class backgrounds. (As with all of my participants, I was able to infer their socio-economic standings by asking them questions about their parent's occupations, in addition to asking them about the specific areas where they live.)

### *Other Relevant Information*

The North Hollywood Zoo Magnet High School is a specialized satellite school (affiliated but otherwise independent from the main North Hollywood High School campus and curriculum) that focuses on environmental and biological sciences. Zoo magnet students frequently score above the state average on California's annual standardized tests, and the magnet now offers several advanced placements classes (introductory university level courses) in several subjects including Environmental Science, History, and English. It hosts a diverse student population consisting of mostly middle-class White and Latino students who are bussed in from the San Fernando Valley, as well as a smaller population of working-class Black, Asian, and Latino students who are bussed in from the South LA, Hollywood, and Echo Park areas. From 25 hours of direct ethnographic observations, past visits to the school and retrospective accounts having attended the Zoo Magnet school myself 7 years ago, and conversations with teachers and students, I can report that the Zoo Magnet, while hosting a uniquely cross-sectional student population from all over the city of LA, is not fully representative of LA schools or students. The school is the only off-campus Magnet in the country, has an active, involved, and relatively affluent P.T.A (parent teacher association), and attracts a subsection of the Los Angeles Unified School District student population that is primarily interested in zoological and environmental studies, and a small learning environment that requires bussing and segregation from the main North Hollywood Campus (which is more representative of LA secondary schools and student populations). However, from my interviews and observations, I found that the students themselves, including those from suburban, White, and middle-class backgrounds, are not substantively different in terms of cultural consumption and other sub-cultural practices from the urban working-class Latino, Black, and Asian young people that I observed and interviewed, who attended less privileged schools. Nonetheless, this must be noted as I expected, and did find, a higher proportion of non-mainstream (I will

discuss this in section 4.3) young people than I would have been likely to observe in a more conventional high school.

#### **4.2.3 The Bresee Foundation Non-Profit Community Center**

My third LA research site was the Bresee Foundation, a non-profit community centre located in the central LA district of Koreatown/Rampart. The centre provides health, counselling, and after-school services and programmes for low-income young people (ages 11-18) and their families who reside in and around the Koreatown/Rampart district. The after-school youth programmes offer college prep-courses, sports and recreational activities such as camping and cycling, and multimedia technology training (the centre's main focus). The young people who attend Bresee are predominantly working-class Latinos and Asians many of whom are first generation immigrants and considered at risk of gang involvement. As a teenager I took multimedia training courses at this centre, and kept in touch with staff members. When I arrived in LA for my study, I contacted some of the staff members and told them about my study. They granted me access, and allowed me to recruit at the centre. During my last week in LA, I made periodic stops at the centre and hung around in the computer lab to observe what types of websites the young people were visiting. With the help of one of the staff members, I recruited four youth participants, all of whom are working-class students who reside in the Koreatown/Rampart district and who attend or attended their nearby high-schools. I was allowed a private room to conduct my interviews in. The interviews consisted of two one to one interviews and one focus group discussion with two participants. The single interviews lasted around thirty minutes, while the focus group discussion took about an hour. While there I also interviewed three adult youth workers to elicit their experiences and observations of working with young people ages 16-18. These observations were documented to serve as a type of secondary ethnography. Each of the youth workers works with young people in different settings: multimedia training, community service, and college/university prep courses. However, they all focus their pedagogical endeavours on activities that attempt to foster a sense of community and social consciousness amongst the young people they work with.

#### **4.2.4 World Vision Youth Empowerment Programme**

Coincidentally, and serendipitously, when I was finishing up an interview with one of the youth workers from the Bresee Foundation, he told me that he and some of the youth members were going to a planning meeting of LA non-profit organizations and their adult and student representatives to organize a Youth Summit that was to be run and coordinated by youth (ages 13-18). He invited me, and I attend three meetings in all. During the first meeting, student and youth representatives from around four different non-profits showed up, and all were invited and encouraged to present their ideas. I was particularly struck by the student representatives of the World Vision Youth Programme (four of them), as their ideas for the youth conference were, as I will describe in the following chapter, politically charged. After the meeting, I approached and recruited them as interviewees for my study, and conducted an *ad hoc* focus group discussion that was very lively but cut short due to the facilities needing to be closed. However, one of the participants met with me two days later at a McDonalds, and brought another young person from the World Vision Programme to join in the interview. This interview lasted about an hour and half. All of these young people are working-class and reside in the Downtown LA and Pico Union areas. One female participant attended a more affluent public school in West LA. The rest all attended their nearby high-schools, which included a social-justice oriented high school attended by the participants Arlene and Lisa.

##### *Other Relevant Information*

The World Vision Youth Empowerment Programme in LA is part of the World Vision International Christian humanitarian organization, and is a programme designed to teach high-school students from working-class neighbourhoods namely from the Downtown LA and Pico Union areas leadership and community organizing skills. To quote from their website, “World Vision is committed to overcoming poverty and injustice in the world—including here at home. Poverty in the United States exists in the midst of prosperity, and is characterized by a lack of safety, security, and access to basic resources”.

#### **4.2.5 London: Bermondsey Youth Centre**

While my recruitment in LA went far better than I expected and was largely facilitated by the generous assistance of my various high school and non-profit contacts, my London recruitment proved to be difficult. However, I caught a break after attending a youth worker academic discussion group meeting consisting of graduate students who were undertaking research with young people. During the meeting, I asked if anyone knew of some non-profit youth centres that are responsive to our kind of research. One of the attendees happened to be working at a youth centre in the Bermondsey area in South London, and put me in touch with one of their youth workers named Miranda.<sup>36</sup> After emailing Miranda, and telling her about my study, she agreed to help me recruit participants, and arranged for me to conduct two focus group discussions each consisting of three youth members who doubled as volunteers who mentor younger members. On the day of the interviews, I arrived two hours early so that I could interview Miranda about her experiences of working with young people. She also showed me around the facilities and programmes offered to young people. The centre was spatially quite large, and even included a rock-climbing wall and a flying trapeze. The main services provided were sports and youth mentorship programmes that prepared young people to be future youth workers. After my interview with Miranda, six youth participants showed up, and I initiated the same procedures that I had deployed with my LA participants. However, a couple of glitches occurred during these discussions. For the first one, the batteries on my tape-recorder ran out half way through the discussion without me realizing it. Once the interview was over, I noticed that the recorder had switched off, and immediately wrote down as many of my participant's responses as I could remember in my notebook. Fortunately, Miranda was kind enough to provide me with some spare batteries for the second group. This second discussion was somewhat sporadic with the participants engaging in too many tangential discussions, but still providing enough data for me to analyze. Both discussions lasted about forty minutes each. All of the participants from this site are working-class and grew up around the Bermondsey area

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<sup>36</sup> Miranda is a pseudonym as are the names used for all the participants in the study.

#### **4.2.6 Islington Political Youth**

My second London research site presented itself to me after I received a Facebook message from my younger sister that Ryan Harvey (anarchist folk-punk singer/guitarist from Baltimore, USA) was going to perform a benefit show in an activist centre in East London. I attended the event hoping to find and recruit young participants for my study. The venue was small and dank, but cosy. The walls were covered with posters featuring prominent anarchist figures like Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and Mikail Bakunin, and event flyers for future political demonstrations and an anarchist book fair. The tables were covered with books ranging in subject matter from the Spanish Civil-War to anarchist-feminism. Overall, it was a typical anarchist hangout similar to the others I have visited in LA, New York City, Chicago, and Barcelona. Four acts performed culminating with Harvey playing crowd favourites like *Once We Bury Fascism* and *Manifest Democracy*. To my surprise, I discovered that the event had been organized by a 17 year-old girl named Aimee, who donated the benefits of the show to the legal defence of activists who were facing trial for street fighting with members of the British National Party. After approaching Aimee, I realized that I had briefly met her before at an anti-Bush demonstration at Parliament three years earlier when I was studying for a Masters Degree programme. After a brief chat, I told her and her friend James about my study, and arranged individual interview meetings with them. They also informed one of their colleagues named Sam about my study, and I arranged an interview with him as well. I held my first interview with Aimee in a café near the Angel tube station, and the subsequent two in an empty classroom at the international college that I work at, also near Angel station. Each interview lasted around fifty minutes. All three of these participants are middle-class and grew up in Islington.

#### **4.2.7 Hackney Youth Centre**

My final research site was located in a youth centre in the Hackney area of London. I came across this centre through one of my colleagues from my PhD programme who is a youth worker. She provided me with a list of members of her youth worker network.<sup>37</sup> After emailing several people from the list, a youth worker named Tipi emailed back agreeing to help me recruit at his centre. Prior to

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<sup>37</sup> She is a detached youth worker who works with youth in Hackney. I also interviewed her.

conducting any recruitment, I met Tipi at his office (which was in a separate location from the actual youth centre) for a meeting to further explain my research and fill out some legal paperwork as required by the larger youth charity organization that runs the youth centre Tipi works in. He suggested that the best time to come in was during what they refer to as their 'peer' meetings. These meetings are part of youth development programmes which, according to the organization's website, are aimed at training young people aged 16 to 25 to be qualified in a range of areas related to youth work. The organization also supports them to gain paid work experience in the areas of youth work, sports coaching, multi-media tutoring, and refereeing football and basketball. The overall goal of the organization is to provide young people with stepping stones between training and the world of work, and to encourage them to think about becoming self-employed, gain further paid employment, and develop their own small businesses or social enterprises. On the first day of recruitment, I showed up at the youth centre, and found several young people playing pool and ping-pong. I noticed that the bulletin boards contained flyers for youth entrepreneurial competitions. As I was reading the flyers, a young person named Sean, who would later volunteer for my study, invited me to play a game of pool, which I accepted. After losing badly to him, Tipi gathered all of the 'peers' to sit in a circle for their weekly meeting. During this time, Tipi introduced me to the group and allowed me to talk about my research. Prior to asking for volunteers, however, Tipi allowed me to lead that week's meeting, which consisted of me fielding questions about university life. I offered this as a small gesture of appreciation for their time. The conversation, which included about eight young people, was actually quite lively and enjoyable. Unfortunately, I did not record it as it was not part of my original research, but interestingly enough their main concern revolved around having to pay for a university education, and how much money they would be able to make with a university degree. They were also especially curious about how much money I would make after my PhD. After our meeting, three 'peers' agreed to an *ad hoc* focus group discussion, and Tipi provided us with a room. The discussion went well, and lasted about an hour. I then showed up later that week for their second scheduled meeting, but due to rainy conditions, only a handful of young people showed up. However, two 'peers' that had showed up for the previous meeting, volunteered and I conducted a focus group discussion with them. This one lasted



about forty minutes. All of my participants from this site are working-class and grew up in the Hackney area.

#### **4.2.8 Confidentiality And Other Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the data collection and writing up process, I protected the personal information and privacy of my participants by ensuring privacy when I was alone with participants during our interviews in all but one case where a youth worker was present due to the *ad hoc* nature of the focus group discussion, and by using pseudonyms in the write up of this report. In the London cases, I omitted the names of the youth centre research sites. I have named the LA research sites because their uniqueness is relevant to the study, and after acquiring permission from their respective representatives. I also took great care to construct my interview schedule in a way that is as general as possible, and that did not ask participants for information or experiences that may evoke painful memories and emotions, or that they would find distressful to talk about with me. And while I did occasionally stray from my schedule to probe them on certain interesting topics that they would bring up during our conversation, I made it a priority not to pry into any aspects of their lives that might cause them distress or anxiety. Moreover, in all of the interviews, I made it explicitly clear to them at the beginning of our discussions that they did not have to answer any questions that they were not comfortable with, and that they could walk out at any time and without having to give a reason. They were also given an information sheet with the relevant contact details, should they wish to remove their responses from my study, or need to contact my supervisor to report any negative incident. However, no one terminated an interview, and it did not seem that my participants were bothered by my questions; they mostly seemed to enjoy talking about their interests.

#### **4.2.9 Sampling Limitations and Demographic Breakdown**

Overall, sampling from LA and London proved to be a sound choice. The sample populations that volunteered for my study are uniquely cross-sectional, and adequately represent the gender, ethnic, and class variances that make up the Los Angeles and London city youth population. Furthermore, my respondents were friendly, active, talkative, and from my observations, appeared perfectly

comfortable and uninhibited in answering the questions I posed to them, thereby providing me with insightful accounts and rich data. However, my sample of young people from LA consisted of only twenty-nine participants who were selected from mostly non-conventional sites, while the LA city youth population of ages 15-21 as measured by the US census, approximates 250,000. Moreover, I did not (due to time and access limitations), gather the accounts of working-poor Black and Latino youth that inhabit the deeper regions of South-Central LA, or of more affluent youth from West LA. (I should note that the city of Los Angeles is a massive geographical land mass that encompasses 498.3 square miles.) Due to similar access and time constraints, my London sample of young people only consisted of fourteen participants that centered around three districts in the central London transport zones 1 & 2, while the 15-19 youth population approximates 335,000 according to a 2007 City of London resident population analysis. Therefore, for now, I will maintain that my sample sizes simply offer a reliable exploratory starting point for future research. More interviews, and possibly large-scale survey studies with young people, coupled with more purposive sampling methods, are needed to gather data from which to make more comprehensive generalizations about the overall LA and London youth populations. Additionally, larger sample-sizes may also uncover significant differences in the roles that the different national settings may play in influencing young people’s socio-cultural and political-economic cognitive frameworks that were not apparent from my current sample (which did not throw up any significant differences that I could observe). The basic demographic breakdown of my participants is presented below in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

**Table 4.1: General Information about Los Angeles participants**

No. of young participants	29 altogether.
Age Range	16-18 years old.
Gender	10 males, 19 females.

Race and Ethnicity	The racial/ethnic composition of this sample of young people is uniquely cross-sectional and is representative of the multi-cultural nature of LA. The specific composition is too mixed and varied to break down, but the majority of participants were of White or Latino backgrounds. Jewish, Asian, and Black students make up the rest of the sample.
Class	15 participants are from working to lower-middle class backgrounds, while the other 14 are from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds.
Youth Workers	3 adult youth workers from the Bresee Community Center were also interviewed.

**Table 4.2: General Information about London participants**

No. of young participants	14 young participants altogether.
Age Range	16-19 years old.
Gender	9 males, 5 females.
Race and Ethnicity	The racial/ethnic composition of this sample of young people is uniquely cross-sectional and is representative of the multi-cultural nature of London. The specific composition is too mixed and varied to break down, but the majority of participants were from White or Black backgrounds.
Class	11 participants are from working class backgrounds, while the other 3 are from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds.
Youth Workers	2 adult youth workers: one from a community youth centre in Bermondsey, and one detached youth worker from the Hackney area were also interviewed.

### **4.3 Data Analysis: Constructing A Socio-Cognitive Typology**

*If qualitative research is to yield meaningful and useful results, it is imperative that the material under scrutiny is analysed in a methodical manner (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 187).*

The data collection methods discussed earlier in this chapter relate to the first step of my both/and framework which was to collect data on Western young people's socio-cultural and political-economic views, preferences, practices, and some of the major institutional settings that they are exposed to. However, this is only one half of the operationalization, the second half involves an analysis of the data that incorporates the study of macro power structures and ideologically charged discourses, the micro processes and contexts of everyday life, cultural and textual analysis, political-philosophical critical analysis, and socio-cognition inspired depth-investigations into discourses, audiences, and effects. In this section, I will present a step-by-step overview of this analysis and how it led to the construction of what I will refer to as a socio-cognitive typology. The content of this typology is discussed in the following empirical chapters.

#### **4.3.1 Initial Thematic Analytical Groupings**

Once the data was collected and transcribed, and after attempting several complicated schemes to organize the responses from my participants, I found that the most effective way to begin my analysis was to methodically organize the data based on how my respondents had answered the questions relating to the themes of my interview schedule, e.g., views on education, opinions on socio-economic issues and politics, personal aspirations (see Table 4.3 below). I then compared these answers to the ideal neoliberal habitus described in Figure 4.3 in section 4.1.4). For example, I would look at participant X's answer to the question that asks about opinions on capitalism, consumption, and personal aspirations, and then carefully examine if X's answers demonstrate an uncritical acceptance of capitalism. I also examined if X's answers demonstrated an instrumentalist view of education, materialistic aspirations, or negative opinions on welfare or welfare recipients. Furthermore, if participant X did express materialistic aspirations, then in order to draw a possible link between those aspirations and possible media-culture influence, I conducted a content analysis of most of their preferred media-

cultural artefacts that they divulged to me. From this content analysis, I could then analyse the relationship between the media-cultural discourses that they actively engage with and their socio-cultural and political-economic views and practices. Likewise, I also examined if my participants' responses and in some cases practices, demonstrated critical views on capitalism and corporate media-culture, or more humanist conceptions of education. I also applied a political-philosophical analysis to my participants' answers to the questions on socio-economic issues and politics, whereby I examined what type of political systems their political knowledge, views, and practices most corresponded to. I conducted this thematic and ideal comparison for all of my participants' answers to all of the questions that they answered. However, not all of them answered all or most of the questions in my interview schedule due to time constraints and other unexpected complications that are typical of the more uncontrolled settings where the research was conducted. Nonetheless, overall there was enough data to be able to group interviewee's responses with the similar responses of others. Lastly, I grouped all of my respondents into three basic categories for the first level of analysis based on a strong, middle, and weak correspondence to neoliberalism, characterized by some of the specific and consistent ways in which their responses reflect, differ from, or contest neoliberal discourses and practices.

**Table 4.3: Representation of the Thematic Ideal Analysis**

<b>Themes discussed</b> (Each theme contained a number of related open-ended questions).	<b>Ideal neoliberal habitus</b> (dispositions, thoughts and practices)	<b>Sample of participants' slightly paraphrased answers that strongly correspond to the neoliberal habitus</b>
Views on education	Instrumentalist view of education.	I think that schools should teach me about business.
Consumption practices	Uncritical consumption of goods and services, regardless of their possible exploitative production and/or negative environmental impacts.	When I'm buying clothes, I think about the price and how they're going to fit me, I don't think about anything else.
Opinions on socio-economic issues and politics	A person-blame outlook towards social problems and overall negative/judgmental attitudes towards welfare recipients	I think that welfare should be cut because people take advantage of it, and are just lazy and don't want to work.
Media-culture interests and interpretations	A preference for media-culture artefacts that contain pro-market or apolitical discourses.	I really like Jay Z because he raps about how anyone can become rich if they just work hard enough.

Personal aspirations	A preoccupation with the accumulation of capital.	I want to run my own business and be rich.
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- This is a basic breakdown of how I analyzed and grouped each of my participants' answers. The answers shown in this figure represent a high neoliberal variant, with other the two groupings representing a lower and middle variant, which I will elaborate on in the next two chapters.

### 4.3.2 The Socio-Cognitive Interface

*Our selves demonstrate continuity in their emergence in the practices of different settings and that occurs to the extent that patterns of participation in different settings elicit similar meanings and practices. Our selves are not simply embodied and revealed in narratives we carry with us (our self-concepts) but also in our attempts at sense making, in our actions and interactions in settings i.e. in the ways in which we interpret ourselves and contexts (Edwards et al., 2002, p 53).*

For my second level of analysis, I drew inspiration from van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis, which originally introduced me to the concept of schemata. van Dijk's (2002) analytic toolkit consists of a three-prong framework that treats discourses, firstly as phenomena that are manifested in, among other means, text and speech; secondly, discourses are examined for their ideological underpinnings and the vested interests that they serve. Thirdly, discourses are treated as context specific (i.e., relevant aspects of situations and society), and subjective representations of the social world that are stored and processed via an individual's schemata. As van Dijk (2006, p. 163) explains:

If contexts 'control' discourse at all, this is only possible when we conceive of them as cognitive structures of some kind. And only in this way are we able to define the crucial criterion of 'relevance', that is, in terms of a selective focus on, and subjective interpretation of some social constraint as defined by the participants. This also explains why discourse may be influenced by alternative, fictitious or misguided definitions of the social situation, as long as the speaker or writer 'sees' it that way. Thus, it is not 'objective' gender, class, ethnicity or power that control the production or comprehension of text and talk, but whether and how participants interpret, represent and make use of such

‘external’ constraints, and especially how they do so in situated interaction.

van Dijk (2006) uses this basic framework in conjunction with more traditional linguistic methods that incorporate the study of semantics, syntax, metaphors, and other linguistic criteria. While I do incorporate some of these linguistic criteria by analyzing my participant’s semantic and lexical associations (e.g., the frequency, connections, order, and connotations of some of the specific words that they use, as well as their categorical and procedural functions), what I mostly borrow from van Dijk (2006) is the socio-cognitive ontological position. This position presupposes that discourse processing and storage occurs in the generative cognitive structures of individuals, and that discourse processing, despite being a mostly unconscious phenomenon can to some extent be inferred and extrapolated from transcribed interview data. That is, in the context of this study, the discursive ways that young people express their views and attitudes, provide a window into their habituses, i.e., the underlying schematic content and organization of the societal discourses and practices that they have been exposed to, which guide their socio-cultural and political-economic views and practices in both conscious and unconscious ways.

Additionally, van Dijk’s (1998) socio-cognitive approach urges researchers to describe the structures of socially shared mental representations, as well as the processes or strategies of their social acquisition, use and change. With this in mind, and after reviewing the initial thematic/ideal analytic groupings described above, it became more apparent that, in addition to the explicit views, attitudes, and modes of cultural consumption, what certain young people share and differ in, is in the ways that they understand and process socio-environmental stimuli/information (e.g., social experiences, interactions, discourses, images, sounds). For instance, while all of my LA and London youth participants expressed critical stances towards certain neoliberal discourses and practices, certain participants expressed a more substantial understanding and knowledge of political-economic issues and theories, and were able to explain their political-economic views and practices in more detail and critical depth than my other youth participants, and connect them to their socio-cultural preferences and practices. Furthermore, they were able to do it very quickly in a seemingly

automatic fashion. According to some of the methods used by cognitive and social-psychologists (e.g., priming, think out loud tests), the quicker a participant responds to a controlled stimuli (in this instance semi-structured questions), the more likely it is that their reactions, or certain aspects of their reactions, are beyond their conscious awareness (Fishbach & Shah, 2006). While my study was not designed to incorporate such methods, the quick response times from those young people to certain questions suggest that they have highly informed and instantly available political-economic schemata from which to draw. More importantly, these highly informed political-economic schemata seem to correlate to the ways that they engage with dominant socio-cultural discourses and practices, which are markedly different from the other groups of young people. Additionally, I also observed that with all my youth participants, the stronger the valence (i.e., negative or positive emotive tone or evaluation of an object, situation, or subject which influences judgments and choices) of their dispositions or expressed thoughts, the more detailed their reflective accounts tended to be. This valence strength could be approximately gauged from their voice intonations (as captured on my digital recorder) and facial expressions (which I paid special attention to during the interviews and wrote down in my notes). Hence, while the explicit and expressed, and in some cases displayed, socio-cultural and political-economic emotions, thoughts, and practices of my youth participants are valuable in helping to establish lines of delineation between groups of them, their dispositional tendencies, as can be inferred from their discursive, facial, and emotive responses, can help to add an extra level of socio-cognitive categorization. Therefore, and given that I did not feel that I had spent sufficient time with these young people and in their specific habitats to be able to provide a comprehensive account of their daily social practices, detailing some of their implicit and explicit socio-cultural and political-economic emotions, thoughts, and practices, as can be derived from their responses and body language, is the next best thing in gauging an approximation of their habituses' key cognitive, normative, and affective components, and serves as the foundation for further and even more in depth research. Lastly, I used an operationalized schema mapping framework to explicitly illustrate some of the lexical and semantic associations of some of my participants' socio-cultural and/or political-economic schemata and their affective



and normative elements. I will elaborate on this in the following chapter in section 5.2 in order to better contextualize this operationalization.

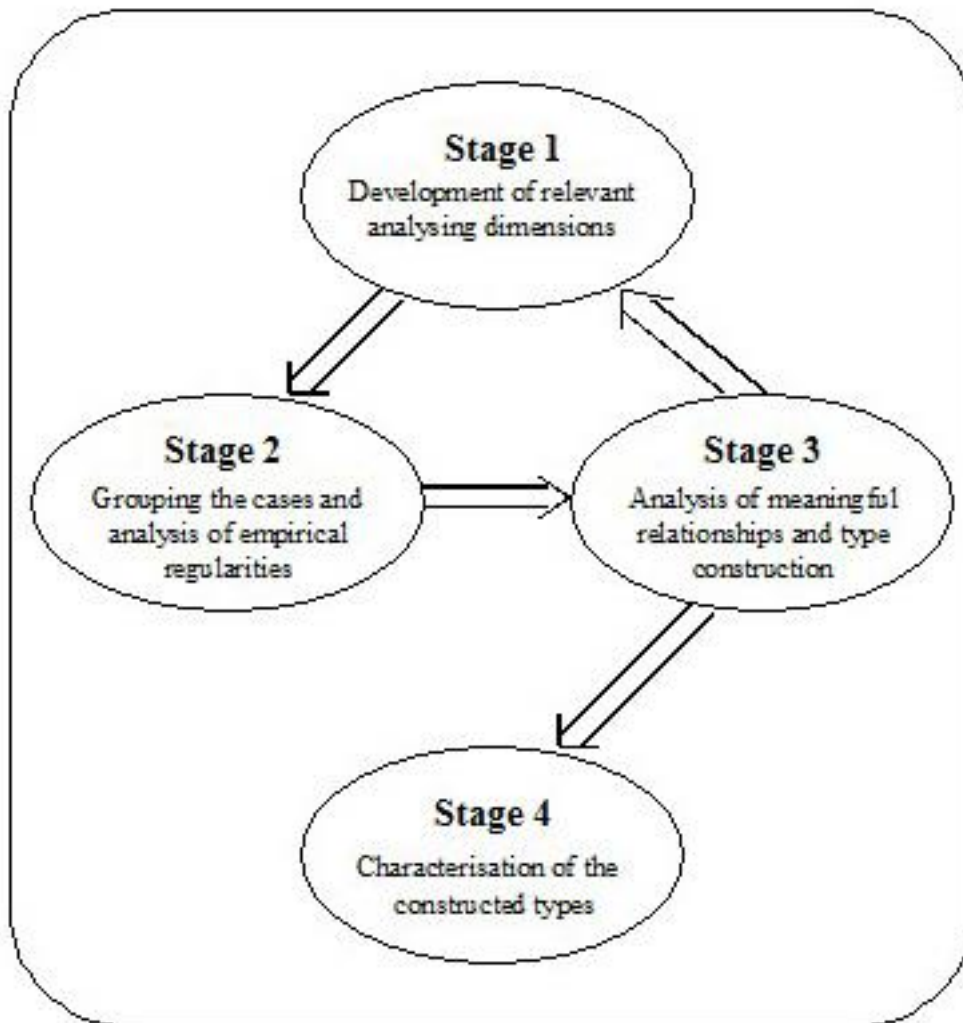
### 4.3.3 Towards a Socio-Cognitive Typology of LA and London Youth

After I had examined the response times, voice intonations, facial expressions, and overall socio-cultural and political-economic semantic and lexical associations and their underlying affective and normative components of my participants' responses, and having established the initial groupings discussed above, I roughly followed stages 3 and 4 of Kluge's (2000) guidelines for creating a typology (see Figure 4.4 below), and constructed three actual 'types' of young people: *Critical/Political*, *Artsy/Indie*, and *Mainstream*. In other words, these types represent real and observed characteristics and dispositions rather than ideal ones. In the following data analysis chapters, I will fully elaborate on the characterizations and points of delineation for each of the three types. However, before I continue, I want to emphasize that I constructed this typology as an heuristic. It is not meant to be a neat representation nor to pigeonhole my participants into any type; particularly as they displayed a variety of messy and scattershot views sometimes making their placing into a particular type difficult. In fact, three of my participants' accounts (Zoo participants Emir and Becky, and World-Vision participant Desmon) were not included in any grouping.<sup>38</sup> Rather, this actual/real yet proto typology is meant to elucidate some of the most salient and specific ways in which certain young people with shared information-processing and other characteristics engage with the dominant institutional discourses and practices of their society, how they are potentially influenced by them, and what strategies they employ to reject or resist them, e.g., via the internalization of opposing or counter-hegemonic discourses and practices.

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<sup>38</sup> In the case of Desmon, I simply did not have enough data to warrant placing him in any group. Emir was a recent Turkish immigrant, and while his socio-cultural practices very much resembled those practiced by *Mainstream* youth, his political-economic knowledge concerning US issues, was by his own admission, underdeveloped due to him being primarily raised in Turkey. Becky's account, was a uniquely complicated one in that it reflected a hybrid between *Mainstream* and *Artsy/Indie* characteristics. Nonetheless, these three cases presented excellent learning opportunities that forced me to carefully construct my existing three-fold typology, as well as to think carefully about future categorizations and methodological fixes.

**Figure 4.4: Model of empirically grounded typology construction**



Typologies are often criticized for not specifying the causal mechanisms or processes operating within each type of organization or classification scheme (Scott, 1981). I will attempt to sidestep this issue somewhat, and argue that while non-determined, the causal mechanisms underlying each of the three typologies that I have created are of socio-cognitive origin. That is, and however vague that may sound, I have positioned my young participants within a particular type because of the ways they interpret, frame, react to, and discursively express social information, arguing throughout that these interpretations, framings, reactions, and discursive expressions are the result of the intersubjective interplay between existing societal discourses and their own unique, subjective, and acquired socio-cognitive schemata (van Dijk, 1998). The specific positioning of my participants into a particular type is listed in the following tables.

**Table 4.5: LA Youth Types**

<b>Critical/Political</b>	<b>Artsy/Indie</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>
Anthony (17) Zoo Joey (17) Zoo Ben (17) Zoo Arlene (17) World Vision Lisa (16) World Vision Senai (16) World Vision Elizabeth (17) World Vision Lupe (17) South-Central Luz (18) South-Central Jasmin (17) Bresee	Jesse (17) Zoo Evyn (17) Zoo Phillip (18) Zoo Zack (17) Zoo Diana (16) Zoo Jocelyn (18) Zoo Gloria (18) South-Central Tiff (18) South-Central Veronica (18) Bresee Jose (18) Breese	Ela (18) Zoo Dennis (18) Zoo John (17) Zoo Karina (17) Zoo Maurine (17) Zoo Maria (17) Zoo Fernanda (17) Bresee

**Table 4.6: London Youth Types**

<b>Critical/Political</b>	<b>Artsy/Indie</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>
Aimee (17) Islington James (17) Islington Sam (16) Islington		Tirian (17) Hackney Sean (17) Hackney Tyrone (19) Hackney Iris (17) Hackney Jenkins (18) Hackney Jack (17) Bermondsey Lindsey (17) Bermondsey Alice (17) Bermondsey Anthony (18) Bermondsey Dylanda (16) Bermondsey Josh (16) Bermondsey

## Chapter Five

### **Critical/Political Youth Challenging Neoliberalism**

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Rudy: How do you guys think these [social and environmental] problems could be fixed?

Joey: By the youth.

Rudy: Explain.

Joey: When you're a teenager and they say like you think that way now but you don't have a job, you don't have a car, you don't have to deal with this. And it's like yes, I don't owe mortgage money to a bank, I have nothing to give to bank, they don't have any hold on me, the government doesn't have any hold on me, I'm not 18 yet. I don't have to pay car companies, I don't have to pay oil companies, I don't give anything to any of these things. I don't have responsibilities; I don't owe anything to anyone. I'm completely free to think what I want to think, and I know what I see, and it's like once you're an adult and you're sucked into the world that is, and It's really hard to change it, but when you're not yet considered part of it, and having to like, work in it. [...] So it's up to the youth. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: So what kind of actions do you think then are necessary to make governments responsive for instance to the views or the wants of their citizens?

Aimee: Threatening the mechanisms that they rely on, and the interests of the people who fund them. I think there is something that's said quite often, if all the people who marched against the Iraq War had rioted against the Iraq War, we wouldn't have gone to war. (Islington participant)

Thus far I have reviewed and described some of the dominant socio-cultural and political-economic institutions, discourses, processes, and mechanisms that constitute contemporary US and UK neoliberal societies. While taking a non-deterministic position that emphasizes the active role of agents in accepting, rejecting, reformulating, or negotiating between the societal discourses presented to them, I have nonetheless argued that current US and UK young people are subject to a hegemonic media driven neoliberal culture that is hard to ignore. In order to begin to explore the complicated micro-level interactional dynamics between this neoliberal culture and individual agents, I now turn to an analysis of my LA and London interviews and observations using extracts from my data. In this chapter, I present a detailed characterization of one of the three actual “types” of LA and London young people that I will refer to as *Critical/Political*.

Throughout this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate how these young people exhibit transposable socio-cognitive dispositions; viz., mentally stored and unconsciously manifested subjective societal attitudes, beliefs, preferences, affects, and inclinations,<sup>39</sup> that are predominantly politically and critically charged, and that orient them towards more reflective views and practices that are critical of, and which challenge, existing neoliberal discourses. By pointing to some of their socio-cultural experiences and agentic practices, and by unpacking the substantive content, i.e., central tendencies, and conceptual, semantic, and lexical associations of their underlying socio-cultural and political-economic schemata as can be extracted from their accounts,<sup>40</sup> I seek to highlight some of the ways that those critical and political dispositions are actively reified. Lastly, I will end this chapter with a section that describes how some of these young people's schemata for political-economic organization and human nature, nonetheless mirror or correspond to existing neoliberal discourses, and the potential implications this may have for neoliberal reproduction.

### **5.1 Critical/Political Youth: A Leftist Disposition**

As mentioned in section 4.2.4, after interviewing one of the youth workers from the Breese Foundation, he invited me to a meeting that, entirely by coincidence, involved the planning of LA's first ever youth-led youth conference. At the meeting, there were representatives, both adults and young people, from several of the city's non-profit organizations. While the adults were in charge of the major logistics including the provision of funds and a venue, the main purpose of these planning meetings (there were five in total, of which I attended three) was to let the young people decide how the conference was going to be run, who was going to speak, and what topics were going to be discussed. As the meeting was taking place, five young people and their adult youth worker representing the World Vision Youth Empowerment Programme walked in about ten minutes late. Once the meeting's adult facilitator opened the floor for the first major decision

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<sup>39</sup> Given the time and access restraints I faced when conducting fieldwork, I do not feel that I observed and documented enough of my participants' practices to be able to comment on them in depth. Therefore, in this chapter, as in the next two, I will be referring to their thought processes, and from those, tentatively inferring a homologous relationship to their expressed practices.

<sup>40</sup> As stated in Chapters 2 and 4, these refer to hypothesized mentally encoded, compartmentalized, and dynamic cognitive representations of their acquired socio-cultural and political-economic knowledge, experiences, and orientations (Lodge et al, 1991; Torney-Purta, 1995; van Dijk, 2012).

(the length of time that each workshop should last), the adults, myself included, stepped back and observed as the young people discussed amongst themselves what they felt would be the appropriate amount of time for each workshop. As we were looking on, the adult next to me leaned over and said exactly what I was thinking, “this is direct democracy”. While all of the young people (about thirteen spanning the ages of 9-17) could be seen weighing in on the consensus, three of the World Vision young people (Senai, Arlene, and Elizabeth) took on *de facto* leadership roles. Very mindful of not wanting to dominate the decision making process, they actively encouraged input from the shyer and younger youth, and facilitated rather than dictated the final decision. The meeting ended with each group of young people from their respective non-profit organization proposing a topic for their workshop. While most of the groups decided on rather apolitical subjects including health issues that affect teens, a teen suicide hotline, and college/university prep, the World Vision group decided to run a workshop to raise awareness on the exploitative conditions of Los Angeles’ sweatshops. After the meeting, I approached the World Vision group, and conducted an *ad hoc* interview with them. I begin this section with a description of the above event as a means of evoking a sense of some of the political practices that the young people who I will refer to as *Critical/Political*, engage in. It was only after witnessing these young people, and in particular Senai, Elizabeth, and Arlene, enacting what can be considered consensus democracy, and pushing the youth conference towards more social justice orientations, that I was prompted to more carefully define what I actually meant by political. Originally, I was prepared to define my participants as political if they held explicit and comprehensive views, whether negative or positive, on the political-economic system, their government’s policies, and corporate culture. However, wanting to avoid falling prey to cultural populist tendencies, and in light of what I had observed at the event described above, I found that my original conception of political was too loose. In order to do justice to the dedicated activism, community involvement, and overall political knowledge and concerns that some of my youth participants expressed and/or displayed, it was necessary for me to distinguish between deeper and shallower conceptions of political. For these participants, their political characteristics took the form of a more deep seated disposition, viz., one that oriented/predisposed them to consistently express and/or display, in a seemingly automatic fashion, and

despite the neutrality of the prompting stimulus (e.g., interview questions), attitudes, views, preferences, and opinions that differ from, and are critical of, existing socio-cultural and political-economic discourses and practices.<sup>41</sup> In other words, throughout my interviews with them, these participants consistently expressed critical dispositions (i.e., the automatic tendency to question and critique taken for granted assumptions), and/or political dispositions (i.e., the automatic tendency or inclination to want to connect or infuse otherwise neutral topics with political concerns or overtures). For example, during my *ad hoc* focus group with the World Vision group, and after briefly explaining the nature of my study, I asked them to tell me a little bit about themselves and some of the activities that they like to do on their free time, to which Senai and Elizabeth answered respectively:

Senai: On my free time, I like to run through the polluted air of Los Angeles, and I like to play guitar, hang out with friends, and save our community and make different changes for the better of the new generation that is going to come after me.

Elizabeth: In my free time this is what I'm doing [referring to the youth conference planning meeting described above] gathering with youth, talking, and making change.

There could be a number of reasons for why they answered my seemingly neutral question in such a way, not least of which, could be that their adult youth worker representative was in the room, or that the non-profit organization that they were representing at the planning meeting was politically charged (hence predisposing them to particular answers when talking to other youth workers, adults, or researchers like myself), or that they simply presupposed the types of answers, they thought I was looking for. However, the World Vision young people, along with all of the other young people that I have categorized as *Critical/Political*, and regardless of their gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and national setting, repeatedly demonstrated this tendency to immediately articulate critical and political thoughts. This tendency is one of the major characteristics that distinguishes them from the other two groups, which I discuss in the next two

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<sup>41</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, a more deep-seated political dispositional characteristic can also entail more conservative viewpoints and practices. However, my sample of youth participants did not include any young people who displayed or expressed a more conservative political disposition.

chapters. For example, note the following extracts, where the information contained in them about the participants' political identities and activities was volunteered at the very beginning of each interview:

Rudy: Tell me a little something about yourself.

Aimee: I'm 17. I live in Hackney in North London, at the moment I'm going to college studying history, politics, and history of art. I identify as an anarchist, and I have for the past 4 years.

Rudy: So what do you do on your free time?

Aimee: I go to gigs, organize gigs. Do DIY art, crafts kind of stuff, and then just usual spending time with friends and the Internet, and reading. (Islington participant).

Rudy: Tell me a little something about yourself and some of the things you like to do on your free time.

James: I like to play guitar, and do a lot of art like graffiti, paintings collages, and reading and writing is quite a big factor both for college and leisure.

Rudy: Are there any after school clubs that you're a part of?

James: I'm part of a press gang.

Rudy: What is that?

James: It's the Waltham Forest borough Forest Flava press gang, and they're all sort of my age, and younger around 18, and we just write articles for our website and for the local Guardian. [...] I have an opinion piece in it.<sup>42</sup> (Islington participant)

Rudy: Let's start with a few starter questions; tell me a little something about yourself.

Sam: I live in London in Leytonstone, and go to college.

Rudy: What do you like to do, like hobbies and stuff?

Sam: I mostly like to read. I like films, mostly old ones, and am interested in politics and philosophy and such.

Rudy: So during your free time what do you do?

Sam: I read quite a lot and go to social events and music stuff.

Rudy: Are you a member of any after school clubs or organizations?

Sam: I go to a politics one on Wednesdays, which is quite good, and [discusses] topical issues, and sometimes they have speakers and that which are quite good. (Islington participant)

Rudy: Tell me a little bit about yourself, name, age, and some of things you like to do.

Luz: My name is Luz Hernandez. I'm 18. I like to hike a lot. Watch movies. I'm a film fanatic.

Rudy: Anything in particular?

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<sup>42</sup> In this piece James writes about broad topics covering art and politics.



- Luz: Horror, old movies, not so much the new ones. Music, you know music culture, counterculture.
- Rudy: Counterculture, like what?
- Luz: Like shows and venues, counterculture as in opposed to the mainstream culture; music that isn't that much out there, Metal and sub genres of punk. I also like to read a lot and learn. (South-Central LA participant)

The instant account of their political identities and activities, as in Senai, Elizabeth, and Aimee's case, or of their preference for counter-cultural activities as in James's graffiti art and Luz's music consumption, presented in the above extracts, suggests that politics was fundamental to these young people's self-identities. This came through also in these (*Critical/Political*) participants' responses to some of my other questions that probed them about other aspects of their everyday socio-cultural experiences. These responses indicate that these young people have developed ways of thinking that allow them to automatically connect personal factors like their socio-cultural experiences with larger political issues and concerns. For example, when I asked members of the *World Vision* group what they felt the role of education should be, the following back and forth discussion broke out between Arlene and Senai:

- Arlene: I mean in general. There should be more clubs to interact and build relationships with others. I mean my school has a lot of clubs, and it's an awesome thing. Obviously, school is about education, but it should teach you more than just that. [...] Like me, I had trouble expressing myself when I was younger. I was a nerd and all I did was write and write, [but I did not have a social club to express myself], like the one I'm in now which is preparing me], and this is what schools should have more of.
- Senai: But look at you, like you don't need school to teach. Did school teach you how to do this? The community itself did, your passion for the community, and make change and stop violence and be a part of that peace vigil. It gives you the pressure to be talking like this, and you didn't learn this from school.
- Arlene: Yeah but we also have to think about kids who do not have the opportunity or who are not aware of these programmes Kids whose parents don't let them go out. Kids whose parents just say you know do your homework study that's what you're going to need to do later in life [to] pay you. But I wanted to add to something she said. I'm taking a US history class, and I sometimes think why aren't we talking about the history that's going on right now. Like, sincerely I have always asked that question, why are we in a war with Iraq. There are so many contradictions with that, and I just want a sincere and honest answer. And my history class doesn't provide a straight answer,

and that sucks because for whatever reason that we're in a war with Iraq, we could fix it, and come to some peaceful arrangement. But because the government is so corrupt, and we're not aware of all of this things, and government just puts people to sleep.

Admittedly the train of thought is a bit difficult to follow, but given that, however brief, this was a free-flowing discussion between the two participants, with no interruption on my part, Arlene and Senai simultaneously express (discursively), a counter neoliberal view of education, and a dispositional capacity to move from private problems to public issues (Mills, 1959).<sup>43</sup> In the above extract, both Arlene and Senai convey anti-instrumentalist views of education with Senai passionately (her voice intonation takes a more impassioned tone at this point in the interview) lauding a community-based social justice oriented education which she appears to have experienced, while Arlene argues for after-school clubs that offer young people a safe space to express themselves and for a school curriculum that seriously discusses current political issues like their government's war in Iraq. Moreover, what was rather striking in this conversation is that Arlene and Senai moved from the specific domain of education to the war in Iraq in under one minute. Arguably, although I can only speculate as I did not ask them this directly, their thoughts were so sporadic, spontaneous, and free-flowing that it is very possible that they were not even aware of the connections they were making.

This propensity to automatically connect personal socio-cultural experiences with larger political-economic concerns, with little to no prying on my part, and sometimes within one breath, was particularly noticeable during discussions concerning shopping and brand clothing. For example, when I asked my London participant James about his opinions on shopping centres and brand fashion, he responded as follows.

Rudy: Do you ever go to the malls or shopping centres?

James: [...] I go to them sometimes, but I'm not a fervent consumer.

Rudy: So what do you do when you go there?

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<sup>43</sup> While not explicitly connected to macro political concerns, Elizabeth's response to the question regarding her educational experiences was loaded with micro political concerns, whereby she expressed that her education was being hampered by racist and discriminatory school policies and practices that negatively impacted working-class pupils of colour. Indeed, all of the young people in this group who were asked the question about what the role of education should be expressed the view that schools, in addition to teaching standard subjects like Math and Science, should provide young people with an opportunity to self-direct their education, and develop critical thinking skills. These views run largely counter to the neoliberal view of education which stresses instrumentalist/job training values.

James: Well when I was at secondary school I used to go with my friends to Tottenham Court Road and Covent Garden and places like that. We mainly just goofed around, and we were the mall rats, and we never really took part in what it was meant to be.

Rudy: Really, what was it meant to be you think?

James: Well it was meant to be just people buying things.

Rudy: Is there a particular reason for why you didn't buy stuff?

James: Well we didn't really have money for one, [...] but we probably didn't have an interest in most of the things they were selling.

Rudy: Ah, like what?

James: I don't know popular fashion is not really a big thing for me.

Rudy: Why not? Brand clothing is a relatively staple accessory of young people, so why...

James: But they're still brands when you get them in second hand stores.

Rudy: But why doesn't it appeal to you, you think?

James: Um I don't know because it's all pretty glossy and just a bit, and off putting.

Rudy: I'm curious as to how you manage to avoid it or I guess resist it, since everywhere you go there are advertisements trying to sell you something, on the tube, everywhere. [...]

James: Well it probably does have a big part that I don't have much money to play into the system, but I suppose it also has something to do because I've cultivated quite an objective view of it. It's detrimental you shouldn't buy into it. It gets everyone into a culture of consumerism.

Rudy: How is it detrimental you think?

James: It's detrimental because it keeps the rich richer and poor poorer.

Although there is much to examine in the above extract, including James' pragmatic constraints on shopping (i.e., he does not have the money for), along with his expressed political objections to it, the following train of thought demonstrates his disposition and capacity to connect everyday socio-cultural practices with larger political-economic issues. After a few minutes of conversation, I then asked James if he knew about the environmental impact of what he referred to above as the culture of consumption. (I highlight James's response times to demonstrate the speed of his connections).

Rudy: Now this culture of consumption that you mention, do you understand the relationship between that and the environment, the natural environment? (Time: 13:47).

James: (13:49) Well yeah it's quite bad isn't it (13:51)?

Rudy: (13:53) In what way? (13:54)

James: (13:56) Well I don't know how to feel about climate change to be honest I mean there's lot of scientists that have conflicting views and lots of people have loads of views and opinions. I don't know, I mean,

- at base level I obviously agree that all these chemicals and toxins that we pump out aren't going to be good for us in the long run (14:28).
- Rudy: (14:31) I see I was wondering that, because when I mentioned consumption and the environment you immediately thought of climate science, so I was wondering why, what was that connection you made in your head? (14:44)
- James: (14:48) I don't know, I thought of cars, and thought of mass produced cars coming out of factories, everyone buying them and buying lots of petrol and then driving their cars to work (15:07).
- Rudy: Oh right, that's a very logical connection between overconsumption and the state of the environment.

James's disposition and capacity to connect consumerism to political-economic issues of labour and environmental exploitation (as further elaborated in the extracts below) was a prominent characteristic expressed and/or displayed in some way by all the *Critical/Political* young people. They all tended to instantly express (either discursively, and/or via changed facial expressions and pronounced voice intonations) an emphatic aversion to consumerism, and in most cases conveyed a principled political rationale for their rejection of consumerism, one that incidentally, is reminiscent of the classic Frankfurt's School's critique of the commercialization of modern society and the individual passivity and conformity that it creates, as discussed in section 2.1.

- Rudy: For instance do you know where clothing and things are made?
- James: Overseas.
- Rudy: And do you know under what conditions?
- James: Very bad conditions.
- Rudy: Like what?
- James: Well you got women in the Congo working for like 5p doing back breaking work. You know getting the little pieces that you need for your laptop or your phone. I read an article recently that said that women have been joining in the mines for gold because rape is one of the biggest problems in the Congo, so they rather work in the mines than in the fields. [...] That was a pretty grim article. But yeah it's elsewhere as well. It's most of the third-world countries you can pick out. It's all happening there.
- Rudy: So does this contribute to your not wanting to?
- James: Well yes obviously. But in another way I do feel quite trapped by it as well because I can't really help having a phone that has those pieces in it or a laptop that has those pieces in it. I mean I did buy my own phone but my parents bought my laptop, but either way I still feel responsible for anything my parents buy me, especially in moral terms. (Islington participant)

Rudy: Do you ever go to shopping malls?  
Luz: No, I don't like the bustle I guess, people pushing and shoving. I don't really like anything about it. Consumerism is kind of blah to me. I'd rather make my own shirts.  
Rudy: What do you mean that consumerism is blah to you?  
Luz: For lack of a better word, as it doesn't really appeal to me. You know I don't want the latest trendy pants [trousers] or something, Apple Bottom jeans, I don't care you know, it doesn't catch my attention at all. (South-Central LA participant)

Rudy: Do you ever go to shopping malls?  
Joey: In previous years since 8th grade to 11th grade malls used to make me nauseous and sick. At first I didn't understand. It was just overwhelming how many faces there are. It's just overwhelming how retarded it is, how retarded people get. It's just the animalistic way they do it. They just go there to spend money and get things. I don't usually go to malls. I hang out at a friend's house for fun. I hate going to malls and I hate looking at ads. [.....] I think a lot of kids our age are not really interested in the whole controversy of like you know, wow, they're ads like this everywhere, like buy this buy that everywhere. A lot of kids aren't really interested in that, and you know it's because a lot of training like capitalism is good, it's what makes the world go round. You know you want things and that's why you work harder, so that's the whole theory behind it and kids aren't really interested. And for Black Friday [in the US, refers to the day after Thanksgiving sales similar to the UK's Boxing Day], it's also 'Buy Nothing Day' for Add busters [a counter-culture magazine that focuses on the anti-globalization movement and anti-corporate activities], and I was trying to organize and assemble a freedom ride thing on the subway which is just like wearing black and dance, and don't buy anything and free your soul kind of thing, and not a single person showed up, except Josh and me. So it just kind of shows you how few people are interested in anything like that. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: Do you ever go to shopping malls?  
Ben: Absolutely not. It's depressing to me. The mall is the symbol of corporate dominance. It's gross to me. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: What do you think of brand clothing?  
Jazmin: I hate brand clothing, it's so stupid. I mean when you go to the ghetto you see [...] families where parents are wearing nicer brand clothing than their kids, their kids are practically in rags, and they're spending so much money on clothes that are made by slave labour. I'd rather wear some cheap ass pants that work the way I want them to work. [...]  
Rudy: Now explain the slave labour part, what do you mean by that?

Jazmin: Well a lot of clothing companies make their clothes in Indonesia or China, in poor areas where they don't pay their workers right, they mistreat their workers, and people keep buying stuff from them. Like Nike, used a lot of slave labour, I don't know if they still do it, but I know that they did, and **people don't fucking care**. They still keep wearing, and they still keep contributing to their profits in the end, I choose not to contribute.

Rudy: So you think knowing this [...] affects the way you consume certain things?

Jazmin: Yeah, like for instance you know McDonalds how they make their meat, and the hormones that they put in it. I, till like four years ago, I didn't eat McDonalds at all, and I still don't really eat it, but there was a certain point where I couldn't afford anything, so that's all I could get, but before that, I didn't buy it. (Bresee Foundation participant)

Rudy: So do you ever go to places like the Brent Cross Shopping Centre or Oxford Street or places like that?

Aimee: No

Rudy: Any particular reason?

Aimee: It's funny because it's not even like an ethical thing. I don't really have a problem with that. I know loads of anarchists who do go shopping and buy designer clothes. It's nothing to do with that. I don't know I just prefer to find things that are second hand. I don't, I like old things and improving them.

Rudy: So like brand clothing doesn't do anything for you?

Aimee: No

Rudy: But it just doesn't, there's no ethical reason as you mentioned?

Aimee: Like I know obviously, I understand all of the reasons why people have ethical objections, and I have ethical objections to the fact that it's made in sweatshops and all that stuff. But I don't really believe in consumer boycotts as a tactic I guess. [She goes on to articulate a very critical view of ethical consumption]. (Islington participant)

Rudy: Do you ever go to malls or shopping centres?

Sam: Rarely, I'm not a big fan of those. It feels, it kind of feels like you're sort of outside of reality when you're in those. It's just like, like loads of consumers in that and it makes me sad.

Rudy: Why, elaborate on that, explain?

Sam: It just kind of depresses me the way that society has become so consumeristic, and you see people flocking to buy things they don't need. It depresses. But see I very rarely go to malls and that.

Rudy: But why does it depress you?

Sam: Just because people's lives are reduced to acquiring commodities rather than. [Inaudible]. Just the way that society has become so consumeristic, but I can't explain it.

Rudy: What do you think of brand clothing then?

Sam: I personally don't wear it. It's for a number of reasons. First of all I don't see the point in paying large prices for items that are just labels.

Also for an ethical point of view they often are made by people who are working below the minimum wage in areas of high poverty and exploitation. And also, I generally dislike kind of large multi-national companies. But obviously don't abstain from all of them because that would be too difficult a task but I generally avoid those sorts of products. (Islington participant)

In the cases of Anthony, Luz, and Lupe, where the connection between consumption and its larger political-economic consequences was not made during their responses to questions that asked whether they go to shopping malls or like brand clothing, they did make this connection in response to the next set of questions about whether they knew where their consumer goods come from.<sup>44</sup>

Rudy: Do you guys know where your clothes are made?

Anthony: China. Slave labour. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: Do you guys know where your clothes are made?

Luz: Like Forever 21, sweatshops and stuff like that. I'm aware where they come from so that's why I try not to buy anything from them. I guess it's the reason I don't purchase brand name clothing.

Lupe: I learned in school. I believe it was in my eight-grade history class. My teacher was really into that stuff. He would show us documentaries about stuff like that. Not only would they exploit people but it also harms the environment.

Rudy: What about the impact on the environment that occurs because of the production of these items, do you know anything about that? If so, what are your thoughts?

Luz: Yes, like every item of clothing is not just affecting the person making it or the person wearing it, the materials that it comes from [...] makes pollution, factory work, deforestation depending on the item.

Lupe: Yeah, like a radio for example, the metal is from Brazil and the plastic is from China. Just stuff from all over the world to make a radio. Just to make it cheaper for you, so it could be worth like \$2 they could down forests and stuff. (South-Central LA participants)

In addition to their critical and political dispositions, these extracts also demonstrate these young people's informed understanding of how seemingly benign cultural artefacts like branded goods are intimately interlocked with wider political-economic processes, and noticeably highlight these young people's

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<sup>44</sup> Due to the *ad hoc* nature of the first World Vision focus group, I was not able to ask them questions about their consumption habits. However, they all worked together to present a sweatshop awareness workshop for the LA Youth Conference, indicating their critical stance towards mainstream fashion and the labour practices of the garment industry.

significant degree of empathy for the suffering of others. Additionally, they suggest that when this understanding or schemata, as I will discuss in the next section, is activated (e.g., via my questioning, or presumably by some other stimulus during their everyday experiences), it initiates a strong emotional reaction in these young people, which can influence their consumption practices, as described in James, Jazmin [note her statement above in bold], Sam, and Luz's accounts, and in the following accounts by Ben, Arlene, and Lisa.<sup>45</sup>

Rudy: Do you guys know where your clothes are made?

Ben: Indonesia, China. I don't know specifically where they are made. But I feel awful about wearing it, because you know. I don't really know too much about this and can't buy anything and be sure. But I have the feeling that the majority of the clothes I wear were made essentially out of slave labour and that's why I got them so cheap. It's because people in South America were making this sneakers for like a quarter a day. And frankly I don't know how to circumvent that and wear what I want without having to spend a lot of money. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: So what do you think about brand clothing for instance?

Arlene: I don't mind, I really don't care, it's not a topic that I really look at. Although sometimes I really do look at brands and who makes their clothes. For example, the coach bags, they're like little kids weaving these bags with their hands, and that's incredibly cruel. And like for example, the See's Candies, there are little kids [extracting] the cocoa, and like they don't get paid for this, their parents get paid, because kids are volunteers, and if they get caught eating a cocoa eating a chocolate they get punished. So most of these have never tried chocolates in their lives, and that's where they work at. So that's incredibly sad. So I do not eat any See's Candies at all.

Lisa: I'm not going to eat See's Candies from now on too, oh my god.

Arlene: You didn't know that (directed at Lisa)? And I love See's Candies, but I don't eat it since I found out. It's been over two years since I found out, and since then [I haven't]. (World Vision participants)

Their critical and political dispositions were also particularly prevalent during discussions that centred on their preferred media-cultural tastes. In most instances,

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<sup>45</sup> At this point I should I also note that, with the exception of the World Vision participants', Senai and Elizabeth, I had repeated encounters with all of the *Critical/Political* young people. During my interviews with them, and subsequent run-ins, I paid attention to what they were wearing, so as to compare their views with their actual practices. At the time of those few encounters at least, these respondents either wore non-corporate DIY ensembles or simple clothing with no obvious or flashy brand labels. More corroborating evidence for the consistency between their views and practices can also be found in their critique of mainstream corporate media-culture as discussed in this section.



these young people tended to automatically express their preferred media-culture interests while simultaneously distancing themselves from, and critiquing, what they view as mainstream culture and its celebrity representatives. Correspondingly, and in general, as with most young people, *Critical/Political* young people tended to express a strong emotional attachment to their media-culture preferences. However, they often coupled that attachment with an in depth critical textual and political analysis of their preferred cultural artefacts. This is again another key characteristic that distinguishes them from the other two classifications of young peoples, who, as I will demonstrate in the next chapters, appreciate and engage with media-culture mostly for its affective and/or entertainment properties. Furthermore, even for contemporary young people who have broad access to a multitude of media-cultural artefacts from all over the world, another general characteristic is that these young people's media-cultural tastes are very esoteric and generally non-corporate, which suggests that they go to extensive lengths to either escape mainstream culture, or to simply find something different from it.

- Rudy: What types of like film or music do you listen to and why exactly?  
Luz: [...] Music wise, not really mainstream music, it doesn't catch my attention, I think it's very bland, it has no challenge, but I guess I'm being judgmental. I like a lot of guitar music, classic rock, old music.  
Rudy: Ok so like some of these media that you're like exposed to, what messages do you get from them, or how do you interpret them.  
Luz: You should dress super fancy and spend all your money on clothes or be dumb. Like Lady Gaga and everything, be Gaga, no, no thank you.  
Rudy: But well for like the ones you do like.  
Luz: I guess it's kind of like don't take shit, you know be your own person express yourself, always be yourself.  
Rudy: So these films and the music you listen to, do you think encourages that more?  
Luz: Yeah as opposed to like mainstream culture yeah.  
Rudy: Can you give me an example, like you said Lady Gaga?  
Luz: Oh I don't like her, I hate her music, but I do like Bony Vare, it's a band. It's very different from normal genres. It's like grind core, it's not what most people listen to, but I think it's really expressive. I think that's what counts.  
[.....]  
Rudy: Lupe [...] movies or TV?  
Lupe: [...] Music wise I haven't really stuck to a genre I just listen to whatever is recommended.  
Rudy: But the stuff you do like, what types of messages do you get from them?  
Lupe: Awareness, do it yourself, be yourself.  
[.....]

- Rudy: Do you listen to any political music?  
Luz: [...] Music wise I like Anarcho-Punk, Crust Punk. Anarcho-Rap like Dead Prez [US Political Rap Duo], Immortal Technique [Independent and staunchly political US rapper] and stuff like that.
- Rudy: Why do you listen to Anarcho-punk music?  
Luz: Because I can relate to it, being oppressed and stuff. It's kind of good that there is a message, it's not just booty shaking.
- Rudy: Do you actively pursue this music?  
Luz: Yes I do, I go to venues where this music plays. I focus more on that as oppose to other music.
- Rudy: What kind of messages do you get?  
Luz: There's a lot of feminism, bringing down capitalism, class, standing up for yourself and for your rights, being independent, not succumbing to what everyone else, being aware. (South-Central LA participants)
- Rudy: I guess for the purposes of disclosure, I should state that I recruited you at the Ryan Harvey gig, which I was then told you helped organize. How does that come about, why did recruit Harvey and such? I mean I'm assuming you like his music, and his stuff is explicitly political.
- Aimee: I guess I'm quite interested in like music as like a tool for social change I guess. And you're saying that his music is all like really, really, really, explicitly political which is true. But I think also he sings quite a lot about personal stuff, which is things that like personal things to being an activist. And obviously that's not something you get from like mainstream artists. And it's a really specific thing, but there's a lot of emotional challenges that come with being an activist and being really invested in things. So yeah I kind of relate to his music on an emotional level as well, because a lot of the struggles that he sings about, in terms of activist burn out and feeling disillusioned with things. Yeah things, that are really important for me to kind of have a way of thinking about and processing, and it's not really something you get from any mainstream artist. (Islington participant)
- Rudy: What kind of music do you listen to?  
Sam: I mostly listen to 60's and 70's Prog rock, Psychedelic stuff, quite a lot of Bob Dylan and Pink Floyd stuff. I think in recent decades music has become quite banal and mediocre. The only good ground breaking stuff was from back then. (Islington participant)
- Ben: Princess Mononoke, it's a Miyazaki film, and it is the most beautiful movie I've ever seen. And it's ultimately a movie about environmental destruction. It's in village in like medieval Japan with demons. [...] And so the guy gets cursed when he kills this giant boar demon that's been essentially infected with technology. [...].

And when the guy finally kills the boar demon, there is this lump of iron inside of it. That's what cursed the boar, and it's a subtle metaphor for technology, and how technology is destroying the world. And there's this woman who is the leader of the village, and they're cutting down the forest to make jobs. And what's interesting about the movie, is that it's not clear-cut, the villain is not like evil and "I'm going to destroy the forest and burn it down". She's a person who basically saved many many many poor people and gave them jobs with the industry of cutting the forests down and hunting the wild animals. She is saving these humans' lives. So it's multi-dimensional, it's not just good and evil. It shows the balance of is it worth destroying the environment for economic purposes? So it's very very applicable to modern society and it's just a beautiful movie. (Zoo participant)

James: There's this band called Andrew Jackson Jihad [Independent US anarcho-folk-punk band] and I think they're folk punk. They have quite good lyrics. They're very satirical and they're very introspective and they have commentary on a lot of things but mostly about living.

Rudy: How do you interpret some of their lyrics?

James: Well they definitely seem to have a moral standing, they have moral attitudes and moral views that they put across and I sympathize with them.

Rudy: Give me an example?

James: In one song called *Personal Space Invader* they say how can you put that straw up your nose when you know how coke is manufactured, but the general gist is about third world countries' exploitation. It's the same thing [coke] it's a commodity like cars and everything else. (Islington participant)

The extracts discussed in this section, while brief, open a window into some of the complex inner thought process and socio-cultural experiences of this group of young people and their reactions to, and interpretations and cognitive representations of those experiences. Through a number of varying interpellating influences, including schools, youth centres, media-culture, and friends and family, these young people have developed a host of transposable dispositions, attitudes, views, opinions, preferences, affects, and inclinations that orient or predispose them towards more reflective critical and political perspectives on varying topics like education, culture, and, as I will elaborate on in the following section, political-economy. Furthermore, these critical and political dispositions, at least according to these young people's accounts, to varying extents, guide them to ethical, empathetic, and compassionate views and practices. These practices vary, but generally revolve around challenging corporate culture, with these young

people employing a plethora of strategies ranging from partial abstinence from it, to active boycotts, to DIY alternatives and consciousness raising activities. Overall, the socio-cultural views and practices discussed in this section run counter to the more uncritical, materialistic, apathetic, and self-interested discourses and dispositions promoted by the neoliberal culture that they are, nonetheless, surrounded by.

## **5.2 Schema Mapping: Operationalized Framework:**

In Chapters 2 and 4, I argued that socio-cognitive dispositions, when specifically referring to an individual's instantly and discursively expressed attitudes, affects, inclinations, preferences, and practices, are some of the empirically observable, manifested, and articulated content that correspond to an individual's schemata (Bourdieu, 1990; van Dijk, 1997). In the context of socio-cultural and political-economic knowledge, discourses, and socialization, thinking in terms of schemata can help us to understand and map out some of the substantive content, context and structure of a young person's frameworks for making sense of the societal discourses and practices that they have been exposed to throughout their lives, and more specifically, how they store, process, react to, and make meaning of those discourses and practices. For instance, some of the extracts discussed in the previous section, suggest that the *Critical/Political* young people's schemata are organized in such a way that cultural ideas and artefacts like 'brands', 'clothes', and 'shopping malls', are associated, networked, and encoded with political-economic concepts such as 'corporations', 'labour and environmental exploitation', and 'consumerism'. So, for example, whenever their schemata for say music were activated via my questioning, their inner thought processes automatically drew on their specific semantic and lexical networks of associated and relevant concepts,<sup>46</sup> that resulted in them tending to dichotomize music by framing it negatively as mainstream (as associated with bland materialistic discourses and superficial lyrics), and/or positively as non-mainstream, associating it with more empowering and socially and politically conscious discourses and lyrics (e.g., see Figure 5.1 Luz's Music Schemata below).

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<sup>46</sup> As Ferguson & Bargh (2004, p. 33) note, "research suggests that the perception of any social stimulus will inevitably activate in memory a diverse array of related knowledge".

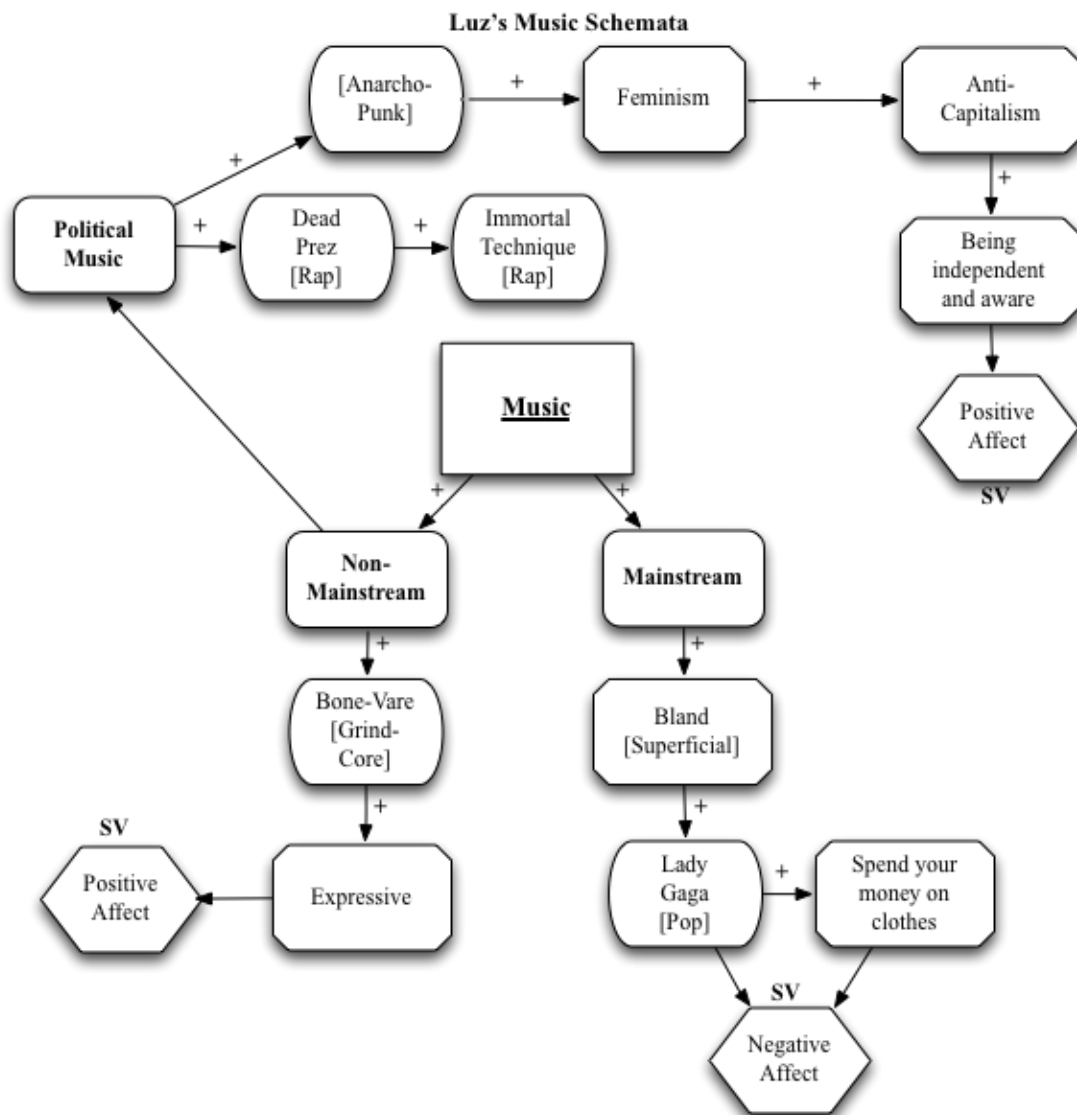
In the following sections, I will analyze some of the substantive content of these young people's schemata for political-economic knowledge. In doing so, I seek to highlight their extensive knowledge of political-economic topics (specifically welfare, voting, and political-economic systems) and their abilities to quickly recall substantial, detailed, and relevant information. Moreover, by drawing out the range of their political-economic knowledge, conceptual associations, and opinions, I can more explicitly highlight how these correspond to, and/or diverge from, neoliberal discourses. From this, I can then provisionally situate their political orientations along a theoretical spectrum of neoliberal interpellation, i.e., the extent to which their political-economic schemata highly, moderately, or weakly reflect or contest dominant neoliberal discourses. Lastly, the schemata diagram shown below,<sup>47</sup> along with the others that will be illustrated throughout the rest of this thesis, are operationalized illustrations that are based on, and that roughly follow, Lodge and colleagues' (1991, p. 1360) hypothetical memory structure, and the following framework set by Torney-Purta (1992, p. 12-13):

A framework for understanding the content and structure of a young person's cognitive representations of politics should meet several criteria: first, it should be appropriate to political situations that usually lack clear structure and political problems that lack agreed-upon solutions; second, it should take account of the role of discourse and dialogue about social representations; and, third, it should integrate attitudes with cognition.

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<sup>47</sup> This figure represents a major portion of Luz's (South-Central LA Participant) actual thought processes and conceptual connections (which comprise her more unconscious and affect loaded critical and political dispositions, as well as her conscious reflections about her music preferences), as evidenced from her responses to questions concerning music. As demonstrated in this figure, and as is the case with the other *Critical/Political* young people, socio-cultural preferences, experiences, and discourses are intimately and intricately intertwined with political-economic knowledge and serve to mutually reinforce each other. I do not have enough data to state whether these young people's media preferences influence their politics, or vice versa. However, the point is that, as the figure demonstrates, they are intimately interconnected.

Figure 5.1: Luz's Music Schemata and Schemata Key



**Schemata Key**

- = Major Schema
- = Subcategories
- = Disclosed Cultural Artefact Representative and/or Genre
- = Expressed Thoughts
- = Affect/Implicit Feeling or Attitude
- +** Denotes a strong node, i.e., the relative ease by which a bit of information can be retrieved from long-term memory, and which is dependent on that bit's subjective importance, linkages to other bits of information, and frequency and recency of activation.
- Denotes a weak node, i.e., as gauged from the relatively longer length of time needed to retrieve a bit of information from long-term memory, and the fewer details provided about a topic during recall.
- [ ]** Bracketed text denote a slight conceptual paraphrasing or manoeuvring of expressed words, in order to make the connections and semantic intents more clear. The train of thought is kept as expressed by participants.
- SV** Denotes a strong valence or relative degree of the strength of an implicit feeling or attitude of an expressed thought as gauged from participants' voice intonations, facial expressions, semantic associations, as well as from the subtext of their expressed thoughts.
- WV** Denotes a relatively weak valence strength.

### 5.3 Welfare And Poverty Schemata:

*How selfish so ever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortunes of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrows of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous or the humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it (Smith, 1759/1839, p. 4).*

In Chapter 1, I argued that contemporary generations of UK and US young people are surrounded by neoliberal discourses that negatively depict government welfare services and their recipients. It follows that a good start to gauge the effectiveness of neoliberal discursive interpellation on young people would be to explore their views on welfare and the causes of individual poverty. This area of youth political research is scarce, but in this section, I will attempt to partially fill this gap by unpacking the *Critical/Political* young people's schemata for welfare and causes of poverty (which will later be compared to that of the other two classifications of young people). Generally, as is the case with their views on education and labour exploitation, these young people expressed a consistently humanist and compassionate view, whereby they supported welfare services with few if any restrictions, contrary to standard neoliberal discourses.<sup>48</sup>

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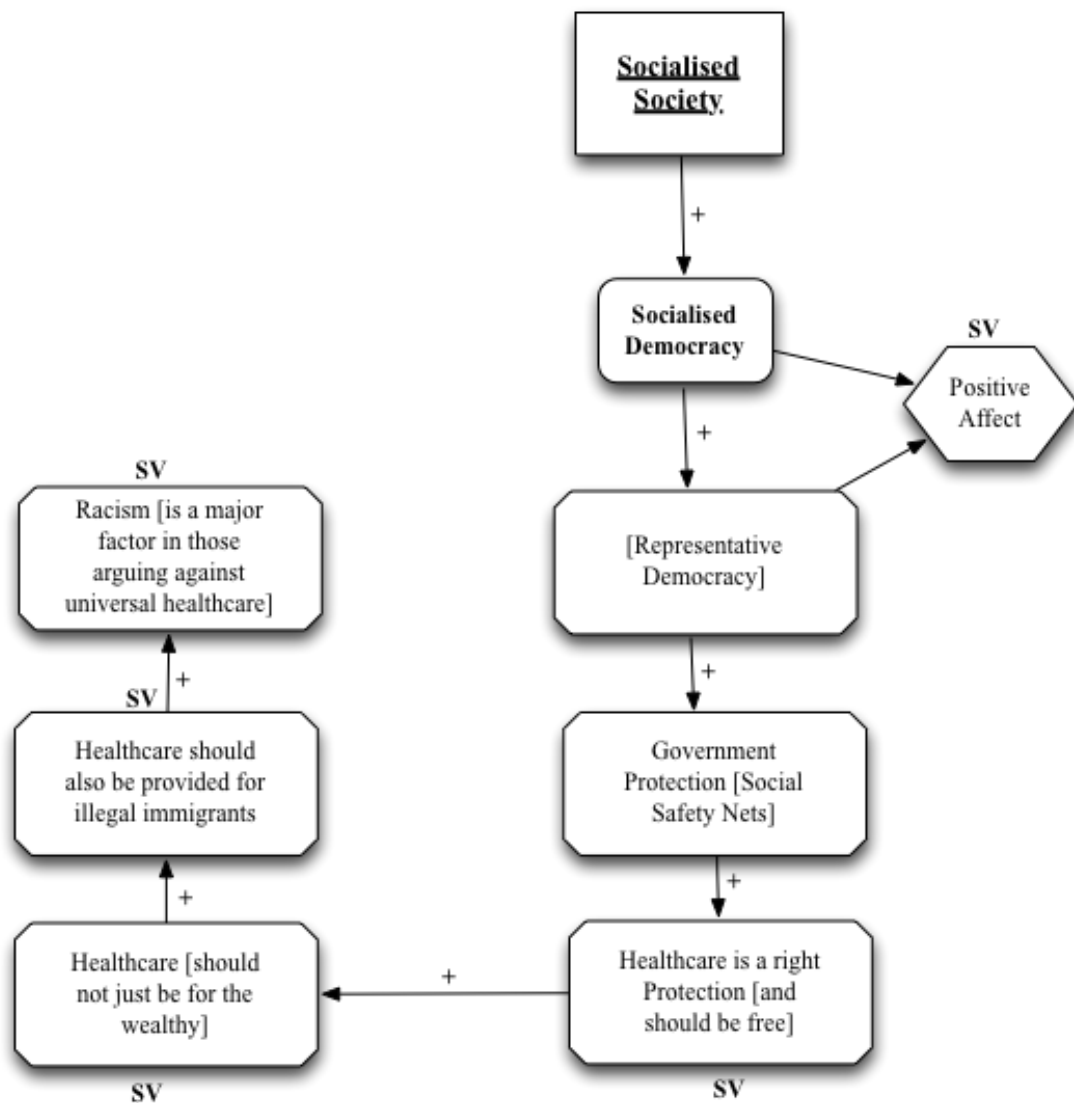
<sup>48</sup> This was generally the case for all the *Critical/Political* young people who were asked these sets of questions with the exception of Jazmin (Bresee Participant), who while first expressing the view that welfare services are necessary to keep people afloat, particularly in the current economic recession, followed her statement with views that reflect more standard neoliberal negative representations of impoverished people having more children in order to receive more welfare benefits.

- Rudy: So on that note what do you think of government welfare programmes?
- Aimee: I think they're the least they can do. It's kind of compensation, because we didn't sign up for this, we're forced to live under this system, we're forced to live under the state and under capitalism. The least you [the state] can do is not let us starve when it inevitably fucks us over. (Islington participant)
- Rudy: What do you think of government welfare programmes then?
- Sam: Yeah well I would advocate more investment in a better welfare programme. I think it's very important that a society looks after those, who in those kind of lower positions, economically and socially, and that basically that a lot of money is invested in helping them. I think that in the programmes we're seeing now, I think that is obviously things get a lot worse, and unemployment rises, yeah I think an effective welfare programme is important. (Islington participant)
- Rudy: So what do you guys think about welfare programmes?
- Luz: Being in these systems you know, I actually think favourably of them because I think they've helped out a lot, and then they get a bad rep from people because you know they're saying, these people are living off government and they're not going to want to get a job. But, actually, if you're in it, you notice that it's people that actually need it, these people cannot survive you know, it's not just moochers, although some people suck you know. Most of the time it is people that need it, and without it they would probably be homeless and stuff. But I think very favourably of them.
- [...]
- Lupe: I think it does help people, and I think it's really good to have them. (South-Central LA participants)
- Rudy: Earlier you brought up Kucinich [Denis Kucinich a well-known progressive Congressman from the US] and you mentioned something about a socialized society along those sorts, what do you mean by that?
- Ben: Well socialized society. I'm a strong believer in a socialized democracy. So you should be able to elect officials so that's the democracy part. The public should have some say in what's going on. The socialized part is what the government provides for you. What's the point of government if it's not going to protect you? By protect you I'm going to include the police department, the fire department, and maybe not just protect, but provide, so the roads, the public facilities that they produce, and healthcare. Healthcare is a right that people have. I think it's the government's responsibility to provide its citizens with free-healthcare. I think it's a right because in this country, the healthcare system it's so confusing. [...] But I still have the feeling that it's somewhat like the old system, where if you have



lots and lots of money, you're good. If you have a stroke or a heart attack, don't worry you have lots of money, and you can pay for that or that cat scan or MRI or whatever test you need. If you're an immigrant from Mexico, illegal immigrant, some of those people are dirt poor, they can barely feed their families. If one of them has a heart attack, do you really think they can afford the surgery, and is that fair? Does someone with more money deserve that surgery more than the immigrant, I'd say no. I think racism is a huge component in the people who advocate for a non-socialized healthcare system. (Zoo participant)

**Figure 5.2: Ben's Welfare Schemata**



As with Luz's schemata for music described in the previous section, Ben's schemata for welfare, is diagrammed above to make his welfare related conceptual, lexical, and semantic associations more visible. Of note are the observations that Ben never mentions welfare at all, which tends to have a negative connotation, and

instead uses the much more neutral concept, ‘government protection’. The diagram also illustrates Ben’s accurate conception of a socialized democracy that, like his general views on government protection, is not riddled or inflected with pejorative anti-welfare discourses or dispositions. Similarly, all but one of the *Critical/Political* young people who were asked these sets of questions did not express the standard neoliberal anti-welfare discourses which, in their most pejorative and often fraudulent (yet commonly circulated via mass media) articulation, depict welfare recipients as lazy welfare queens sponging off the government trough. In fact, their views on welfare are arguably emphatically anti-neoliberal, and reflect a pronounced empathetic disposition that echoes Adam Smith’s (1759/1839) account of human nature described above. For instance, Sam and Ben strongly argued that government safety nets and services should be a given in any society and freely available to all who need them, with Ben going the extra step of associating anti-universal healthcare attitudes with racism.<sup>49</sup> Luz disclosed her personal experiences in using welfare programmes, noting that people who use such programmes desperately need and are helped by them, while Amy tied her arguments for the need for welfare provisions to her anti-statist and anti-capitalist views, arguing that it is the very least that the state can do for the citizens it subjugates and oppresses.

Corresponding to their views on welfare, are these young people’s views on, and informed explanations for, the causes of poverty. When asked about the causes of poverty, *Critical/Political* young people generally pointed to structural political-economic factors, rather than expressing typical neoliberal person-blame discourses that emphasize individual choices as the main contributors to homelessness and poverty:

Luz: It could be the capitalist system. There are a lot of people who have tried and owned their own stores but when you have these monstrous companies you’re going to run out of business. And then eventually these people have nothing to live with like no income.

Lupe: There are some people that can’t work because they’re immigrants, drugs and companies leaving to different places for cheaper labour so people are out of jobs. (South-Central LA participants)

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<sup>49</sup> A merited view, given that a prominent rationale for the opponents of universal healthcare in the US is that it would be overrun by ‘illegal aliens’.

- Rudy: So our economic system is described as capitalist, where people are said to be rewarded on how little or how hard they work. What do you think of this?
- Aimee: Um, it's completely not the case that people are rewarded for how hard or how little they work. There are loads of people who work really really hard their whole lives and are still really poor. Yeah it's completely, and likewise people who do basically no work who inherit loads of money and are really rich and don't have to work. So yeah just the whole idea of trickle down wealth as well, if rich people get richer it will ultimately be better for everyone, is just I think, proven itself to be completely not the case; especially in terms of globalization and stuff.  
[...]
- Rudy: So why do you think that some people are poor or homeless?
- Aimee: Basically because. I think poor people are poor because it's always going to drive up profits if you pay people less. Yeah basically just in the system where the ultimate focus is on profit, then it's always going to be about anything that's going to increase profit rather than looking at what's going to be best for the workers or anything else apart from profit. Also, unemployment is linked in, because it's always made an issue in this country with immigration as well without looking at the fact that the reason they use labour from undocumented workers and stuff is because they can pay them less which is an issue of capitalism again rather than. (Islington participant)

Of note in these extracts is Lupe's mentioning of drugs as a possible cause for poverty, which is a commonly held view that corresponds to a general neoliberal individualist discourse. However, it is a noticeably quick and almost offhand disclosure, which is overshadowed by her other views which stress more structural factors like immigration status and job outsourcing as reasons for why individuals suffer from poverty. Luz and Aimee strictly stressed structural economic factors as the major contributors to the proliferation of poverty, with Luz essentially describing the effects of contemporary monopoly corporate capitalism in depressing wages and running small businesses out of business. While Aimee's response is interlaced with a rather precocious political-economic lexicon including the accurate use of concepts like 'trickle down wealth' and 'globalization' to argue that trickle-down (neoliberal) economics have not worked to lift the majority of people out of poverty.

Overall, the extracts discussed in this section demonstrate that, like their socio-cultural schemata, *Critical/Political* young people's schemata for welfare and poverty are imbued with humanist and empathetic tendencies, and informed

and sophisticated understandings of the complex issues of welfare and poverty. They also demonstrate a key structural understanding of these issues, and indeed seem to be disposed to expressing structural concerns, which is a possible explanation for why most of their responses did not evoke or reflect standard neoliberal discourses on these topics. It is notable that all of the *Critical/Political* young people's socio-cultural and political-economic schemata share virtually identical central tendencies and conceptual associations, which are for the most part, not inflected by neoliberal discourses. However, in the next section, their divergent views on voting, capitalism, and human nature are discussed, as well as how some of these reflect discourses crucial to neoliberal hegemony.

#### **5.4 A Creeping Neoliberalism and Fatalistic Dispositions:**

*This logic is seen as a paradigmatic form in the dialectic of expressive dispositions and instituted means of expression (morphological, syntactic, and lexical instruments, literary genres etc.) which is observed in the intentionless invention of regulated improvisation. [...] In other words, being produced by a modus operandi which is not consciously mastered, the discourse contains an 'objective intention', as the Scholastics put it, which outruns the conscious intentions of its apparent author and constantly offers new pertinent stimuli to the modus operandi of which it is the product and which functions as a kind of 'spiritual automaton' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 57).*

Despite their broadly left-leaning positions, my respondents from this group did have varied views. While they all strongly supported welfare programmes, and expressed deep concerns over the state of the natural environment and a pronounced contempt for their respective governments, their political sympathies varied, across the anarchist, socialist, and social-democratic political spectrum, as evidenced, for example, in their views on voting and capitalism. The following extracts demonstrate this spread.

Rudy: That leads us to segway into the political part of our discussion, so what do you guys think of the current political system.  
[....]

Joey: The people have a lot to do with it, because the ignorant masses, a lot of people are ignorant masses, and a lot of people are not involved in what's going on at all, and a lot of people are made to feel that role of like, I'm just here to buy things, and I'm not really here to whatever. That's the government's problem, that's scientists' problem, that's this person's problem, like all my job is to do this. And you know, a lot of things that they build into us, like you need to work really hard so you can get what you want, or you need to do what you need to do so you can get the money so you can tell someone what to do, because otherwise you're just going to be told what to do your whole life, and you need to work for money cause and that's the most important thing. [.....] You know that capitalism, they say that communism doesn't work, because it doesn't take into consideration human behaviours or like human desires or whatever, but capitalism working with those like animalistic behaviours and like encouraging those things isn't a good thing either. Just because it works with those things doesn't mean it's good, that means it's worse, because the human species doesn't progress in any direction it just allows it to be barbaric.

[.....]

Rudy: So do you know about any other economic alternatives?

Joey: Yeah communism. Communism is great. Every time it was tried it failed, yeah but that's because every time, every person who tried to do it was a fascist dictator, it's not like fascist dictators like communism. That was right, is that communism doesn't mean that you have to have a fascist dictator, what it means is no government, no fascist government, you know what I mean. And I don't mean just pure communism, because I guess because at some level that might just be impossible for people as a whole, but I mean some level of that general idea of sharing, caring, helping, you know the whole community. We're too big as a group to be about individual income, you know what I mean. We're a huge community, and it has to go around [income], and it has to be levelled out, and everyone needs to pull in the same amount. Our teacher [biology teacher] told us about this thing, the tragedy of the commons, that whole thing. You know a lot of people will do that, and not care, and that's why communism doesn't work, and that's why we're destroying our eco-system.

[...]

Rudy: Voting, do you think it's effective?

Anthony: I defiantly think voting needs to be there. But, I think one problem is the system is an unsolvable problem unfortunately. When you vote for a senator, you don't know what they're going to do what they say when they campaign for it, and if they don't you have no say over it because you that they're just there until their turn is over. Even during it, you don't know if they're going to vote towards your interests or not. You know what they stand for but they really, once they're in

office, they can really do whatever they want, and you can't really stop them unless they start breaking the law.<sup>50</sup>

Rudy: So how would you change that Anthony?

Anthony: That's the problem, I don't know how it can be changed. I know how to identify the problem but.

Joey: Revolution

[.....]

Rudy: If you guys could vote who would you vote for?

Anthony: Green Party.

Joey: Gore. (Zoo participants)

Of note in this discussion are Joey and Anthony's seemingly dissonant views on voting, and Joey's reference to the prominent argument made in Hardin's (1968) influential paper; *Tragedy of the Commons*. On the first point, both Joey and Anthony have pointed critiques of capitalism and the voting system respectively, with Joey referring to capitalism as 'barbaric', and Anthony summing up a key structural flaw in the US's representative democratic system: namely that elected officials are not under any legal requirement to uphold their campaign promises or the interests of their constituents. However, both still support the voting system, despite the hopeless outlook they express. While Joey does mention revolution as a possible remedy to the electoral system, she does not elaborate on this, and later discloses that she would vote for Al Gore who was a mainstream neoliberal politician (and for example, an ardent supporter and spokesperson for NAFTA). Moreover, while Anthony's ambivalent support for the voting system, and the Green Party is consistent with his overall politically progressive views, engagement with critical but still liberal media, and relative under exposure to information on alternative political-economic systems (which the media he engages with is loath to talk about or accurately depict), Joey's inconsistent political views seem to be at least partially influenced by Hardin's (1968) famous essay. Hardin's (1968) essay is a thought experiment outlining how overpopulation coupled with natural human self-interestedness can lead to an unregulated use of the commons and consequent environmental catastrophe. This essay has been critiqued for a number of reasons, the most significant of which is that it is a thought experiment with no empirical evidence to support its broad theoretical claims. In fact, recent economics research has demonstrated that

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<sup>50</sup> Due to word limits I cut this extract short, but of note, Anthony references several prominent political media figures that inform his views including Jon Stewart [US political comedian], Rachel Maddow, and Jim Lear [US openly liberal news anchors].

collective societies, which tend to promote more co-operative and altruistic norms and values, practice environmentally sustainable management of natural resources (Ostrom, 2010). However, Hardin's (1968) thesis continues to influence contemporary neoliberal economists who commonly site it as a reason to fully privatize the commons. According to the above extract from Joey's interview, Hardin's (1968) essay, introduced to her in a biology class, clearly makes her question the merits of her communist sympathies, and seems to lead her to the conclusion that, because of natural human selfishness, communism, and particularly the anarchist branch of communism she seems to be alluding to, will not work. This suggests a fatalist disposition, i.e., an automatic belief that human beings are naturally selfish and therefore cannot enact viable political-economic alternatives. As Hawkins (1997, p. 22) argues:

Among the various elements within a world view, the concept of human nature usually occupies a pivotal role. This concept purports to describe the fundamental motives which govern human conduct. [.....] Thus a theory which posited the primacy of instincts and human passions in human behaviour and which saw only a limited role for reason and self-discipline could infer the necessity for authoritative political [structures]. In contrast, a theory in which people were depicted as inherently altruistic, rational, and cooperative, but liable to the corruption of vicious institutions and practices that warped their spontaneous proclivities, might recommend anarchism as the system most in harmony with human nature. In both instances, human nature acts as the reference point for specification of ideal but plausible modes of social and political organisation.

The kind of fatalist disposition expressed by Joey, which can, in effect, contribute to the reproduction of neoliberalism, as it stops the imagining of political-economic alternatives in its tracks, and the begrudging acceptance of existing political-economic modes, was prominent amongst the majority of the *Critical/Political* young people, despite their substantial critiques:

- Rudy: Do you know about any other political and economic alternatives?
- Luz: When you see capitalism as a bad way you look for alternatives like socialism or Marxism different things such as that but all in all it's hard to implement them since you live in a capitalist society.
- Rudy: What do you know about these alternatives?
- Luz: I know that it's equal. Like Marxism it's like a class revolution. Where the class takes over where they can make things to benefit the people other than just commercialism.
- Lupe: There's socialism, communism all that stuff. I think the problem would be with the people. Like in socialism if you have a corrupt leader it's not going to work. The problem is with the people not the system.
- [...]
- Rudy: What do you think about voting; do you think it is effective as a way to get the government to do what citizens want, or to influence government policies?
- Luz: For the people that can vote I think they should since that's one of the best way to voice your opinions. Well then again I'm being biased since I can't vote. I think whomever lives here should be able to vote since we are all affected.
- Rudy: If you could vote do you think it would change anything?
- Luz: I think it's like I don't have a choice. If that's the only way I can then I will.
- Lupe: I don't think it will change anything since it's ultimately not up to us to decide in the end. (South-Central LA participants)

Interestingly in the following extracts Lisa demonstrates an informed understanding of anarchist political philosophy, but like Joey, rejects it outright on the premise that people are ignorant and naturally selfish.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, without apparently realizing it, Arlene expresses support for the anarchist ideal of direct democracy, which is premised on a more positive view of human nature, arguing that it would produce a more effective system of government:

- Rudy: What about voting, what do you guys think about voting?
- Lisa: Oh my god that's George Carlin [Polemical US comedian]. I mean the whole voting I disagree with George Carlin on that actually [Carlin is known for his anti-voting views]. I believe that because our community is not represented because we don't vote. I mean we don't vote, like Hispanics don't, and because of that we're not getting represented. When I talked to Lucy Arroiba (Congresswoman), our house of representative, she told me that she had money, and she wanted to give the money to Boyle Heights [working-class Latino

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<sup>51</sup> Incidentally, in the following extract Lisa also mentions political media texts (e.g., George Carlin, *Fight Club*), which she cites as influences on her rather astute political knowledge. This further demonstrates the interconnectedness between these young people's socio-cultural and political-economic schemata.



community in East Los Angeles] to [give them] computer programmes and all that, but she got another offer from this principal from like Beverly Hills, and they just want to expand their swimming pool. I mean she would rather give the money to the people in Boyle Heights, but because the people in Beverly Hills vote, she needs to give the money to them so that they can vote her into Congress a year later. So I just believe that if our community, we vote, and if we have a voice, and if we show the politicians, hey we're voting and we're going to vote who is going to be in office, than they're going to be terrified and they're going to be in our favour.

Rudy: What about you Arlene, what do you think about voting?

Arlene: I think it's corrupt. I don't think they follow, for example, Bush was running, and how all of those votes were missing, and how all that contradiction that there was, I think that happens every time there is an election, every time you have to go vote. I just think it's a way of telling you that you're being heard, that you mean something...

Lisa: (Directed at Arlene) You should watch George Carlin, everything you say is just.

Rudy: So what type of government would you prefer, how would you change it?

Arlene: How would I change it? I think that there shouldn't be no government, I think that we should run it. I think that if there was no government, that we would be a lot more united, it wouldn't be as corrupt, and we would know what's going on around us, exactly what's going on around us. I don't think there would be any contradictions [she's referring to voting irregularities] about anything, because we wouldn't be keeping anything away from anybody around us.

Rudy: Like what do you mean by us running it?

Lisa: [instantly] Direct democracy,

Arlene: Yeah

Lisa: Anarchy.

Arlene: Yeah, not anarchy no,

Rudy: Direct democracy for instance like Lisa said?

Lisa: I don't support direct democracy at all.

Rudy: Ok why not?

Lisa: Because they're stupid people in this nation, are you kidding me? Oh my god.

Arlene: But I mean, I don't think so. I think that if [we had] direct democracy than I think that good people, people with knowledge would stand up, and try to lead it in a way, I think it would just go good.  
[.....]

Rudy: But Lisa, you mentioned direct democracy and then you mentioned anarchism right away, why did you do that?

Lisa: Um, I forgot what anarchy is. I know that in anarchy there is no government, where are we getting at again?

Rudy: Oh because you mentioned direct democracy and then anarchy right after it, I was just wondering why you did that?

Lisa: I don't know, I believe that they're both the same.

Rudy: Where did you learn that?

Lisa: *Fight Club* [US movie] (World Vision participants).

Moreover, a consistency between critiques of existing political-economic systems and support for alternatives was also expressed by Sam who supports voting as a means to an end, and James and Aimee who rejected representative forms of democracy in favour of more direct models.

- Rudy: So what do you think of the current political system?
- Sam: I'm anti-capitalist in general because I believe that the system itself is one of the main causes of inequality and environmental degradation etc. In terms of the political climate at the moment, I'm very anti the current agenda of the government on the count of the fact that the austerity programme is essentially the largest attack on working-class living standards since 1945. And basically it will make society far more unequal, raise unemployment a lot, and also the gap between the rich and the poor will get a lot larger. And at the same time the upper echelons of society line their pockets and are doing fine.
- Rudy: This anti-capitalist view, can you elaborate on that, I mean what is your critique of capitalism since you brought it up.
- Sam: Well capitalism itself relies on the exploitation of the wider working class by the ruling class, and basically through that wealth is redistributed to the upper end of society. And then, so they exploit the working class and then, and so basically society is brought up on profit rather than need, and if society were to be run on the basis of need rather than profit obviously things would be a lot better because basically when the profit motive [inaudible] the ruling class exploits a lot of people.
- Rudy: So what political economic alternatives would you favour?
- Sam: I'm personally a socialist in that I advocate a society based on need rather than profit, and basically through the revolutionary actions of the working class. Capitalism can't really be reformed the way the Keynesians think because it's the very intrinsic nature of capitalism, it can't really exist without poverty and an exploited working-class because it relies on that mode to work.
- [.....]
- Rudy: So what do you think of voting then?
- Sam: I would vote because it's pretty much the only democratic involvement one can have, but as a principle, I don't really think it's genuinely democratic because you know once every four or five years you vote for someone who allegedly will represent you. But they cannot be recalled and not accountable in any meaningful way once they are representing you, and essentially the kind of structures of society like Parliament and the judiciary, and the police force, all grew up under capitalism designed to protect its interests, so you cannot really achieve genuine socialism through the parliamentary route, but I advocate the importance for reforms as a measure towards that kind of society. (Islington participant)

- Rudy: So as an individual do you think you can have a say in this government if you wanted to?
- James: In this government?
- Rudy: In your government. When you turn 18 for instance, do you think you can have a say?
- James: I probably could if I tried, but I'd have to go into politics and become a politician, voting wouldn't be enough.
- Rudy: Why not?
- James: Because your vote doesn't count for anything.
- Rudy: You care to elaborate on that?
- James: Well, firstly, as soon as you come into voting there are already main parties, and if you want an alternative, you probably have no chance of getting most of your ideal laws, policies or the manifesto of your party isn't going to be realized if it isn't one of the main parties. So really you just got to choose from the big three, or whoever it is, or the big two. (Islington participant)
- Rudy: Since we're on that issue, moving on to political-economic issues. So what do you think of the current political system that we live under? Do you think it is effective?
- Aimee: Um, no. I think that trying to have government, which represents a society as large, well any society. Well I basically don't think that having one government govern large amounts of people could ever be democratic. I don't believe in government full stop, but I think it's because one of the issues is that it's impossible to have a society with millions of people in it organized democratically. Yeah I'm not explaining this very well.
- Rudy: It sounds like you're taking issue with representative forms?
- Aimee: Yeah.
- Rudy: So what's your conception of democracy?
- Aimee: I think it basically only works in the context of people having a direct say in issues that affect them in their community on like a day to day basis. Yeah, and basically people coming together to talk about and find solutions to problems that affect them, rather than there being someone who represents them and then. (Islington participant)

All of the members of this group generally shared a distaste for mainstream culture, an emphatic and empathetic support for welfare programmes, and highly critical views of their respective governments. Indeed, if not for time and word limits, I would map out each of these young people's socio-cultural and political-economic schemata in order to further illustrate how relatively indistinguishable they are from one another in terms of substantial central tendencies and conceptual associations. Where they diverged, however, is in relation to their views on political-economic systems, possibilities, and human nature, and it is also in

relation to these themes that the extent of the influence of neoliberal discourses is more visible. Nonetheless, and however brief these accounts may be, they offer a glimpse of some of the ways that a cross-sectional sample of LA and London young people think about democracy, and how this reflects their dispositions and values.

### 5.5 Triggers of Politicization

Before concluding, it is worth briefly identifying some of the initial triggers for the politicization of these young people in order to shed some light on the types of influences and experiences that may have fed into the development of their sophisticated political views. Of particular note in the following extracts is the variability of the political influences on these young people.

- Rudy: Why are you studying these subjects [politics and art]?
- Aimee: [...] I was very political before I chose to study politics and it kind of seemed like a logical thing to do.
- Rudy: What, I guess since you brought it up, what brought you into politics, why are you drawn to it from such an early age especially?
- Aimee: Um, I think it was obviously like a mixture of factors, so I'm not entirely sure. But one of the things, one of my best friends in secondary school was like a lot older than me and identified as a Marxist. So I learned quite a lot through her. And also because I've gone to primary school in a very, very middle class area, and moved to a very working-class secondary school when I was eleven, and it was like a massive culture shock. And I guess I just started thinking a lot more about, like issues of class and race then, because as a way of processing, and because I have a tendency to over think everything, that was just my response to it.
- Rudy: Oh, so the move from a different class section sort of like -
- Aimee: Yeah.
- Rudy: Made you analyze things differently -
- Aimee: Yeah.
- Rudy: In addition to your friend introducing you to -
- Aimee: Yeah, I met her at the secondary school. (Islington participant)
- Rudy: What are some of the things in the world that you care about the most?
- Luz: A lot of things, the environment, animals, [...] just happiness in general, you know freedom of expression, just freedom.
- Rudy: Where do you think you got these [ideals] from?
- Luz: Um, well I guess from growing up the way I did and from hanging out with the people I did, and spending time with these people. Yeah

just developing my own views on things, as a response to my environment. (South-Central LA participant)

Rudy: How is it that at such an early age you are so community oriented, what is it that moved you to do this type of work?

Senai: I come from a background where I've only gone to schools with only one Asian and like one African American in my whole life in middle-school and elementary. And lived around a lot of Latinos, and a lot of Latinos and they're oppressed in this community. My father has suffered from police brutality and I have family members who have been caught crossing the border. I have [family] members that have died [...] in the Guatemalan civil war. [...] And then they [Latino immigrants] come to this damn country and are [asked to leave], and it's just so sad, like I have so much passion towards helping my community. [...] But yeah I guess it's the oppression of my people is what's given me the anger which I turn into passion to be helping them out. (World Vision participant)

Rudy: Where do you think you got your political positions from?

Joey: I have no idea. It's somewhat of a collective thing. My sources are very wide and very scattered.

Rudy: Can you think of any dominant sources?

Joey: Well I think 10<sup>th</sup> grade history. Like I never really gave history a care in the world, but then 10th grade with Ms. Gotlieb when I was taking world history, and like I was like really high the whole second semester, and it seemed so much more intense, and it really go me to want to do something. (Zoo participant)

The early age of these young people's politicization is noticeable. Their accounts indicate that they became politicized between the ages of 11-14. While this observation broadly coincides with the developmental literature on political attitudes which finds that political positions and attitudes begin to form and crystallize around adolescence (Eckstein et al., 2011), a more substantial finding is that, even at this early age, these young people seemingly possessed intellectual capabilities to form initial understandings of quite complex subject matter. Note for example, the following accounts by James and Sam:

Rudy: So do you think that your political awareness, your political beliefs were influenced by your parents in any way.

James: My actual and specific views not at all. By my engagement probably has to do a lot with my mom. I mean I started looking into the Socialist Workers Party when I was eleven.

Rudy: So you mom introduced you to?

James: No she didn't but she was quite active and she knew about things. So there was this protest outside a hospital and there were these placards 'Nurses Not Bombs'. So I went down to it and I got grabbed by some of the Socialist Workers and I got recruited so to speak. [...] But yeah I went to few of their meetings and demonstrations when I was quite young.<sup>52</sup> (Islington participant)

Rudy: This might not be a fair question, but can you like think of any particular experience that sort of turned you on to it [socialism]?

Sam: Um, I'd say that I probably got radicalized in that respect around the time of the student protest last year. That's when I got more drawn towards the kind of more radical end of the leftist spectrum, I was a fairly radical Keynesian for a while, but then I got kind of got involved in more ultra-leftist politics and I found that they quite suited my beliefs.<sup>53</sup> (Islington participant)

Additionally, while Ben, Anthony, and Jazmin cited their parents as their initial political influences, the rest of these young people who cited a plethora of different initial influences, also stated that their political views were markedly different from that of their parents. This is in keeping with Flanagan's (2008) claim that young people rarely reflect the same exact political positions as their parents despite parents usual status as primary agents of socialization.

One of my original objectives for this research had been to find out if there were any common experiences or modes that led young people to develop a more heightened political awareness. For a number of reasons, which include too small a sample size and other methodological limitations that I describe in section 9.2, I did not find any. However, while there is little that can be generalized from these young people's politicizing experiences, they nonetheless reinforce the point that even a kernel of exposure to critical perspectives, irrespective of the setting, medium, or timing, can have both a catalyzing and lasting effect on the development of young people's political views and practices.

## **5.6 Potential Future Political Trajectories and Concluding Remarks**

Overall, the young people in this group expressed a host of political and critical views, which involve significantly contestation of dominant neoliberal

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<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, James attributes his introduction to anarchist ideas from a hard drive which he received from his uncle which contained over 20gb of videos, some of which were about anarchism.

<sup>53</sup> Given that Sam was 16 years old during my interview with him, his account suggests that he was at least a Keynesian sometime around that age of 14 or 15.

discourses. While their political ideologies vary, with Aimee, James, Jazmin, Joey, Arlene, and Luz expressing anarchist identities or sympathies, and others like Anthony (being the elected senior school President), Ben, and Senai expressing broadly social-democratic views, all of them fall within a Leftist spectrum. This observation, coupled with their detailed political-economic knowledge, support for welfare institutions, humanist outlooks on the role of education, and their overall highly developed sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), allows me to, without too much hesitation, argue that these types of young people are the ones most likely to be the potential catalysts for social change. This is perhaps an obvious conclusion to draw, and it cannot be assumed that their counter-neoliberal dispositions will not change as they get older, nor that highly critical yet non-activist young people like Ben will join a political organization. However, what these young people have provided is the insight that despite their different ethnicities, genders and class backgrounds and national settings, they process, frame, and interpret social information in surprisingly similar and consistent ways. In other words, and in accordance with Althusser's (1971) theory of interpellation, these young people, through whatever different points of ideological contestation they have been exposed to, have generated transposable dispositions and corresponding views and attitudes that allow them to more readily resist neoliberal discursive interpellation.

However, while this group is definitely the most leftist in their views, most of them cannot be labelled as specifically anti-neoliberal. That is to say, most of their views and attitudes were such that they reflect what Willis (1977) refers to as 'partial penetration'. For instance, Senai, during our short interview, expressed affinities for capitalism in her affirmative opinion of Bill Gates and his wealth. Jazmin, Luz, Lisa, and Lupe, however sympathetic they were to socialist and/or anarchist ideals, were sceptical of democratic socialist alternatives, believing in particular that human beings are too self-interested to make such an ideal system work; while Ben and Anthony held a more reformist social democratic political outlook, which, whether they are aware of it or not, are still capitalist in form, and therefore also inherently premised on the ontological position that emphasizes human selfishness. These can all be contrasted to what I believe are the more anti-neoliberal views of my anarchist participants, Arlene, James, and Aimee, who not

only believe in an arguably more authentic form of democracy,<sup>54</sup> and in egalitarian economic systems antithetical to neoliberalism, but also hold a fundamentally different ontological view of human nature. This view holds that humans are just as capable of being empathetic, just, co-operative and altruistic rather as they are of being competitive and self-interested. Furthermore, this is a view that is supported by various anthropological, historical, and (increasingly) cognitive, developmental, and social-psychological empirical accounts (Graeber, 2009:2004; Olson, 2008; Sloane et al., 2012, Zinn, 2003),<sup>55</sup> and therefore at the very least, as I will emphasize in Chapter 8, worthy of consideration and discussion in education settings. However, this is not to suggest a normative evaluation of their political views on my part, but rather that a more authentic anti-neoliberal disposition necessitates a more affirmative view on the possibilities of non-hierarchical forms of democracy and the belief that human beings can make it work; without these beliefs firmly in place, capitalist and hierarchical organizational forms of thinking, and as a consequence practices and forms of organization, may start to insidiously manifest themselves, regardless of the critical and humanist views that people may have and consciously express (Albert, 2003). As Pynn (1988) argues, for example, in talking about organizations as opposed to organization, we afford our dominant institutions a supreme level of agency that obscures our own volition in enacting them, and crucially, blinds us cognitively to alternative possibilities. However, here again is it also possible, given their already established critical dispositions and precocious nature that, at some point, and perhaps in the near future as they attend university (all of the *Critical/Political* young people expressed plans to attend a university), they will be introduced to more radical politics and movements, and will possibly be informed and influenced by them. As stated, their current dispositions are such that they are oriented towards a leftist counter

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<sup>54</sup> I did not include Sam in this subgroup because of his professed Trotskyist politics, which, while socialist, are expressly authoritarian in their organizational commitments. Thus, in this context, Sam cannot be placed alongside Aimee, Arlene, and James with their more direct democratic political leanings.

<sup>55</sup> For example, a study by Sloane et al., (2012) found that 19-21 month-old infants have a general expectation of fairness, and that even babies are disturbed by displays of injustice even when it does not apply to them. This study lends support to the argument that fairness may be a natural human predisposition.



neoliberalism, and not towards a more conservative neoliberalism. However, without the benefit of a longitudinal study, this is only a provisional speculation, and it is of course entirely possible that at least some of them will move politically to the right or to any other variant; as zoo participant Ben stated, “I’m 17 years old, I’m still really young. The way I think is going to change, my opinions on these things [political topics] are going to change. So it’s a gradual process from things you take here and there”. Having more authentic and cognitively ingrained anti-neoliberal views does not of course automatically translate into developing anti-neoliberal practices. However, the former are a necessary precondition for the latter. As Buroway argues (2008a, p.29), “habitus plays a secondary role in the reproduction of domination, but can play a primary role in the creation of new social orders”.

Lastly, it is not my intention to only define as political those young people who only take critical stances towards the existing socio-cultural and political-economic systems. It is entirely possible, and in fact very likely that, somewhere in LA and London there exist groups of teenaged conservatives who are at least as politically knowledgeable and dedicated as the *Critical/Political* young people I have described in this chapter. And indeed, it would be interesting to explore if these conservative young people shared a similar concern for social justice as the *Critical/Political* ones, or if their concerns were more inflected through, and reflective of, neoliberal discourses. In any case, future research would benefit from a broader sampling methodology that also seeks out more conservative young people. In the next two chapters, I will describe the main characteristics of the other two classifications of LA and London young people that I have identified as: *Artsy/Indie* and *Mainstream*.

## Chapter Six

### Artsy/Indie Youth

### The Wild Cards

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Rudy: What type of media do they [young people] engage with?  
Warren: They watch a lot of TV [shows] and movies on the Internet. There's a lot of bootleg websites where they stream pirate movies. They have iPods, and they're really technically savvy. Some of the kids do role playing games on the Internet. But yeah, they all have iPods. Race, religion, creed, class, it doesn't matter, they all have iPods. But they don't go to the movies as much, and I don't think they watch much TV because a lot of the stuff is on the Internet. -(Youth Worker: Bresee Foundation)

Rudy: Last question, is there anyone that you look up to?  
Veronica: I really look up to my friend, he was my ex-boyfriend. He lost his eyesight when he was three, and I really look to him because after losing his eyesight he didn't give up. [...] My documentary was based on him, the one that I got an award for second place. And it shows how he could do so many things without his eyesight, when other people who have their eyesight are always saying I can't do it, it's too hard. [...] It's really amazing. He was the one who helped me finish my video because by then I didn't have my parents' support. (Bresee participant)

As the title for this chapter, and above extracts suggest, the young people that I have classified as *Artsy/Indie*, expressed a distinctive and pronounced affinity with artistic endeavours (e.g., dancing, writing short stories, playing music, film-making, painting), in addition to a tentative rejection of mainstream popular media-culture (which consisted of accounts similar to that described above by Warren), and an active engagement with alternative and/or independent Western and non-Western media-culture. In this chapter, I will draw out these prevalent characteristics, pointing to the socio-cultural experiences, media preferences and interpretations, and corresponding affective and apolitical dispositions of these young people, and speculate on some of the complex ways that these help them to contest dominant neoliberal discourses. As in the previous chapter, I will also map out and analyze some of the substantive content, i.e., central tendencies, and conceptual, semantic, and lexical associations characterizing this group of young

people's political-economic schemata, and their divergence from, and congruence with, neoliberal discourses.

### **6.1 Leisure Time, Cultural Preferences, and Affective Dispositions:**

From writing novels, to dancing, to playing in music bands and working on independent films, the *Artsy/Indie* young people can be primarily differentiated from my other two classifications of young people by their proactive engagement with some form of creative cultural production. This artistic preoccupation, differs from the one expressed by the *Critical/Political* young people described in the previous chapter who in addition to artistic endeavours, spent a significant amount of their leisure time engaged in activist and community oriented activities and informing themselves about political issues. The *Artsy/Indie* group of young people, however, was noticeably more prone to engage, or be mostly interested, in non-political artistic activities.

Rudy: What do you do on your free time?

Jose: Well that depends, on my free time, either filming, I'm in a couple of music projects so I'm in that, and I also like to write and spend time with my friends. And well I do consider myself an artist, and as an artist we have to punish ourselves for trying to imitate god by smoking and drinking. (Bresee participant)

Rudy: Tell me a little something about yourself and some of the things that you like to do?

Gloria: I'm Gloria Avila. I'm 18. I went to Santee high school. I like music, reading, I'm attending film school. I like cats a lot. I read a lot, write a lot. I'm interested in doing something in the fine arts. I also paint and draw. (South-Central LA participant)

Rudy: Tell me a little about yourself, starting with your name, age, and some of the things that you like to do.

Jesse: My name is Jesse. I'm 17 years old. I like playing music. I like to learn all sorts of instruments. I'm really interested in guitar and any kind of related instruments. I'm also interested in animal sciences and I hope to look into a career with that. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: Alright, so first questions I'm just going to ask you to tell me a little something about yourself, starting with your age, and some of the things you like to do in general.

Jocelyn: My name is Jocelyn, I'm 18, and usually I like to dance [ballet], or read, or watch television maybe.

Evyn: My name is Evyn, I like to draw, I read, I also watch television and play video games. (Zoo participants)

Rudy: So we'll start. Tell me a little something about yourself, starting with your name, age, and some of the things you like to do.

Diana: My name is Diana. I'm 16. I like to write short stories. (Zoo participant).

Rudy: Tell me a little bit about yourself, so what are some of things that you like to do.

Veronica: I like to run, I run the marathon. This is going to be my third year running it. I like photography and filming, and I like working with little kids.<sup>56</sup> (Bresee participant)

Additionally, this central preoccupation with artistic pursuits seemed to be accompanied by a pronounced aesthetic rationale for their preferred media texts, and with their tentative rejection of mainstream media culture. On the first point, the following extracts highlight how when asked about their favourite types of music, these young people tended to give an immediate response that elaborated on the affective and subjective responses that music conjures up in them.

Rudy: What types of messages do you get from some of your favourite songs? Think of one and tell me how you interpret it.

Zack: Ok, like I said Damien Rice [Irish acoustic guitarists/singer]. And there's a song called *Delicate*. And my friend Austin here in this school, she showed it to me [...] And she gave me her iPod and said, "here I think you'll like this song." After listening to it for the first time, I really liked the music and the melody. I thought it all worked really well. That's what first got me to it, but the more and more you listen to something, the more and more you think about it I guess. Like that song for me, it means more like the beginning of the song says, "we might kiss when we're alone". And the whole song means to me like, things that mean a lot to you are [things you shouldn't take lightly]. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: Name one particular song that you really like?

Gloria: Ocean Breeds Salty by Modest Mouse. I like mellow music and it's really mellow the lyrics are put well together.

Rudy: What about the lyrics do you like?

Gloria: I don't know, it's nice... I don't really read a lot into music for some

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<sup>56</sup> The interview with Veronica started with a short discussion on her choice of high school in which she told me that she decided to transfer to a different school because of its filming and photography programs.

reason, a lot of people get the whole be your own person and do whatever you want, but I think I mostly listen to it for the sound aspect of it. (South-Central LA participant)

Rudy: What are some of your favourite types of music?

Tiff: With music, right now I'm really into EDM [electronic dance music]. One of my favourite artists is a house DJ. I got into it like two years ago when I went to my first music event. I don't know, I feel like it's pretty calming music.

Rudy: House music is calming? [laughs].....

Tiff: I guess because I like to dance. (South-Central LA participant)

Rudy: Do you have a favourite song?

Diana: I don't really have a favourite song. I like a lot of songs. For me music depends on my mood, whether I'm happy or sad or working, or working on writing anything like that. [...] I kind of use music to inspire me. (Zoo participant)

These extracts also demonstrate the importance to these young people of the aesthetic and affective dimensions of their social worlds. They are automatically inclined to be attracted to media-cultural texts primarily for their aesthetic and/or sound dynamics, and for the emotions that they stir. For example, Zack's initial liking of the song *Delicate* was due to its melody, which, after more reflective consideration, led him to a more interpersonal and evaluative interpretation and liking of the song; while Gloria, Tiff, and Diana forego more interpersonal interpretations of their favourite types of music, in favour of their mood inducing properties, with Diana adding that listening to music helps her with her creative writing.

On the second point, *Artsy/Indie* young people tended to share a tentative rejection of mainstream media culture as evident from their indifference to brand clothing and the emphasis they place on a use-value rationale for their consumption preferences. Note for example, Gloria's rationale for buying Vans [brand] shoes, Veronica's opinions on brand tags, and Zack's thought processes when buying clothing:

Rudy: Do you pursue brand name clothing?  
Gloria: Well, I'll go to the mall if I need something or just to spend time there. The only brand name thing I'm guilty of buying a lot would be Vans shoes, cause they're comfortable.  
Rudy: Is it just because they're comfortable? It has nothing to do with the commercial appeal to it?  
Gloria: Not really. They're just kind of simple and comfortable and that's what I like about them. (South-Central LA participant)

Rudy: Do you ever go the mall or shopping centres?  
Veronica: Sometimes.  
Rudy: How many times do you go?  
Veronica: I hardly go. I don't really like going. I don't think I'm the type of person that likes to go the malls and stuff.  
Rudy: Why not?  
Veronica: First of all, because I'm from a low-income family, and if I like something I can't afford it, so it's like, I rather not go. If I do, it's partly on Black Friday [the US equivalent of Boxing Day] or back to school.  
Rudy: What do you think about brand clothing?  
Veronica: I don't believe in that, I think the only thing that changes are the little ticket thingy [labels]. I could wear any type of clothes. My uncle works, he makes the cloths, not really makes, he puts the buttons and stuff, [...] and he gives me clothes. [...] But I could wear any type of clothes, I don't really care if it's a cool brand or not, it doesn't really matter. (Bresse participant)

Rudy: Do you ever go to the mall or shopping centres?  
Zack: Yeah.  
Rudy: How often?  
Zack: Maybe like once a month, if I'm hanging out with friends I guess, not too often.  
[...]  
Rudy: What about brand clothing, does that mean anything to you?  
Zack: No I don't really care for specific brands or anything.  
[...]  
Rudy: What's going on when you do purchase these items, what do you think about?  
Zack: I just think if I'll, right before I purchase, I think it's something I can use often so it's more worth the money.<sup>57</sup> (Zoo participant)

Congruently, their indifference towards mainstream fashion was also accompanied by a tentative rejection of mainstream media-culture in favour of an active engagement with alternative media-culture.

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<sup>57</sup> From my preliminary observations, the young people in this group wore relatively simple and non-flashy clothing, in accordance with their accounts.

- Rudy: What are some of your favourite songs, like what's on your iPod?  
 Evyn: My iPod is connected to me, it's on me right now. But I listen to anything but country and rap.<sup>58</sup>
- Rudy: Why not rap?  
 Evyn: It's not singing, it's people talking, plus the subject matter. People shooting each other and going to clubs. But I do like techno music. I'm a big techno fan. My favourite band is Owl City [a US Electronica band]. My favourite songs are Japanese, cause I'm a huge Anime fan.
- Rudy: What type of TV shows do you like?  
 Jocelyn: I like superheroes. I've always liked cartoons and I don't think I'm ever going to stop. I like them better than regular shows, like I would never watch *Jersey Shore* [An MTV reality TV show featuring a group of Italian-American young people living together in a beach house New Jersey, also the US equivalent of the UK show the *Geordie Shore*].
- Evyn: Me neither.  
 Jocelyn: I don't understand the appeal to that.  
 Evyn: I don't understand why people like MTV. (Zoo participants)
- Rudy: What kind of music do you listen to?  
 Jesse: Mostly rock. I won't listen to any Disney thing. It's crap. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: What kind of music do you listen to?  
 Jose: [...] Some people like it because it is mainstream music. I don't know if I could relate to it like in a whole sentiment the way that other people can relate to it, but I can relate to it as in it kind of how it makes me feel, it keeps me normal, it keeps me open minded. If you can't really be open minded about music than what can you be open minded about? [...] So you know you hear some Taylor Swift *You Belong With Me* or Mylie Cyrus *The Climb* [US pop singers], and I was listening to those songs, and thinking, these are some nice songs. [...] But the thing I also hate about mainstream music is that it's also one of those things that are really fake. You know there's a level to it where music producers and music labels want to hear a certain thing, and they control it. That's why you have seven happy songs about partying, being happy, and just living life, and then you have two depressing songs, and two kind of political songs, and then back to happy. You try to show everyone everything, but then you gotta keep it at a level. [...] Like in radio you never really hear thrash [a subgenre of metal], [...] and you never really listen to the other options that are out there, and that kind of sucks. (Bresse participant)

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<sup>58</sup> Evyn and the other young people who mentioned country are referring to contemporary country Western music from the southern states of the US. It is well known that the overwhelming majority of urban US young people do not like country music, as it is viewed as music white people from the South listen to.

It is tempting to read Evyn and Jocelyn's emphatic disliking of MTV, and Jesse's automatic mentioning of, and strongly dismissive attitude towards Disney music, and argue that what is demonstrated in the above extracts is a form of cultural resistance to the mainstream. However, as I argued in Chapter 3, the term resistance has a political connotation, and thus I argue that, if not for any other reason, it should be used appropriately for the sake of conceptual accuracy. Hence, the *Artsy/Indie* young people do not like most mainstream media culture because it clashes with their aesthetic preferences. This is not the same as having a political and ethical objection to it as expressed by some of the *Critical/Political* young people. To put it simply, the *Critical/Political* young people tend to resist mainstream media-culture, the *Artsy/Indie* young people tentatively reject it. Jose's response is especially exemplary of this more tentative rejection, where he expresses an informed and sophisticated structural understanding of why mainstream music and radio are so bland and formulaic, but at the same time admitting, and rather surprisingly given his obvious Heavy-Metal look and identity, that he listens to some very mainstream pop songs, again noting their positive affective properties as his rationale for doing so.

## 6.2 Apolitical Dispositions

Another key characteristic of the *Artsy/Indie* young people is that they tended to separate their aesthetic agency from their political agency, keeping the two forms relatively mutually exclusive. Although pronounced affective and aesthetic dispositions can be arguably expected from individuals that partake in cultural production of whatever form, what struck me as interesting is that these young people's aesthetic agency was not explicitly linked to a form of political agency. Indeed in some instances the *Artsy/Indie* young people seemed hostile to the fusing of musical aesthetics with politics. Phillip, Zack, Tiffany, and Gloria, for example, (all of whom I asked specifically if they engaged with political media) seemed to prefer to keep the domains of music and politics separate:

Rudy: What type of music do you listen to mostly?

Phillip: Pink Floyd, is most definitely my favourite band. I don't only like it because it's different from other bands, but because it's sombre. I like sombre and it's really good music with a really good message?

Rudy: Like what kind of messages do you get from it?



Phillip: Like in The Wall [song by Pink Floyd], I don't like how Roger Waters turned it into a political message, but before it was the social message [that I liked]. Like how little things can break down a person's stability and make them be ostracized from society. [...] Music is very important you know it's kind of like a drug.<sup>59</sup> (Zoo participant)

Rudy: Do you listen to any political music?

Gloria: I don't really listen to music to get a meaning from it. I mean some people do and good for them, but I really don't. (South-Central LA participant)

Rudy: Do you listen to any political music?

Zack: Like what?

Rudy: I don't know, like Rage Against The Machine or something like that.

Zack: Um. Not really. I mean I listen to them, and I've heard a few of their songs...

Rudy: But political music in general doesn't do it for you?

Zack: No I guess not. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: Do you ever listen to any types of political music?

Tiff: Not really?

Rudy: Any particular reason why not?

Tiff: I don't know, it doesn't really interest me. (South-Central LA participant)

These strong valence apolitical dispositions, manifested in an automatic avoidance of, and/or disinterest in politics, can also be inferred from the rationales they gave for their consumption practices, which, while use-value oriented, did not tend to invoke any political or ethical concerns. For example, in the following extracts, Gloria seems to be aware of the exploitative origins of her clothes, but is admittedly unconcerned about this, while in the cases of Zack and Veronica, their awareness of the likely exploitative origins of their products is noticeably absent.

Rudy: Well besides Luz who doesn't purchase brand name clothing because of where they come from. Lupe and Gloria, how does this affect your shopping?

[...]

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<sup>59</sup> Phillip's answer can be contrasted to the following short response from the Critical/Political youth Luz.

Rudy: Give me one particular song that you really like? And Why?

Luz: Pink Floyd - Comfortably Not. I think it's a commentary on society.

- Gloria: I think it's a biased. Let's say you don't like Nike's so you go and say hey you know little kids who get paid ten cents an hour make those. But when it's something you like you kind of ignore it.
- Rudy: So because it's a particular brand you don't like you're more disposed to say well it's made by so and so where as if it's something you like it doesn't really matter?
- Gloria: I thinks it's you try but you don't really care. I'm not trying to sound mean but yeah. (South-Central LA participant)
- Rudy: Now some of the stuff that you do purchase in these malls, do you know where they're usually made?
- Zack: No, I'm not sure. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: Are you aware of some of the conditions where certain clothes are made?
- Veronica: kind of.
- Rudy: Can you sort of elaborate on that?
- Veronica: Like what do you mean?
- Rudy: Like you said kind of, what came to your mind when you said kind of?
- Veronica: Like do I really care?
- Rudy: No not necessarily, um just like do you know what kind of conditions certain clothes are made?
- Veronica: I don't really get the question.
- Rudy: Like sweatshops for instance, stuff like that. Are you familiar with these concepts?
- Veronica: Not really.
- Rudy: Or like environmental impact that certain products have?
- Veronica: Sort of I guess, it depends on the person. For me, I don't really care. I'm more into like my stuff, like pictures and stuff. I don't really look outside.<sup>60</sup> (Bresse participant)

### 6.3 Complicated Contestation of Neoliberalism

However, this is not to suggest that these young people's apolitical and aesthetic dispositions correspond to, or are reflective of the more apathetic and self-interested discourses of their surrounding neoliberal environments. To be certain, these young people's predominant apolitical and aesthetic dispositional tendencies appear to be playing a different role entirely in their overall

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<sup>60</sup> In Veronica's case, it did not appear that she understood my questioning, and this is partly to due to my failure to explain to her what I meant. Nonetheless, it would seem that she is unaware of sweatshop conditions even though she volunteered to me that her uncle works in a garment factory in LA (it is an open secret that most of these factories are in fact sweatshops that employ undocumented and mostly Latino immigrants like Veronica's uncle).

contributions to, and contestations of, neoliberal reproduction, which seems to be one of an unconscious partial avoidance and escape from it. To be certain, these young people do not appear to be consciously contesting neoliberal discourses, at least not for political and ethical reasons; they simply do not like the majority of mainstream media-culture and are indifferent to the consumerist and materialistic practices that it promotes. Equally, however, they are not actively and significantly contributing to this culture, at least when compared to the *Mainstream* group discussed in the following chapter. A possible partial reason for this is that their predominantly apolitical, aesthetic, and artistic dispositions have also partly shielded them from buying into the more materialistic, self-interested, and dominant political-economic discourses of neoliberalism. For example, all of these young people wanted to pursue a career in some form of cultural production for the sake of pursuing something they love do, whilst acknowledging that they do not expect to become rich or famous out of it.

Rudy: What do you think your parents expect of you, that is, what do you think they want you to do in life?

Gloria: My mom wants me to do whatever makes me happy. But I think that her definition of happy is being financially stable. I just want to do whatever makes me happy [which includes pursuing a career in independent film-making] I don't really care about the money.  
(South-Central LA participant)

However, on the flip side, this does also suggest that these dispositions can lead them to avoid a more active engagement with political-economy full stop, neoliberal or otherwise, as is somewhat evident by their underdeveloped political-economic knowledge discussed later in this chapter. As Bourdieu (1981, p. 314) argues: “differences in dispositions, like differences in [socio-structural] position (to which they are often linked), engender real differences in perception and appreciation”.

Nonetheless, at various intervals concerning different topics, these young people did express more politically? conscientious views. For example, some of them, as demonstrated in the following extracts, expressed very empathetic views when discussing the labour conditions of the people that make their clothes. It is worth noting that when articulating the statements below, Jocelyn, Evyn, and Jesse, at a seemingly dispositional level, manifested voice intonations and facial

expressions that reflected a more solemn tone and appearance, while Tiff immediately expressed some remorse as soon as she was asked about where her clothes come from. However, despite these instances of cognitive dissonance that thinking about labour exploitation seemed to induce in them, their knowledge of the sweatshop labour that very likely produces their preferred consumer items, did not seem to impact their consumption practices:

- Rudy: Do you know under what conditions these clothes are made?  
Jocelyn: I've heard of sweatshops [...] I think that they're really bad, and nobody should be treated that way, to work a lot of hours for little pay. If could change it I would, but I don't see myself in the condition right now to be able to help anybody.  
Evyn: Companies need to stop going to China for cheap labour. (Zoo Participants)  
Rudy: What do you guys think about these sweatshop conditions?  
Jesse: The same as John [*Mainstream* youth]. I'll buy things if I need to. I'll feel guilty, I think is unfair. Self-conscious thoughts come up. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: Can you describe to me what you're thinking when you purchase them?  
Tiff: Well if it's in style. Like the colour jeans I bought one pair even though I liked the other ones. But I mean, if I'm not going to wear them like in a few months from now so what's the point? That's what I'm thinking, like how often am I going to wear the product.  
Rudy: Okay, do you know where these clothes are made?  
Tiff: I know where they're from. Now you're trying to make me feel guilty.  
Rudy: Why am I making you feel guilty?  
Tiff: Because I'm thinking about the sweatshops and that people being paid so little for making clothes that they sell here for so much.  
Rudy: Why do you feel guilty though?  
Tiff: I guess because I'm supporting the industry that continues to treat this people that way.  
Rudy: How are you supporting it?  
Tiff: I still keep buying products from them even though I know how they are made. It's like telling them it's ok to go ahead and keep on doing it.  
Rudy: Now do you think about these issues when you're buying them?  
Tiff: No. (South-Central LA participant)

Moreover, some of these young people did express a liking for some political media, and in the case of Tiff, her exposure to a political movie appeared to alter her views.

- Rudy: Do you listen to any political music at all?  
 Diana: Um, Mueban Las Industrias [Get rid of the factories]. Well like I don't remember the lyrics that well now. But I like the fact that they use situations that concerned us all in their songs. Because I don't like the songs nowadays that are just pop and have nonsense lyrics that don't even connect. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: What about a movie?  
 Tiff: One of my favourite movies would be *Innocent Voices*. It really changed my point of view. I didn't really see the guerilla people's point of view.
- Rudy: What was your perspective before since you said it changed it?  
 Tiff: Well yeah, I didn't see them [the guerillas] as having families, I saw them mostly as a bunch of men. But when the little boy comes into the picture, and they see the government as bad.
- Rudy: I should ask what is the movie about?  
 Tiff: It's about this little boy who lives in El Salvador during the civil war. At the age of 12 the little boys would be taken away from their families so they could be in the army for the Salvadorian government. And his uncle is part of the guerrilla movement.
- Rudy: So before that what was your perspective?  
 Tiff: Well I didn't really see the guerrilla men as having families, I thought they were just a bunch of guys.
- Rudy: So after the movie you were more sympathetic to their cause?  
 Tiff: Yeah to their cause, and to them in general. (South-Central LA participant)

Nonetheless, as Diana's and Tiff's above responses exemplify, the *Artsy/Indie* young people's expressions of political concerns, like their interpretations of their preferred political media texts, and their rejection of mainstream media-culture, were generally not as prevalent in the interviews and/or as in depth as those of the *Critical/Political* young people. Correspondingly, neither Diana nor Tiff expressed a strong valence affective reaction or attachment to their respective political media texts, which in conjunction with their non-elaborate responses, and according to the tenets of cognitive psychology, suggest that they do not regularly engage with their preferred political media, or the political topics covered by that media (Lodge et al., 1991). On its own, this is not a striking observation, but it further highlights how the few *Artsy/Indie* young people who do engage with more critical media, do so to a lesser degree and in less depth than the *Critical/Political* young people. For instance, Jocelyn, Gloria, Evyn, and Jesse all mentioned the US adult cartoon *Family Guy* as a source of

political information. While these cartoons do on occasion contain a few instances of political commentary, these are limited to mostly US Democrat/liberal concerns, last a few seconds, and are otherwise drowned out by what is an overall jarring kaleidoscope of the mainly 1980s US television and pop-culture references and non-sequiturs that constitute each episode.

Given that these transposable apolitical dispositions seem to figure quite prominently in these young people's socio-cognitive frameworks, traditional consciousness-raising critical pedagogic methods may not be sufficient to create a more conscientious political understanding and concern within these young people, and by inference, within other young people that can be loosely situated within the *Artsy/Indie* classification as well. This suggests, as I will argue in Chapter 8, that critical pedagogic strategies might benefit from more tailor-made and socio-cognitive approaches that take into consideration the different types of dispositions that are prominent amongst different types of young people.

#### **6.4 Artsy/Indie Welfare Schemata**

The *Artsy/Indie* young people's responses to the questions on welfare signified another key characteristic that sets this group apart from the others; that is, they tended to express very dissonant, ambivalent, and tentative support for welfare services that seemed to be more reflective of neoliberal anti-welfare discourses. That is, they first and foremost support welfare programmes for the underprivileged, and expressed very compassionate views for the suffering of others. However, these tended to be accompanied by the standard neoliberal anti-welfare discourses of self-reliance and temporary assistance (e.g., see Tiff's and Zack's welfare schemata below), which are often premised on a more implicit belief that that welfare programmes create life-long dependency, and that welfare recipients take unfair advantage of them:

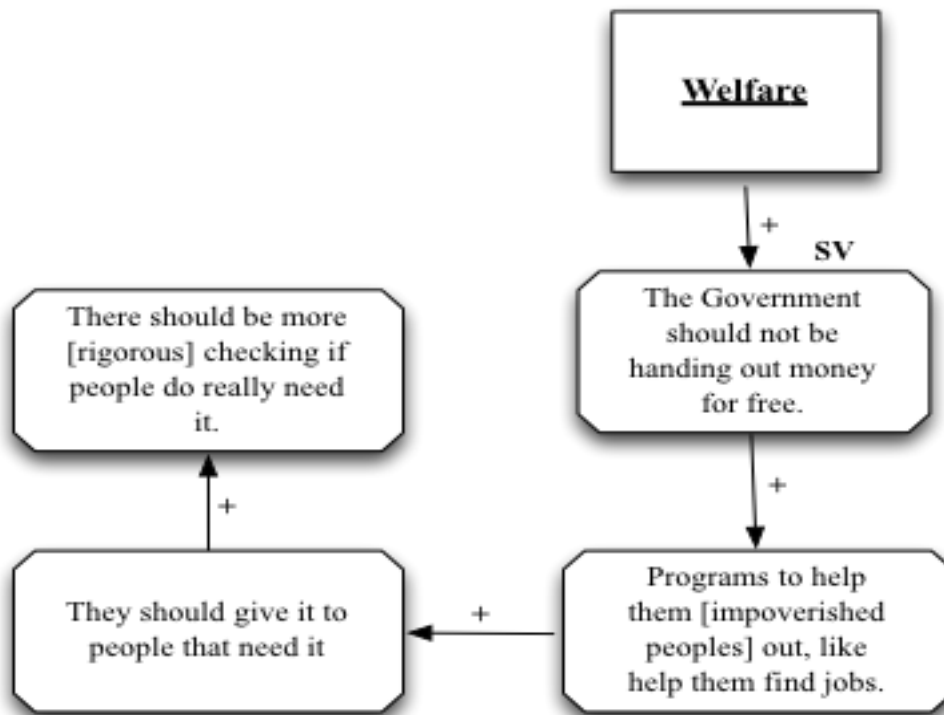
- Rudy: Do you think that the government should do something about poverty?
- Phillip: They should help out with like welfare and everything. They should definitely, and like when you're unemployed, you know like an unemployment check. That definitely helps you know. But they should let people deal with it by themselves, like they should create more jobs, but then let people go out and find the jobs, but don't control them. You know like how the government [sometimes] has control of the people.

- Rudy: But like you mentioned welfare programmes, what do you think of them?
- Phillip: I think they're good. Like if you're unemployed, get the welfare check, but the minute you become employed stop. It's kind of like corrupt, these people will have like ten children [on their claim forms] even though they only have one, just to get that food stamp you know. So I think they definitely should be more regulated, but it's definitely a good idea. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: What do you think of welfare programmes?
- Jose: I do like welfare programmes, I just think that some people yet again abuse it. [...] Everybody does it. I have actually a couple of friends that are like, how can we get some money. And they don't want to steal or rob anybody, so they're like, let's just go on welfare, and not because they needed, but they're getting that money just for themselves. If I needed welfare I would use it to also help out my mom and stuff [...] but some people lie and just take that money for themselves. And you know, and then they wonder why is this economy so fucked up, you know it's because people are stealing money. We're trying make things good you know, yet there is always someone that says fuck that it's going to be all mine, and that's where things always goes wrong. (Bresee participant)
- Rudy: Do you think it is the government's job to do something about social problems like poverty?
- Tiff: To a certain degree I think the government should help but they shouldn't be providing all of it.
- Rudy: What do you mean?
- Tiff: The government should not be handing out money for free. I think they should give them enough money to live but I also I think they should come up with programmes to help them out. Like help them find jobs.
- Rudy: So what do you think about government welfare programmes?
- Tiff: Well I don't think they should not allow just anybody. I know of people that just live off welfare. I don't think it's right. They should give it to people that actually need it. I think they should be more rigorous on checking if people really do need it. (South-Central LA participant)
- Rudy: You said something about homelessness.
- Veronica: [...] They [government] should build like buildings and houses for them, I know there is, but they should build more than that and help them more. But at the same time the homeless people sometimes deserve it, because they have chances to work and they're not doing it. And there is jobs out there that they could do, and they're not doing cause they're lazy. But it's like half and half. [...]
- Rudy: So what do you think of like government welfare programmes for instance?

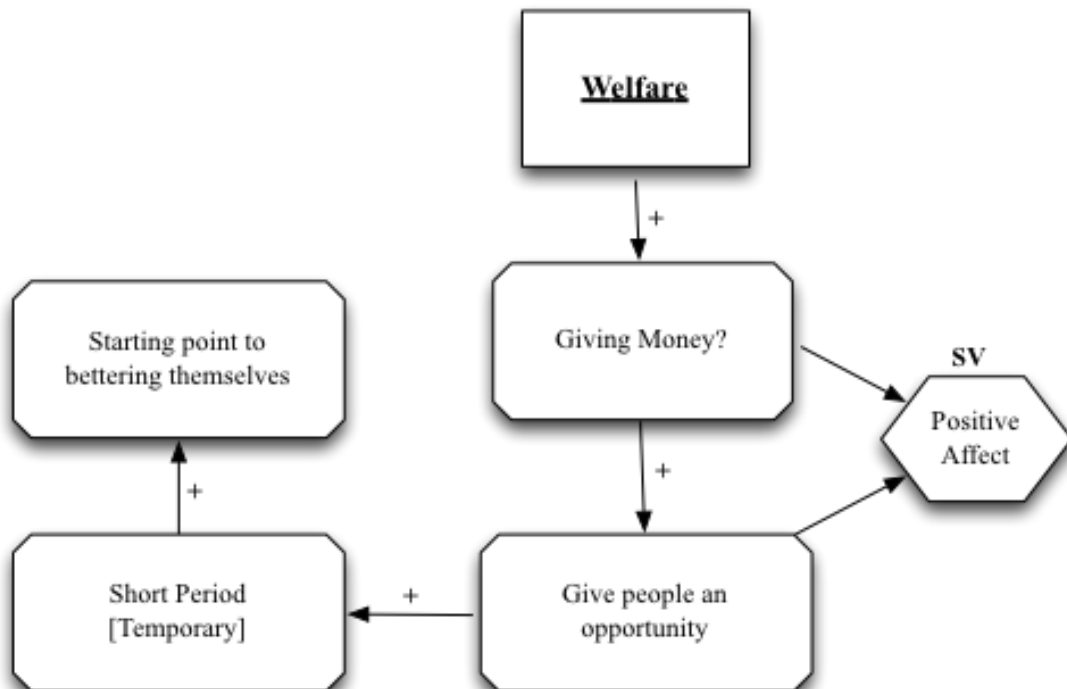
- Veronica: I think it's good, but then at the time, other people who actually have the money are taking advantage of that, and using it when somebody else could be using that money. (Bresee participant)
- Rudy: Since we're on this topic, what do you think is the government's role in dealing with poverty?
- Zack: I think they should offer services to help people who are like in need. I think if people are really struggling that they should have the opportunity to do something about that, and government should offer some opportunity. Yeah I don't think it's something that they just not think about, I think they should really make an effort to kind of help people if they can as much as they can.
- Rudy: So what do you think of government welfare programmes?
- Zack: Welfare like offering money?
- Rudy: Yeah that's one aspect of it?
- Zack: Um, well can you explain that a little more?
- Rudy: Sure, ah you know like welfare programmes like unemployment benefits for instance, there is some money that is given to people that claim to be in need, extra financial need, food stamps for instance.
- Zack: Ah ok, what was the question I'm sorry?
- Rudy: What do you think of these types of programmes?
- Zack: I think that they're good, they give people an opportunity. I don't think that people should get to the point where they see all those like all those opportunities and just think, oh I'm good with this, I can stay with this. I think they should take that and say like, here's some help now, and now I need, I need to figure out, like this is keeping it for now, but that they need to go figure out what more they can do to kind of get out of that situation.
- Rudy: I understand, you don't think that they should be dependent on welfare?
- Zack: Yeah or at least not for a long period of time. Yeah it's good to have for like a short period of time to kind of stabilize you a little more, not be as stressful, but from that you should take that as like, as like help to get back to what you think you need to be. So yeah people should just see those as starting points to bettering themselves. (Zoo participant)



**Figure 6.1: Tiff's Welfare Schemata**



**Figure 6.2: Zack's Welfare Schemata**



A number of things are interesting about these extracts, foremost of which, is that they demonstrate that these young people's schemata for welfare are all almost identical to one another. Tiff's and Zack's welfare schemata, as illustrated above, highlights the train of thought that was exhibited and generally followed by all of the *Artsy/Indie* young people who were asked these sets of questions. First, they all semantically and initially automatically associated welfare with the government handing out money to the less fortunate, despite the fact that this is technically not correct as welfare programmes can take the form of a number of other government services as expressed by the *Critical/Political* participant Ben in the previous chapter. This strongly reflects the neoliberal anti-welfare discourses represented in the mass media which tend to negatively equate welfare with handing out free money to undeserving people. Second, after their initial reaction, all went on to express the more compassionate view that these programmes should exist to help the less fortunate. Finally, they circle back to views that reflect neoliberal anti-welfare discourses, namely, that welfare should be temporary. Tiff, Phillip, and Jose also implied that a significant proportion of people cheat the welfare system, and that more stringent controls need to be put in place to ensure that this fraud is stopped. There is no indication of what has influenced these anti-welfare discourses, which are commonly disseminated via mass media, other than Jose citing anecdotal evidence to support his claims.

Nonetheless, as with their socio-cultural schemata, the welfare schemata of these young people expressed what can be tentatively and for heuristic purposes be considered a middle variant form of neoliberal interpellation, that involves supporting welfare services, and generally appreciating the importance of the need for them, while still echoing dominant neoliberal anti-welfare discourses. As their welfare schemata reflected incorrect factual information, standard pedagogic approaches that seek to inculcate more comprehensive and accurate conceptions about policies of welfare may work to help these young people acquire more accurate knowledge about welfare. This is another recommendation that I will elaborate on in Chapter 8.

## **6.5 Politics and Capitalism Schemata**

Generally, as with their views on welfare and their knowledge about the labour and environmental consequences of their consumption practices, their

political knowledge was limited, and, in the cases of Zack and Veronica, it was by their own admission, non-existent. The political economic knowledge that was conveyed by the other participants consisted of tentative support for capitalism, moderate to strong support for voting, and a partial understanding of alternative economic systems.

Rudy: What do you think about capitalism?

Gloria: I think is somewhat fair since you do have a chance to go up. You have people who are born with nothing and then later on in life they've achieved something because they built a company or whatever. But I think the way that it's actually run it's mostly favouring whoever was already on top.

Rudy: Have you heard of other alternatives?

Gloria: I've heard of socialism, communism and Marxism and all those other isms. But the problem with those would be the people. (South Central LA participant)

Rudy: Our economic system is described as a capitalist system of private property rights and competing privately owned businesses where individuals are rewarded based on how hard or how little they work, what do you think of this economic arrangement?

Tiff: Well I feel that it's not good to a certain degree, but it's better than others like communism.

Rudy: Can you explain to me your understanding of communism since you brought it up?

Tiff: Isn't it when everybody lives at the same level and there isn't any rich people right?

Rudy: Yeah that's one aspect of it, in theory? But what else, and why do you think the current capitalist system is better than communism?

Tiff: Well because here we have room to grow but it's really rare when that happens. I don't think our system is an ideal system but it's better than some.

Rudy: Why do you say that?

Tiff: Well don't communists have dictators? I guess that's their flaw of their system, dictators as oppose to a leader that they choose.

[...]

Rudy: As an individual, do you think that you have, or can have (if you wanted to) a say in government, in your government.

Tiff: Well yeah.

Rudy: How so?

Tiff: I think I do by writing letters to the politicians, actually going out and voting.

Rudy: So you think voting and writing to your congressmen are effective means to get governments responsive to their citizens?

Tiff: Yeah, and like signing petitions.

Rudy: Do you or would you vote? Why?

- Tiff: Yes, because I think it does make a difference. (South-Central LA participant)
- Rudy: So Evyn brought up voting. So do you think voting is important, explain.
- Evyn: Nobody votes nothing gets done. There you go. Some people think that in voting that one person isn't going to change anything, but it could be a bunch of one person's voting that changes something.
- Rudy: Joey?
- Joey: Oh yeah I agree with [Evyn], voting is very important.<sup>61</sup> (Zoo participants)
- Rudy: Our system is described as [one] where individuals are rewarded on how hard or how little they work. What do you think of this system?
- Phillip: It's fair.
- Rudy: Elaborate on that.
- Phillip: It makes sense you know. You work hard you get a lot, you work a little you get a little. Even the rich people that never done anything, they still, like the oligarchs they still did something. They went out and innovated. Except the people who like inherited all their millions of dollars, they didn't deserve it, but the people who found oil, they found it, they cultivated it, they made it into oil. They found out how to do it, so they deserve that money. It makes sense.
- Rudy: Do you know of any other like political or economic alternatives, or systems?
- Phillip: You mean like communism or socialism?
- Rudy: Yeah, yeah.
- Phillip: I guess I know a little bit about socialism.
- Rudy: Ok explain socialism, your understanding of it.
- Phillip: My idea of socialism like, the ruling [proletariat], but yeah like the working class dominates it. The better the working class, you know kind of not have a dictator, like you know Soviet Russia went against that. But that's really all I know, the better the worker or labourer.
- Rudy: Where did you come about that understanding?
- Phillip: This book by Upton Sinclair: *The Jungle*.
- Rudy: Yeah where did you, why did you read that book?
- Phillip: It was just really interesting. The whole socialist movement you know, all the unions and the workers, and how like in 1905 our country was

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<sup>61</sup> On alternative approaches to social change, these young people also supported petitions, peaceful protests and strikes, but were avidly against what they considered violent protests. Correspondingly, they had middle variant understanding of environmental politics and practices relative to the high variant and low variant understandings demonstrated by the Critical/Political and Mainstream young people respectively. This middle-variant understanding consisted of having some awareness that their consumption practices can contribute to environmental degradation, but this understanding was not detailed. Furthermore, most of them also favoured individual approaches to environmental problems such as recycling, as well as governmental responses with Diana and Phillip (Zoo participants) arguing that governments should regulate polluting factories. Overall *Artsy/Indie* young people held what can be considered a moderate level of internal and external political efficacy (see Hayes & Beane 1993).

- a piece of shit with all these factories, and then all of a sudden like boom. 1920's [...] the working class definitely improved at that time that was so crucial for our society. [...]
- Rudy: Did you have to read that for class, or how did you come about it?
- Phillip: Well I was in history class, and we were talking about like unions. And I got into like unions, and why are they bad. I didn't understand why they are bad in our society. So I looked at unions on Wikipedia.com and one of the books that came was Sinclair.
- Rudy: What do you think of unions and the labour movement?
- Phillip: [...] Well I don't understand why unions, why people make them out to be so bad cause they were helping people. You know most of this country is run by the elite, you know the few elite, and the rest of the country is poor or middle class, so if you better them you better the entire country, and the entire country would be happier.. And I guess life would be enriched.
- [....]
- Rudy: As an individual do you think that you can have a say in how the government is run?
- Phillip: Well I can vote, but that's about it.
- Rudy: Do you think voting is effective?
- Phillip: Yeah I do, because if you vote, the government kind of has to do what you voted for you know. If enough people get together and vote for one thing, the government has to do it you know. And it definitely expresses the public's opinion on certain issues. I think it works. (Zoo participant)

In the above extracts, both Gloria and Phillip used the word fair to describe capitalism echoing the standard discourse of upward mobility via hard work, but they simultaneously expressed the view that it is also unfair since it favours individuals who inherited their money. Tiff, immediately notes that capitalism is not ideal, but seems to premise her support for capitalism on a lesser of two evils rationale. In these regard, these young did express a partial structural critique of capitalism, albeit not one that was as pronounced as that of *Critical/Political* young people. Moreover, these ambivalent or dissonant views on capitalism are especially apparent in Phillip's extract. Despite commenting throughout the interview that he is not interested in politics and finds the subject dry, a casual mentioning of unions during his history class led him to read Sinclair's famed book *The Jungle*, which contributed to his accurate conceptualization of democratic socialism, support for unions, and understanding of elite rule. However, only seconds before, he had used the word 'innovate' to argue for why oligarchs deserve their wealth, and in that moment expressed a dominant neoliberal trope. Nonetheless, Phillip's account also highlights how young people can be turned on

to politics or political understandings via any number of random events. Phillip's otherwise apolitical orientation may initially predispose him to avoid politics, but as his extract demonstrates, and as discussed in section 5.5 of the previous chapter, even minimal exposure to political information can have a significant influence on an individual's political schemata. The initial key, however, is direct exposure.

## **6.6. Concluding Remarks**

Overall, the *Artsy/Indie* young people expressed a pronounced seriousness about, and dedication to, their artistic endeavours and aspirations. These artistic proclivities seem to correspond to their affective and aesthetic dispositions and a tentative rejection of mainstream media-culture and materialistic consumption practices and aspirations. However, while their immersion into alternative and indie forms of media-culture shields them to some extent from the more commercial, vacuous, narcissistic, and consumerist messages of mainstream media-culture, these indie forms are not especially conducive to the formation of more refined political perspectives, which more comprehensively question and critique neoliberal discourses. For one thing, alternative and indie cultural forms, particularly the *Anime* cartoons, *Electro-Techno* music, and Internet blog mediums mentioned by these young people, are not necessarily conducive to critique. Bannister (2006) for instance, argues that Western alternative and indie music culture tends to be seen as an autonomous, spontaneous, and corporate-free culture, and that this overlooks the fact that it can also be hierarchical, stratified, and traditional. Congruently, it does not appear that these young people's media preferences and interpretations have a significant influence on their relatively underdeveloped political-economic schemata, at least when compared to that of the *Critical/Political* young people whose socio-cultural and political-economic schemata were intricately intertwined. This is particularly noticeable in their responses to questions concerning music. As noted in Chapter 3, music lies at the centre of media culture, and contains unique semiotic powers and interpellating potential, functioning, as De Nora (2006, p. 141) argues, as "a device for the generation of future identity and action structures, and a mediator of future existence". In this regard, it stands to reason that these young people's indifference towards political music, or a lack of political interpretation of their preferred music texts, representing a further indication of what can be considered

an apolitical disposition, which may partially explain why their overall political knowledge and views were not as developed as those of the *Critical/Political* group. This is a somewhat surprising discovery, as there is a popular conception that more artistically inclined individuals are also politically engaged, particularly as in the history of revolutionary movements, as Graeber (2009) argues, there has always been a strong relationship and alliance between Bohemians and political agitators.

However, it may well be the case that upon entering their respective universities (as with the *Critical/Political* young people, all were attending or expressed an intention to attend a university), or in future experiences with their respective artistic communities, that they will be exposed to more critical forms of media-culture, and may potentially be influenced by them. Gloria for instance, noted that, in addition to her 12<sup>th</sup> grade Civics course, she had received a lot of political information from music and art festivals stating that, “they always have that one activist group that hands out flyers and whatnot”. As it stands, the *Artsy/Indie* young people fall somewhere on the progressive to liberal political spectrum, as they have some critical views on capitalism and the current government, and favour reforms, but do not believe that alternatives to the current political-economic system are viable and they have internalized the dominant neoliberal discourse on welfare that exaggerates the problem of welfare fraud. To put it crudely, the *Artsy/Indie* young people are the quintessential wild cards whose aesthetic and affective dispositions and artistic endeavours may lead them to develop a more in-depth political consciousness, or whose more introverted, apolitical, and escapist dispositions may guide them to more passive and apolitical practices in childhood.

## Chapter Seven

### Mainstream Youth

### A More Neoliberal Inclination

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- Rudy: Why do you think some people are poor or homeless?
- Fernanda: This is how I look at it, you always find a way to come up with money, [...]. Put it this way, life is like this, either you hustle or you just don't do nothing about it. If you hustle, you'll get somewhere, if you don't, you won't get anywhere. (Bresee participant)
- Rudy: So some of these kids, what are their aspirations, what do they want to do?
- Jaquie: Some of them don't know, quite a lot of them don't know, some of them got a whole in depth plan about careers or what they want to do. Some of them want to go into the army.
- Rudy: Talk to me about those that have in depth career plans.
- Jaquie: So some of them will say, 'I've got my whole life planned out', but it's to do with, right I'm going to go to the Army. After I've gone to the army then I'm going to set up my own business. And you get that quite a lot, setting up your own business, and you get quite a lot of completely unrealistic things about I'm going to be famous because I'm going to become an actress. (Hackney Youth Worker).

While both the *Critical/Political* and *Artsy/Indie* young people described in the previous chapters expressed dispositions, thoughts and practices that to varying but significant extents run counter to dominant neoliberal discourses, the young people I classify here as *Mainstream*, deployed socio-cultural and political-economic cognitive frameworks that mirror dominant and widespread neoliberal discourses. Although this group of young people was the most varied in their views, they all expressed, for example, degrees of self-interested, apathetic, and consumerist dispositions, materialistic and/or entrepreneurial concerns and aspirations, apathetic attitudes towards political-economic issues of labour and environmental exploitation, and person-blame views on the causes of poverty. Congruently, these cognitive frameworks seem to be strongly linked or closely correspond to a more active and relatively uncritical engagement with corporate media culture, and to a lesser extent, to other interpellating settings including youth centres and family. As in the previous two chapters, I will begin this chapter with an overview of these young peoples' socio-cultural experiences, media-



culture preferences and interpretations, and the central and transposable dispositions that can be extrapolated from these accounts. This is followed by an analysis of their political-economic schemata, and a brief discussion of what these young people's political-economic views and attitudes contribute to the ongoing youth politics debate concerning the 'crisis in democracy'. I will end this chapter with a section that details some of the ways these young people, nonetheless, contested dominant neoliberal discourses.

### 7.1 Shopping and Self-interested Dispositions

The *Mainstream* young people tended to describe themselves as typical teenagers. While the *Critical/Political* and *Artsy/Indie* young people also reported that they engage in typical teenage activities like surfing the Internet or hanging out with their friends, they tended to couple these with more politically oriented and/or more artistic endeavours. The *Mainstream* young people, however, when asked about their leisure activities and everyday experiences, generally said that they mostly like to hang out with friends at home or at youth centres (with a significant number of them also commenting that they actively engage in sporting activities).<sup>62</sup>

- Rudy: Tell me a little bit about what do like to do and stuff  
Jack: I'm Jack I'm 17, I do youth work. I'm volunteering at [...] Youth Centre. I hang around with mates, go out places, have fun, typical teenager.  
Alice: I'm Alice, I'm studying my last year at school, I volunteer at the Youth centre. In my spare time I like to dance and hang around with friends.  
Lindsey: My name is Lindsey. I'm in my last year at school. I work at [Youth Centre] Mondays. In spare time just like to go out with mates, stay at friends' houses, and just do what a typical teenager would do. (Bermondsey participants)
- Rudy: Tell me a little bit about yourself and some of things you like to do.  
Anthony: My name is Anthony. I'm 18 years old. I like to do mainly sport stuff like basketball, football, swimming, going to the gym. That's the main thing.  
Josh: I'm Josh, I just left school going on to college to do football and sports science. I enjoy sports because I like being active and running around.

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<sup>62</sup> All of the *Mainstream* young people who I interviewed at youth centres received some form of monetary or other forms of non-monetary compensation for mentoring younger members.

- Dilanda: I'm Dilanda. I like music, basketball, and singing. (Bermondsey participants)
- Rudy: Tell me a little bit about yourself and some of the things you do on your free time.
- John: I'm John. I'm 17 and I'm really interested in any physical activities. That's what I like to do in my spare time. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: Tell me a little bit about yourself and some of the things that you like to do when not in school.
- Dennis: I'm Dennis, I'm 18 years old. I play sports, I write, kind of you know, hang-out, basically that's what I do. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: Tell me a little bit about yourself and some of the things you do on your free time.
- Ela: My name is Ela. I'm 18. I like to hike, I like to dance, model, and yeah just hang out with friends, party a lot. I don't like reading, just saying.
- Karina: My name is Karina, I'm 17. Some of things I like to do, I like to read, I like to watch movies cause they're fun, and that's basically it.
- Maurine: I'm Maurine, I'm 17. I like animals, and swimming, and water polo, and I like to listen to music a lot and watch movies. (Zoo participants)

These typical activities also included shopping. These young people expressed a particular preference for specific clothing brands, like Nike, TopShop, and Forever 21 (which are all infamous for exploitative labour practices). Correspondingly, as shown in the following extracts which centre around some of their shopping experiences and concomitant thought processes, there is an initial articulation of what might be considered a self-interested disposition; viz., an automatic tendency to only be concerned with one's own interests, often with an implicit disregard for the interests of others. This can be inferred, for example, from Fernanda's self-declared 'selfishness', and Ela's consistent use of 'I', which can in their given context, be interpreted as semantic and lexical indicators of a self-interested disposition. Additionally, so can Tyrone, Jenkins, and Iris' primary concern with price and appearance when deciding on which clothes to buy even though, as other extracts demonstrate, they are keenly aware of the likely exploitative origin of their clothing:

Rudy: Do you guys ever go to like shopping centres or high streets? How often?

Jack: [...] Once twice every two weeks.

Rudy: What do you do when you're there? Do you buy?

Jack: Nah, I just go over there to have a look cause I get bored, but sometimes I go there [to] TopoShop.

Alice: I go to shop like every two three times a week. Just to buy anything, I don't know.

Rudy: Do you have a favourite store that you go to?

Alice: Not really, just anything.

Rudy: Lindsey?

Lindsey: Probably like once every two or three weeks just to go look and see what's there.

Rudy: Any favourite store?

Lindsey: New Look, Dorothy Perkins, that's about it?

Rudy: What about any brands, do you have any favourites?

Jack: [...] Nike.

Lindsey: Yeah Nike.

Alice: Yeah Nike and Paul's Boutique. (Bermondsey participants)

Rudy: Do you ever go to malls or shopping centres.

Fernanda: Yeah all the time, depends how often I have money.

Rudy: How often?

Fernanda: Every time I have money I'll hit up the malls.

Rudy: Any particular brands that you like?

Fernanda: I like American Eagle, [...] Forever 21, H&M.

Rudy: So give me the process of what's going on in your head when you're buying a nice shirt?

Fernanda: The process? Well I'm kind of a selfish person. Like for Christmas, I went Christmas shopping and I was supposed to get gifts for my friends, but instead of going in there [stores] and looking for gifts for my friends, I kept on buying stuff for myself. So yeah it's kind of difficult. (Bresee participant)

Rudy: Like when you see a pair of shoes, what compels you to buy them?

Ela: It's just new things, new ideas, new wardrobe, cause you know, I work and I get money, and it's like a reward for myself. Oh I worked hard, so I'll buy something. (Zoo participant)

These young people's consumption practices, at least as they described them to me, also seem to reflect apathetic attitudes and an unconscious and/or conscious and sometimes callous disregard for the plight of others, despite their sometimes implicit (see Jack's account below), or explicit awareness of their marginal contribution to that plight. While the *Critical/Political* young people abstained from and/or expressed politically motivated remorse when purchasing clothing, as

did some of the *Artsy/Indie* young people to a lesser extent, issues of labour exploitation associated with the production, and enabled by the purchasing, of mainstream fashion, tended not to register in the cognitive frameworks of most of the *Mainstream* young people when asked about their consumption practices.

Rudy: [.....] But these issues [sweatshops] for instance when you're buying your clothes, they don't come into your head?

Fernanda: No. It depends, only like. [pause] Nooo. [laughs]. (Bresee participant)

Rudy: Do you know under what conditions these things you buy are made?

Ela: No, actually I've never thought about that.

Rudy: So when you're shopping those things never factor in at all?

Ela: No.

Karina: The conditions? Like the people working for a little bit, but the things they make being worth a lot more.

Rudy: Yeah, does that factor in?

Karina: Well, I don't really buy a lot of expensive clothing. Well I think it's sad obviously, but I don't know. (Zoo participants)

Rudy: What do you guys think about these sweatshop conditions?

John: I don't mean to sound like a jerk but I don't really pay much attention to that. I look if it fits me, and well I get it. (Zoo participant)

Rudy: I want to know, like when you guys are buying something like a pair of trainers or a shirt or something, what is going on in your head when you're buying it and you're walking to the cash register?

Jack: I don't know really, it's like yeah I'm getting a new t-shirt.

Alice: I'm thinking about what you're going to wear it with and stuff.

Lindsey: Probably the same as Alice. What I'm going to wear it with, and it would go right with.

Rudy: Do you guys know where your clothes are made?

Jack: I don't know, it says on the tags.

Alice: In a factory.

Lindsey: In a workshop.

Jack: Thailand or something.

Rudy: Workshop, is that a sweatshop or something, like bad conditions for workers?

Lindsey: No like a factory, somewhere where they make loads of things.

Rudy: So do you guys know anything about like the conditions where these things are made, [...] like under what conditions workers are treated stuff like that?

Jack: They're probably treated really bad so that they can get more stuff done every day.

Rudy: How do you know this?

Jack: I don't, I'm just having a guess.

Alice: You get them TV programmes though that show you how things are made. Every now and then they show us how things are made like, they showed you how cups are made with bungs [...] so I don't even want to know where my clothes are made. (Bermondsey participants)

In the few instances where thoughts on labour exploitation or the environmental impact of consumption were spontaneously offered, as in the following extracts, these thoughts did not seem to influence, or be manifest during, the act of consumption, at least according to their own accounts. Nor, with the exceptions of Karina (as can be gauged from her "I feel badly" sentiment described above) and Tyrone (see extract below), did these young people seem to experience any form of cognitive dissonance when asked about these issues:

Rudy: These clothes you like. These Nikes and Ralph Lauren, do you know under what conditions they're made?

Sean: What conditions?

Rudy: Yeah like how are they made these clothes, like how are workers treated?

Sean: Oh, I watched a documentary about Nike, and [...] the place where they work. The Just Do It sign [Nike motto], the motto of 'Just Do It', was basically formed from workers basically stepping down, and people saying just do the work.

Rudy: Um, does that ever factor in when you're buying them?

Sean: Nah, nah, not really.

Tirian: It could have a factor if it was food, cause people saying just do it, and people don't [want rushed food] that might affect you.<sup>63</sup>

[..]

Rudy: What about like the environmental impact that some of these products you guys buy, do you know anything about that?

Sean: The environmental impact? Meaning like global warming and stuff like that?

Rudy: Yeah sort of, yeah.

Sean: It don't really impact me. Cause uh, I know it's bad, but at the same time I don't think about it in the moment. I'm not really that person that, in my language, I don't give a shit really. (Hackney participants)

Rudy: So these clothes that you guys like, do you know where they're made?

Tyrone: With my trainers I do, because you look at the tags and it says made in wherever. Most of mine are made in Vietnam or China. I remember

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<sup>63</sup> Tirian is attending college where he is being trained to be a chef, and aspires to be a chef like Jamie Oliver [UK celebrity chef]. This sudden shift from a discussion on standard garment worker conditions to food standards suggests a transposable self-interested disposition whereby Tirian is expressing a concern that is directly tied to his vocational training and career aspirations, but which significantly diverges from the initial topic of discussion.

back in like 2009 a lot of the fake trainers were coming from China, so if you look and it said China, everyone would look at you and laugh and say “fake”. It was crazy.

- Iris: China, yeah.
- Jenkins: I don't know China, some probably come from Europe
- Rudy: Now do you know under what conditions these clothes are made?
- Jenkins: Sweatshops [instant answer].
- Tyrone: [Sombre voice intonation and facial expression] Bad conditions. The people that make them aren't getting paid a lot of money. Yeah man, they go for a lot just to make the stuff that we take it for granted.
- Rudy: Does that ever factor in when you're buying these things?
- Jenkins: Well we kind of know where our clothes come from. But the thing is, if [they] don't buy them, you don't get paid.
- Tyrone: But to be honest the youth of today don't actually think about that. I think half of them won't even know where it comes from.
- Jenkins Plus if they actually pay regular wages the shoe prices are going up the roof, and businesses don't want to do that, so if they could do it for cheaper they'll do it for cheaper, and helping that economy where it's coming from. but you know they're helping their economy with that.<sup>64</sup> (Hackney participants)

Indeed, as Jenkins' above self-description as a 'shopaholic' and subsequent economic justification, and as the following extracts suggest, there seems to be a fair degree of cognitive consonance between these young people's seemingly compulsive shopping habits (which seem to be driven by unconscious drives), and their expressed rationale for their consumption practices.

- Rudy: Ela, you say you buy shoes and jewellery. What goes through your head when you're buying these things?
- Ela: I don't need these things. Why am I buying this? But I can't put it down. I have a shopping problem.
- Rudy: I'm curious about that. Like when you see a pair of shoes, what compels you to buy them?
- Ela: But even when I'm buying, as I'm paying, I'm still thinking, oh should I back out, should I still go through with this, and I really want to. But I still go through with it, and still spend money on it. (Zoo participant)

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<sup>64</sup> Jenkins' account in particular, whereby he justifies the low wages paid to garment workers on the grounds of economic development, strongly echoes the standard neoliberal economic argument for sweatshops (Henderson, 2000). For example as neoliberal economist Powell (2008, p. 1) argues: “Not only are sweatshops better than current worker alternatives, but they are also part of the process of development that ultimately raises living standards. [...] When companies open sweatshops they bring technology and physical capital with them. Better technology and more capital raise worker productivity. Over time this raises their wages.”

- Rudy: So when you see a nice shirt what do you think?
- Fernanda: I gotta buy it.
- Rudy: Any particular reason?
- Fernanda: No not really.
- Rudy: So you see it, you like, and you buy it?
- Fernanda: Well it depends if I have enough money, if not, I'll be like, I'll come back for you.
- Rudy: So what draws you back to these malls and shopping centres when you have money?
- Fernanda: I don't know, I just want to go somewhere. I mean I don't know I think I have an addiction.
- Rudy: Can you explain?
- Fernanda: So it's kind of all up on me, and in a way it's kind of hard to deal with it because I don't I'm just kind of weird. (Bresee participant)
- 
- Rudy: Do you ever go to the mall or shopping centres? How often?
- Sean: I go whenever I can go, when I got the money and I see something I need to buy, and I buy it. I'm like that type of person that Tirian said that get money and spend it, because I wasn't really brought up in that childhood where I had the money then. So as I'm getting the money, I'm thinking yeah I need this, I need this now because I didn't have it when I was younger so I buy it now and stuff. (Hackney participant)

While Ela's account reveals a lack of impulse control despite a striking wish to avoid buying things, it can be tentatively assumed, that as one of her aforementioned accounts suggests, this dissonance is resolved by her "I work and I get money, and it's like a reward for myself" rationalization. Fernanda's account of her shopping as an 'addiction', on the other hand, does not suggest any inconsistency between her consumerist disposition and her more cognizant awareness of these practices, while Sean rationalizes his 'need to buy' using the justification that he did not have the money to do so when he was younger. Whatever the rationale, these young people's accounts could be seen to fit Marcuse's (1964) 'repressive desublimation theory of habitual consumerism (as discussed in section 2.1). That is, these young people's impulsive and compulsive consumerist practices could be the result of an acquired arousal-desire-purchase feedback loop that is largely promoted by the rampant consumerist norms and values characteristic of the advanced capitalist societies that they live under. Correspondingly, this habitual consumerism also overlooks or ignores the environmental degradation that it engenders; a fact that none of these young people were really able to connect to their own consumerist practices. However, it

bears repeating that given my limited ethnographic observations, I can only make tentative claims about my participants' material (i.e., non-discursive) practices. That withstanding, it can be reasonably assumed that their own accounts of their material practices are likely to be strongly reflective of their actual material practices. Given this assumption, it can be argued from the above extracts, along with the limited ethnographic data that I did collect, that *Mainstream* young people's consumption practices are more congruent and reflective of dominant neoliberal consumerist discursive practices. Thus, they are in effect, via their active and uncritical consumption of corporate goods, contributing to the neoliberal global economy more than the *Critical/Political* and *Artsy/Indie* young people.

## 7.2 Media-Culture Influence and Aspirations:

- Rudy: Where do you think they get these images and influences?  
Jerald: They get them from everywhere. Their ads are on MySpace, on YouTube, on the Internet, on television, cable television, on screens in the market, on billboards. It's 360. Youth today are immersed in this world. (Youth Worker: Bresee Foundation)
- Sean: I live in the moment, 'Yolo Yolo'.  
Rudy: Alright.  
Sean: Do you know what that is?  
Rudy: Nah.  
Sean: You only live once.  
Rudy: Ah alright, where'd you get that from?  
Sean: Um Drake [mainstream rapper] (Hackney participant)

Even though at times critical of mainstream media-culture, another key characteristic that distinguishes *Mainstream* young people from the others, is their tendency to appreciate and more directly engage with corporate media-culture. This consisted of an engagement with a wide range of media-culture artefacts,<sup>65</sup> which did include some ambivalent or indifferent attitudes towards some of their preferred media-culture texts. In these cases, these texts were enjoyed solely for their entertainment value as suggested in the following extract:

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<sup>65</sup> For example, *Mainstream* young people expressed an active use of the social-networking sites Twitter and Facebook to follow celebrity news and tell their friends of the (corporatized) music that they are listening to.



Rudy: Name some of like your favourite songs.  
 Fernanda: Well I like Rihanna, *The Only Girl In the World*, I think.  
 Rudy: Is that the name of the song?  
 Fernanda: Yeah.  
 Rudy: *The Only Girl In the World?*  
 Fernanda: Or something like that. I also like the Rihanna and Drake, *What's My Name* I think.  
 Rudy: Why do you like these songs?  
 Fernnada: I don't know, they're just cool.  
 Rudy: Anything in particular, like the lyrics or anything like that?  
 Fernanda: Uhm, I think it's since their focus is all about them, I just like, make it seem like it's all about me.  
 Rudy: What about TV?  
 Fernanda: Oh I like the Shore.  
 Rudy: Oh you mean *The Jersey Shore*. [...] Why do you like *The Jersey Shore*?  
 Fernanda: I don't know, they're just really dumb, and they do the dumbest things ever, but it's so funny.  
 Rudy: Any other shows that you watch?  
 Fernanda: I like *Bad Girls Club*.  
 Rudy: Why do you like *Bad Girls Club*?  
 Fernanda: I don't know they just start fighting. It's stupid but it's entertaining. (Bresee participant)

However, despite this occasional critical distance, in most cases *Mainstream* young people drew direct inspiration from their preferred (and highly corporatized) media-texts as demonstrated in the following extracts.

Rudy: So what are some of your favourite [songs]?  
 Tyrone: My favourite artist right now? I hate to sound typical but Drake in it. Drake is cutting it man.  
 Rudy: Why? Give me a song that you really like.  
 Tyrone: Um, *Look What You've Done* on his new album. [...]  
 Rudy: Why do you like about that song, what do you get from it  
 Tyrone: He tells a story in it, and obviously like, it's a deep story, and I recommend everyone listen to the story. [...] Yeah the story he's just chatting about life, and his life and how it went. That's the thing about *Drake*, he tells stories though his music. I don't like to listening to music that has no meaning to it.  
 Rudy: Like what?  
 Tyrone: Yeah I got a big gun, sold guns, just typical that. Whatever, I heard it before.<sup>66</sup>  
 [...]  
 Rudy: What are some of your favourite movies?  
 Tyrone: *Scent of a Woman* with Al Pacino, *The Hurricane*, *Malcolm X*,

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<sup>66</sup> Ela (Zoo participant) and Josh (Bermondsey participant) expressed this same view and critique of mainstream hip hop music.

Uhm, *The Pursuit of Happiness* with Will Smith.  
 Rudy: Why do you like *The Pursuit of Happiness*?  
 Tyrone: Well it's like he's telling my story. He kind of shows you that you can come from absolutely nothing, in the worst circumstances, and you can strive towards something and always getting. He was sleeping in bathrooms with his son, and if you could come from that, than you can come from anywhere.  
 Rudy: So you like that message then?  
 Tyrone: Definitely! I think everyone would. Anyone who doesn't like that message then they just don't want to be successful.  
 Iris: *Colombiana*. Anyone that's in that situation etc. *Save the Last Dance*.  
 Rudy: Why?  
 Iris: Don't know it's just good.  
 Tyrone: That's kind of one the ones about chase their dreams as well.  
 Iris: Yeah.  
 Rudy: Is it, is that why you like it [asking Iris]?  
 Iris: Yeah.  
 Tyrone: It gives us hope. (Hackney participants)

Rudy: What's your favourite song?  
 Sean: *House Party*.  
 Rudy: Who sings that?  
 Sean: Meek Mill.  
 Rudy: Why do you like *House Party*?  
 Sean: Because it shows me how the successful life is.  
 Rudy: Ok, what's the song about?  
 Sean: Hookers, drinks. (Hackney participant)

Rudy: Can you name one of your favourite songs?  
 Jack: Dappy (UK rapper) *No Regrets*.  
 Rudy: What's that song about?  
 Lindsey: It's about life  
 Jack: No regrets  
 Lindsey and Jack [simultaneously]: Living life to the fullest. (Bermondsey participants).

A noteworthy feature in these extracts is that they evoke a strong valence relational affinity between these young people and the themes and characters of their preferred media texts, which corresponded with their career and materialistic aspirations. For example, Tyrone states that the messages of the song *Look What You've Done* and the film *The Pursuit of Happiness* film (both of which promote the *Horatio Alger* 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' discourse) resonate with his own struggles and ambitions for upward mobility. Similarly, Iris cites the *Save The Last Dance* film for a similar reason. This film also promotes a 'chasing your

dream' discourse, which is congruent with Iris' stated ambition to become a model.

It is tempting to use the term passive to describe these young people's affirmation of dominant media-cultural discourses, even if measured along a continuum of agency. As Dedman (2011, p. 512) suggests, "passive [...] is a relational concept, separating those whose cultural engagement is more centred on the consumption of mass-mediated products. In this sense the dichotomous variables 'active' and 'passive' should not be considered as fixed states". However, under any interpretation no matter how nuanced, the term 'passive' denotes an almost unconscious acceptance of exposed to discourses, which I do not believe that the participants in the above extracts are displaying. Rather these young people appear to have a conscious and affect driven engagement and affinity with the media texts and discourses that they expose themselves to, but this conscious engagement appears to be relatively uncritical, and does more accurately denotes an uncritical rather than passive disposition. For example, Tyrone's discursive interpretation of his favourite movie is thoughtful and deliberative, as are Jack and Lindsey's interpretation of the *No Regrets* song, (which is incidentally similar to Sean's 'YOLO' evocation described above). What is not as apparent, however, is an understanding of how their interpretations strongly resonate with neoliberal individualist and consumerist discourses. Nor is there is any critical read in these accounts as exemplified by Tyrone's, "Anyone who doesn't like that message then they just don't want to be successful" affirmations.

### **7.3 Welfare/Benefits Schemata**

The majority of these young people's views and attitudes on welfare programmes reflected popular negative conceptions disseminated by major media outlets. This marks another important line of delineation from the other two classifications of young people. However, as the following extracts demonstrate, their views on welfare were also marked by a high degree of ambivalence, inconsistency, and in some cases, negative strong valence dispositional attitudes.

- Rudy: So you guys brought up benefits, so what do think is the government's role in providing benefits?  
Jenkins: I think benefits should be more lenient:  
Tyrone: No, [stomping his fists on the table] no I disagree.  
Rudy: What do you mean lenient, as in the government should give more money

Tyrone: No [emphatic]

Jenkins: They should give money but they should know who they are giving it to.

Rudy: Oh like more restrictions?

Jenkins: Yeah like if you make a certain amount that's fine, but as soon as they should like have rules, more stricter rules saying that you could only get it cause of this. To actually get benefits, [inaudible] you got to find work.

Tyrone: Yeah I hear what you're saying [directed at Jenkins], but I think it's really soft this country. Like for instance, a lot of English people in this country they say, these whatever people come into our country and stealing all our jobs, but it's these people that come into this country that own the chicken shops and the corner shops and they're the people that are working, they don't just come into the country and say yeah here I'll take a chicken shop and run it. So it's like the English people that are on benefits, so I don't understand this theory of English people saying, they come for our jobs.

Rudy: But what about benefits in general, what you think about benefits?

Tyrone: Obviously they help, they help.

Rudy: Do you think like Jenkins that they should be restricted more?

Jenkins: Not the amount, but the people that [get them]

Tyrone: I think, people get a lot of help as it is now, but I just don't think that if someone is on benefits and they're like 55, you shouldn't be saying, oh you got to go to work. There are young people who are like 17 and they can't get a job, why should a 50 year old get one.

Jenkins: Yeah but that's different if they're 55 he's got 10 years before he has to retire.

Tyrone: Yeah but that happens though man, trust me, that's what they do. Is a lot of these older people that are on benefits in it, is not people like us that are young in it. They're the ones [that are being told] find a job and then you come off benefits, and then their argument is if I get a job I won't even be getting as much as I'm getting now on benefits, so why am I getting a job I might as well stay on benefits.

Iris: That's exactly what I was going to say.

Rudy: So what do you think about that Iris?

Iris: I was just going to say what he [Tyrone] just said. I agree with him [Jenkins] about restricting cause some people might start thinking, right if I'm already getting money, some people might see it as a reason to not get work.

Rudy: Because they're getting more...

Tyrone: They're getting more on benefits for doing nothing especially families that you see in the paper all the time man, families that got like seven kids just milking the system.

Iris: Yeah

Tyrone: Nice money, housing, and benefits....

Rudy: All of these stories about seven kids where did you hear that?

Tyrone: [raised intonation] Newspapers, type it in Google, type in.

Rudy: But which newspapers

Tyrone: The Sun [UK tabloid newspaper]. There's people that have loads of kids and milk the system.

Iris: The more kids you have the more money you get.  
Jenkins: Yeah the more kids you have the money you get. (Hackney participants)

Rudy: What do you think about government benefit programmes?  
Josh: I think the government should provide these.  
Dilanda: [Nodding her head in agreement.]  
Josh: Some take the piss, but they should [remain].  
Anthony: I think more needs to be done to stop people from [taking advantage of them]. (Bermondsey participants)

Rudy: What about your thoughts on government welfare programmes, what do you think of them?

Fernanda: Welfare like when they give out money to poor people?

Rudy: That's an aspect of it yes.

Fernanda: [..], I think they're not doing a good job because I've seen people around the neighbourhood and I know people who want certain stuff. And then it's funny how I seen this happen to a neighbour of mine, she was in need and she went to the welfare office to get food stamps she told me, and then another neighbour who like lives with her husband, and put on her application that she doesn't live with her husband and has five kids, and her husband has a good job and they own three cars. And she got food stamps and my neighbour didn't.

Rudy: But do you support them?

Fernanda: Like how support them?

Rudy: Are you against government welfare programmes?

Fernanda: I'm not against them. If people are in need and there's money out there to give them, well why not you know. (Bressee participant)

Rudy: Ok since you guys brought up the government, what do you think of the current Cameron Administration?

Sean: I don't really agree with him because he cut down on a lot of things that young people and their families really need. He cut down EMA (education maintenance allowance) for us, and that's really brought a struggle to us really. I feel like some people's mums out there can't survive off paying for them every week so the thirty pounds really helped them out.

Tirian: No but I think it's good that he cut down benefits so that people will have the incentive to work on their own backside.

Rudy: Ah so you agree with him then that benefits should be cut so that people can be..

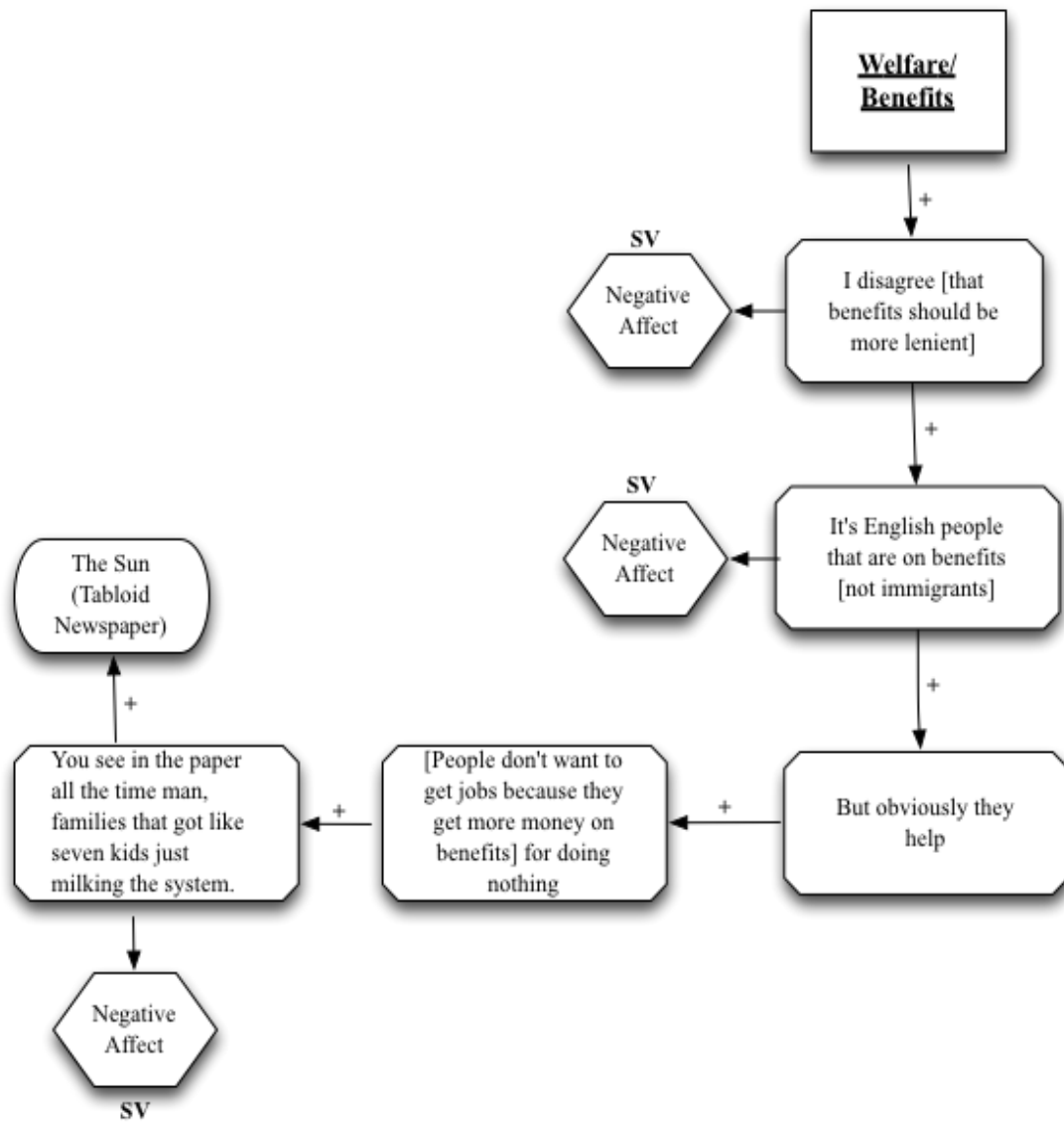
Tirian: (laughs) Well obviously I don't because I want my mom to get money so that I can get stuff, but in a way is good.

Rudy: Ok explain, please elaborate.

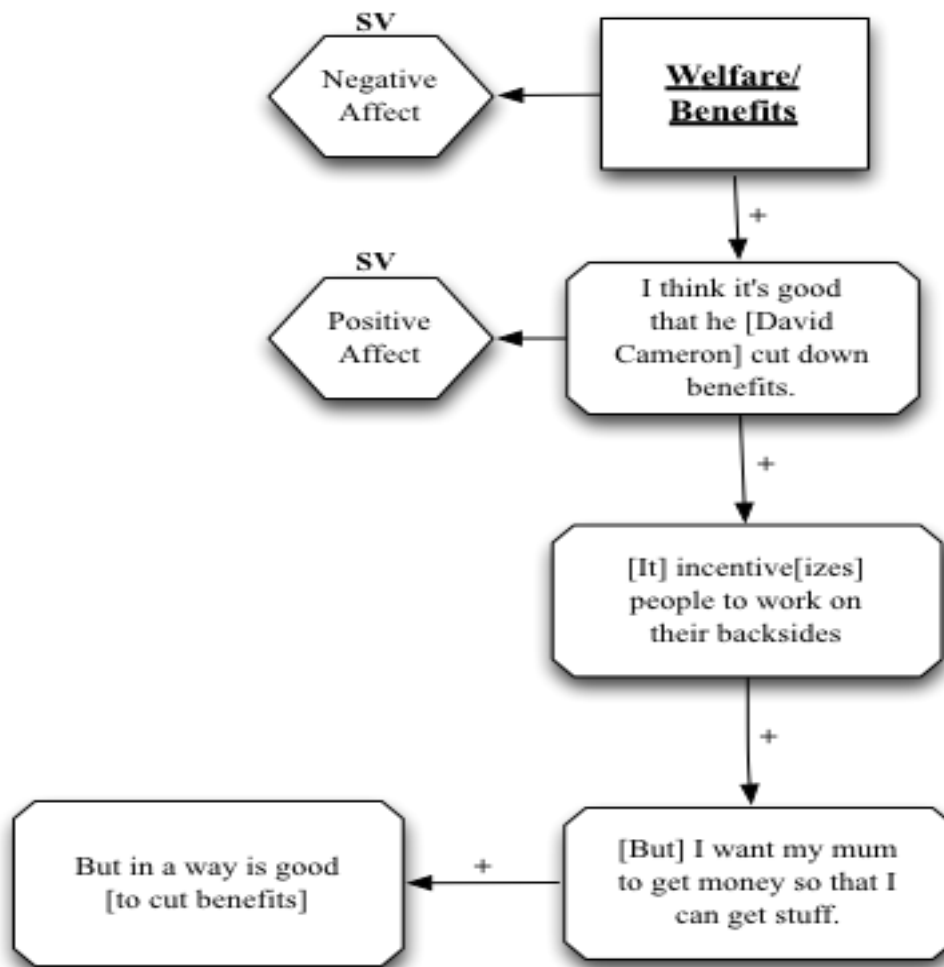
Tirian: Elaborate, in that parent's that are now forced to work. Not forced, but they're forcing their own stale mind, cause when they think that they're kids ain't got clothes, usually they'd be getting five-hundred

pounds a month, so they can buy some new trainers, but now they get two-hundred pounds a month, so they have to work, and when you start working it's not as bad as you think. (Hackney participants)

**Figure 7.1: Tyrone's Welfare/Benefits Schemata**



**Figure 7.2: Tirian’s Welfare Schemata**



The above accounts, and as illustrated in Tyrone’s and Tirian’s welfare/benefits schema maps, show the range of conflicting thoughts on welfare that these young people had. In most cases, as exemplified by Tyrone who cited the *Sun* [a British tabloid newspaper] as his source for his information on welfare recipients, these young people’s views and attitudes on welfare largely reflected those of negative media stereotypes. Nonetheless, in the final analysis, most of these young people with the exception of Maurine (Zoo participant) who also cited Fox News (a notoriously right-wing propaganda US cable news network) as a source of political news, support some form of welfare provisions; albeit, in some instances, as Tirian’s and Sean’s accounts demonstrate, this tentative support was motivated by self-interest. However, as suggested by some of the linguistic markers in the above extracts (e.g., Tyrone’s “getting something for nothing,” or Jenkins, “not the amount but the people that get them”), these young people’s

sense of fairness is disturbed when they hear accounts of people cheating the system, which are influenced by overblown media and anecdotal accounts of systemic fraud which are not vindicated by existing empirical accounts (around 1% in the UK),<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, the strong valence negative dispositional affect expressed by these young people, may be the cognitive product that results from the clash between the acceptance of widespread anti-welfare discourses (however erroneous they may be) and their inherent fairness predispositions, which preliminary research suggests are inherent in human beings (see Sloane et al., 2012) In other words, rather than reflect a simple internalization of neoliberal discourses, these young people's socially generated negative attitudes towards welfare programmes and recipients may be related to other unconscious cognitive processes and underlying mechanisms, which are nonetheless exploited by, and inflected through, neoliberalism. I will elaborate on this point further in section 8.4 of the following chapter.

Furthermore, on the topic of homelessness, these young people's views generally correlated with the person-blame approach found in their welfare schemata. To wit, they tended to express a person-blame and (in most cases) negatively affective view and attitude when discussing the causes of, and government responses towards, homelessness. Moreover, as the following extracts suggest, these views and attitudes strongly in some instances strongly reflected those that an ideal neoliberal would likely express (see Figure 4.3).

- Rudy: Do you think the government should do anything to help homeless people?
- Ela: Like homeless people. Like I'm against people that are just standing in the corner asking for change. With all that money that they save on the street, or go to a homeless centre, they can somehow find a job. They can turn their life around. Government should not do anything about homelessness.
- Maurine: I don't think it's the government's responsibility to do anything. It's up to the individual. (Zoo participants)

However, other *Mainstream* young people, while maintaining that individuals have to be responsible for their own lot in life, did express more sympathetic and compassionate views on this issue. For example:

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<sup>67</sup> Retrieved from:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10922261>



- Rudy: Do you think the government should do anything to help homeless people?
- Karina: I think the government should help the homeless. Some of them have mental problems that they can't resolve. Some people just want to be homeless, but I think the government should help people that want to be helped. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: Hostels, is that where like..
- Jack: Is where like young people can go and live there.
- Rudy: Is that right, and they're charging for it now? And they used to be free?
- Jack: Yeah.
- Lindsey: Yeah and they ain't go nowhere else to live, like homeless people.
- Jack: Yeah when I went to the store a homeless guys was like you got a spare fag? And I was like seriously mate you should be indoors its cold and raining outside.<sup>68</sup> (Bermondsey participants)

Nonetheless, despite their varied views, overall, *Mainstream* young people's thoughts on welfare and homelessness largely mirrored those propagated by dominant neoliberal discourses. Correspondingly, while some of these young people did point to bad luck as a possible cause of poverty and homelessness, and even held more compassionate positions, none of them mentioned any structural factors that can contribute to individual destitution. Furthermore, these more individualistic views and outlooks also echo the findings of other researchers. For example, Sherrod et al., (2002, p. 268) found that "those [young people] high in self-interests tend to blame individuals for being poor, unemployed, or homeless, whereas those high in public interests [like the *Critical/Political* young people] tend to see the systemic or structural roots of those problems".

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<sup>68</sup> The train of thought from this focus group was difficult to follow. However, these participants implied that the price of hostels, food, and transport should be lowered, and presumably by the government. Additionally, the Bermondsey participant Josh expressed similar sentiments.

#### 7.4 Politics and Capitalism Schemata

- Rudy: So our current economic system is described as capitalist. So basically you know competing businesses, private property rights, and where people are rewarded based on how hard or how little they work. What do you think of this economic arrangement?
- Fernanda: I don't know.
- Rudy: Are you taking a civics or government class right now?
- Fernanda: I'm taking government.
- Rudy: Ok cool. Can you think of any other political alternatives or economic alternatives?
- Fernanda: Are you talking about how, [long pause] no. (Bresee participant)

When it came to discussions on government and alternative political-economic systems, all of the *Mainstream* young people expressed a disinterest and overall limited understanding on these topics that was noticeably less detailed than the accounts offered by the *Critical/Political* and *Artsy/Indie* groups. Jack, Alice, and Lindsey (Bermondsey participants), for example, all chose to skip the questions concerning capitalism and their opinions on alternative political systems, stating that they did not know much about these topics. Others like Anthony and Josh (Bermondsey participants) and Maurine and Dennis (Zoo participants) brought up socialism, but expressed a partial and somewhat skewed understanding of it describing it as an unfair system that rewards everyone the same regardless of how hard they work.<sup>69</sup>

When it came to the issue of voting, most of the London participants generally commented that politicians are not responsive to the needs of the poor, but like most of the LA participants, believed that voting was still necessary.<sup>70</sup> The major difference found on this topic is that LA participants expressed the view that voting was a very important mechanism for governmental responsiveness and

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<sup>69</sup> While these views on socialism were laced with negative sentiments, these may be related to their underdeveloped understanding of what socialism actually entails. This partial and skewed understanding may also help to explain why their responses to these questions did not evoke strong valence reactions that would mark these young people as emphatically anti-socialist. However, I do not want to speculate too much on this particular weak/strong valence distinction, as it could be the case that I simply did not probe deeply enough into these questions and so did not give my participants the opportunity to elaborate in more detail their views on these questions. Had I done this, I might have elicited higher level valence responses. But, if my highly speculative weak valence assessment is correct, it may have significant implications for strategies aimed at helping these young people to develop more comprehensive political understandings. I will elaborate on this in the following chapter. Nonetheless, incorporating more systematic priming methods in future research may help to investigate this distinction more thoroughly.

<sup>70</sup> The exceptions were Bermondsey participants Jack and Lindsey and Zoo participant Karina, all of who expressed the view that they would not vote because politicians will do as they please with little regards to the wishes or interests of the poor.

social change. For example:

- Rudy: What do you think about voting?  
Maria: [...] If [people] want change strongly, than they have to vote for that change to occur. Otherwise everything is going to stay the same.  
Rudy: So you think voting is an effective way to bring on change?  
Maria: Yes. (Zoo participant)
- Rudy: What do you think about voting?  
Ela: I think it's very important to vote, because it's your future, you're going to be the one that is stuck with the problems.  
Maurine: I would vote, [cause] it's getting your opinion across. (Zoo participants)

However, they were less enthusiastic about ways to effect change outside of the ballad box, with only a few of them mentioning that they support peaceful strikes and protests (with the exception of Maurine who expressed an emphatic opposition to labour strikes).<sup>71</sup> On issues related to environmental politics and practices, the few that expressed an opinion on this issue stated that they recycle, and that the government should do something to address environmental problems, but did not elaborate on what that should be.

On the questions concerning their views on capitalism, *Mainstream* young people were also different from the other two classifications in their automatic and strong valence attitudes towards capitalism, viewing it as a fair economic system that rewards individual effort and ambition. To be certain and similar to their views on the causes of poverty, their overwhelmingly positive views of capitalism were devoid of structural criticisms in that they contained no acknowledgement of some of the negative effects of capitalism. The potential and mild exception to this was the acknowledgement by Tirian that luck can play a role in how some people are rewarded under capitalist systems as exemplified in the following extract.

- Rudy: The economic system that we live under [capitalism], it is assumed that if you work hard basically, in this system, that you will get rewarded based on how hard you work.  
[...]

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<sup>71</sup> The topic on labour unions was something I was hoping would be more naturally brought up and elaborated on by my participants. However, while this did occur in some cases, I failed to probe my other participants further. Given that dominant neoliberal discourses are generally anti-union, future research should incorporate questions that more directly ask young people about their feelings and views on labour unions.

Tirian: I think it's kind of true, cause if you work hard anyone can become what they want to be in life. I know people say that a lot of the time, but sometimes it's not always true. Because sometimes things can [hold] you down depending on what's happening at home, but I can't really explain it. It's kind of like fifty/fifty. Some people are just brought up in a lucky life. [...] But if you want to become something in life, you can do it. (Hackney participant)<sup>72</sup>

Nonetheless, even the above extract, in the final analysis Tirian affirms the basic premises of capitalist ideology. Indeed, some of these young people, videlicet Dennis (Zoo participant), Fernanda (Bresee participant), and Tyronne, Sean, and Jenkins (Hackney participants), also expressed entrepreneurial aspirations, with Fernanda and Jenkins enthusiastically stating that they hope to someday own several businesses. Correspondingly, they primarily equated success with having a lot of money.

However, while these young people's general knowledge on political-economic systems, including their own was limited, this could be partially attributed to the limited politics education that all of these young people received from their schools. For example, in the cases of the Bermondsey participants, viz., Jack, Anthony, and Dylanda cited one year eight civics course where they mostly discussed voting procedures as their total formal political education, while Alice and Lindsey stated that the civics course they were supposed to take had been removed. Although I neglected to ask the Hackney participants about their pre-college formal politics education, Tirian, Sean, Tyrone, Jenkins, and Iris all attended or had attended vocational colleges with no civics or politics curriculum. Similarly *Mainstream Zoo* participants and Bresee participant Fernanda, cited their 12th grade civics and economics and 10th grade world history classes as the sources of their formal political education, with Dennis stating, "actually school is the only political influence I have". This contrasts significantly from the formal political educational experiences of *Critical/Political* young people like Aimee,

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<sup>72</sup> A debate erupted during these questions between Tirian and Sean who was also part of this focus group interview. This consisted of Sean asking me where I was from, and after telling him of my working-class upbringing in South-Central Los Angeles, Sean directed the following comment at Tirian, "see if Rudy can make it, anyone can make it". I did not intervene during this debate, and allowed these participants to express their views with Sean taking an even more affirmative stance on basic capitalist ideology than the somewhat more qualified stance by Tirian as noted above.

James, and Sam (Islington participants), and Lisa and Arlene (World Vision participants) who were each receiving a comprehensive political education from their respective colleges and high schools. While this factor alone does not explain why other *Critical/Political* and *Artsy/Indie* young people who also received a limited formal political education still expressed more detailed political-economic knowledge than all of the *Mainstream* young people, the former had institutional outlets outside of their schools that played a role in the development of their political-economic schemata, the latter did not, and as described in this chapter and in sections 4.2.3, 4.2.5, and 4.2.7, are mostly exposed to institutional settings that directly disseminate or do not contest neoliberal discourses. Nonetheless, this suggests that *Mainstream* young people are not apolitical *per se*, but are rather apathetic as they did not express an avid rejection of politics as did some of the *Artsy/Indie* young people. Instead, they expressed a disinterest in politics which may be related to their limited abilities to connect wider political-economic concerns to their everyday lives and/or lack of awareness of alternative means to get governments to be more responsive to their citizens. Both of which may in turn be tied to the limited formal political education afforded to them. In other words, there is no telling what the effects of a more comprehensive and formal political education on these young people may be, but given one, it likely could not hurt in helping them to develop more critical views and dispositions which may help to temper their existing self-interested and consumerist dispositions.

### **7.5 The “Crisis in Democracy”**

*“We do not say that the man who shows no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business, we say that he has no business here at all.” Pericles<sup>73</sup>*

Furthermore, as briefly discussed in section 3.4, much of the literature on youth and politics has centred on concerns regarding contemporary young people’s lack of interest in formal politics (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Edlestein, 2001; Harris, 2008; Liu & Kelly, 2010). This is generally referred to as the ‘crisis in democracy’ whereby the majority of Western young people are deemed to have abandoned the civic and political realm in favour of consumer lifestyles and/or

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<sup>73</sup> Cited in Wolff (1996, p.1).

more identity or single-cause politics, and consequently tend to be more individualistic and more focused on self-actualizing pursuits than they are on civic and social responsibility. While the accounts from my *Mainstream* participants to an extent corroborate these concerns, proponents of the ‘crisis in democracy’ thesis seem to overlook the fact that this generational switch has coincided with, and largely reflects the omnipresence of neoliberal discourses over the last 30 years and the extent to which the behaviours of socio-economic subordinates may reflect the structural pressures under which they operate. Hence, in the instance of *Mainstream* young people, their political-economic schemata and political inactivity, I would suggest, is most likely the result of underexposure to valuable forms of political-economic knowledge, and overexposure to neoliberal discourses; as Gill (2003, p. 118) notes, a rather disturbing feature of neoliberal culture is that it tends to generate a world-perspective that is, “ahistorical, economistic, and materialistic, me-oriented, short-term, and ecologically myopic”. This is in keeping with Flanagan’s (2004) explanation of young people’s inability to conceive of alternatives to their political-economic situation, which she suggests is rooted in a lack of access to knowledge about these alternatives.

Other researchers, like Biesta and Lawy (2006) and France (1998) argue that young people’s lack of interest in civic and political affairs is mostly due to wider socio-economic constraints that can hinder their access to political and economic resources and opportunities. For example, in a study exploring the relationship between youth citizenship, rights, and responsibilities, France (1998) argues that his British working-class participants’ dissatisfaction with youth employment schemes and job training programmes, and overall dismal view of their town led to their apathetic views on active citizenship and community involvement. The implication, or logical inference that can be drawn from France’s (1998) study is that given more substantial state services that also incorporate cultural rights (i.e., rights to unhindered and respectful representation of distinct cultural lifestyles and identities), and better employment opportunities, working-class young people would be more inclined to be responsible citizens. Yet, despite their respective structural constraints, most of the working-class *Mainstream* young people valorized self-reliance, volunteered in their communities, and expressed a general appreciation for voting as an important political practice. In this context, they reflected a practically ideal form of citizenry and social responsibility as described

by France (1998). However, equating citizenry and social responsibility along these lines offers a narrow view of democratic citizenship that engenders very passive and limited political practices, and thus the ‘crisis in democracy’ reflects a more fundamentally semantic and conceptual problem about the meaning of democratic citizenship.

In other words, if democracy is equated with neoliberal political norms and values centred on discourses of self-reliance and community involvement via occasional volunteerism and/or systems of electoral representation, than *Mainstream* young people are largely fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as citizens despite of their limited political knowledge and political apathy. If, however, democracy means a more direct and egalitarian form of collective decision-making and problem solving, than *Mainstream* young people, regardless of their social positioning, are neglecting their roles and responsibilities as citizens and conscientious political agents. If the first conception is valid, then there is no crisis; if the second conception is valid, then there is a crisis. However, whilst increasing social services that recognize cultural rights and offer meaningful job opportunities to young people as France (1998) suggests, may allow *Mainstream* young people to realize their material aspirations, they may have limited effects on their democratic ethos. As I will argue in the next chapter, this requires a more comprehensive education and participation in genuinely democratic values and practices.

## **7.6 Contesting Neoliberalism: A Partial Opening**

However, even participants from this group at times expressed progressive and arguably counter neoliberal views, with all but one of them supporting welfare programmes to some limited extent, and suggesting that the government should step in to help solve large-scale social problems like poverty and global warming. Moreover, most of these young people mentored younger students in their leisure time. While in most cases they were financially incentivized to do so, they all expressed the view that they enjoyed mentoring underprivileged young people, and in this respect, expressed more altruistic tendencies.

Tyrone (Hackney participant) and Dennis (Zoo participant) brought up particularly noteworthy points which I believe signify a point of departure from neoliberal discourses as well as a potential opening for pedagogic intervention.

When asked if he thought about the conditions under which the clothes he likes are made, Tyrone responded: “No but in discussions like this it does [make me think]”. This acknowledgment and his display of mild cognitive dissonance, whereby he seemed unsettled thinking about these issues (as could be gauged from his more sombre tone and facial expressions), was a phenomenon that I observed amongst other *Mainstream* young people. This suggests that further exposure to these topics may have an impact on their consumption practices. Dennis instantly expressed support for welfare programmes, which is potentially related or influenced by his factual knowledge of US welfare services, noting accurately some of the limitations of these programmes:

Dennis:       And you can't really get welfare more than five years, It's not, you know, it's not something that is going to take care of somebody for too long, and the money really isn't enough to take care of somebody. You can't really buy, like, you can't really have more clothes or more this or more that, you don't really have more money for that, from welfare. (Zoo participant)

Although these are highly tentative, the main insights to take from Tyrone's and Dennis' statements, and others like them from other *Mainstream* young people, are that there is some degree of compassion in their views and beliefs (in most instances this is noticeable in their voice intonations which take a more sombre tone when talking about issues of poverty and labour exploitation). Hence, and crucially, unlike neoliberal economists for instance, and with the exception of Jenkins (Hackney participant), these young people do not resort to rationalizing their consumptive practices on the grounds that it provides jobs for people in the developing world, and in that sense, this discursive engagement differs significantly from how a more ideal neoliberal would respond, and sheds some light, however dimly, on the moments where these young people contest neoliberal discourses.

## **7.7 Concluding Remarks**

I have argued earlier in this thesis that neoliberalism is, in part, maintained by a mutually reinforcing material base and discursive superstructure apparatus where the labour and environmental exploitation and consequent social inequality is coded and mystified by discourses of inevitability, progress, efficiency, economic



growth, consumption, materialism, rational choice, and rugged individualism, amongst others. Within this system, individuals either ignore the larger political-economic system or entrust it to elites and technocrats, and focus mostly on forms of consumption that can best satisfy their self-interests. And their value as individuals is based not on their inherent humanity, but on how much capital they can acquire via their individual effort. While neoliberal interpellation is never total, and always contested, the majority of the responses from the *Mainstream* young people, indicate that their socio-cultural and political-economic schemata to a significant extent mirror those of dominant neoliberal discourses and practices, and particularly more so than is the case with the *Artsy/Indie* and *Critical/Political* young people. This is not to suggest that the *Mainstream* young people are neoliberal automatons, but simply, as I believe Bourdieu (1990a) would argue, their socio-cognitive frameworks and homologous practices have been inflected by neoliberal discourses to the extent that they appear to be reproducing them at a mostly unconscious dispositional level. Nonetheless, mapping out the socio-cultural and political-economic schematic content of these young people's sense making frameworks revealed potential spaces for neoliberal discursive contestation that, I will suggest in the next chapter, can be exploited by pedagogies aimed at challenging neoliberalism, or at the very least, of getting young people to be more cognizant of their roles in reproducing it.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Discussion:**

## **Towards A Socio-Cognitive Approach To Critical And Progressive Pedagogy**

*“I think one reason it is so important to break out of the monoculture of the mind, is to recognize that this world has so many alternatives. There are so many alternatives to the industrial agriculture based on fossil fuels and chemicals. There are so many alternatives to a banking system based on fraud. There are so many alternatives to the unrepresentative representative democracy”. –Vandana Shiva<sup>74</sup>*

In the previous three chapters, a socio-cognitive approach to understanding neoliberal and counter-neoliberal discursive interpellation guided the exploration and analysis of the substantive content of my youth participants’ socio-cultural and political-economic schemata, and led to the construction of a three-fold typology of LA and London young people consisting of classifications that I have referred to as *Critical/Political*, *Artsy/Indie*, and *Mainstream*. While the young people positioned within these classifications did not all share the same exact political-economic views or socio-cultural experiences, preferences, and practices, they expressed significant similarities to warrant being grouped in one of the above three classifications. In this chapter, I will attempt to show how these young people’s shared schematic content and unique accounts offer insights that can inform the work of critical and progressive educators concerned with progressive social change.

This chapter begins with an overview of some the basic tenets of the existing literature on critical and progressive pedagogy. It then reviews some of major characteristics of the *Critical/Political*, *Artsy/Indie*, and *Mainstream* LA and London types, with an emphasis on the implications that each of their shared dispositions poses for critical and progressive pedagogy. I then move on to indicate the curriculum content of what a socio-cognitive approach to critical and progressive pedagogy might entail. This is a curriculum designed to help young people to be more cognizant of neoliberal discourses and practices, and their roles in reproducing or contesting them, in addition to developing within them more critical, political, democratic, co-operative, tolerant, and empathetic dispositions

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<sup>74</sup> Retrieved from:  
<http://www.creatingfreedom.info/>

that can help to replace, offset, or contest any pre-existing fatalistic, apathetic, uncritical, self-interested, and apolitical dispositions. Additionally, I provide examples of classroom activities aimed at fostering these dispositions.

### **8.1 Critical and Progressive Pedagogy and Democracy**

In this section, I will briefly review some of the central tenets and political objectives of the substantial literature on pedagogy concerned with fostering a more critical citizenry and participatory democracy. Generally, this literature follows and builds on the classic works of Paolo Friere (1996) and John Dewey (1990). Both of these traditions and approaches differ from more conventional civics education by emphasizing the learning of democracy not just the teaching of it. This conception holds that democracy should not be confined to simply voting officials into power, but rather as Biesta and Lawy (2006, p. 65) put it, democracy should extend to “participation in the construction, maintenance, and transformation of all forms of social and political life”. I will start with the Friesian (1996) tradition and approaches, then move on to Dewey (1990) and contemporary interpretations of his work. I end this section with a discussion of some of the potential limitations of both of these that insights from the empirical findings of my study may help to address.

Critical pedagogy as originally conceived of by Paolo Friere (1996) is based on the premise that schools and education systems are not politically neutral institutions, but rather function as key political and ideological apparatuses that can help to foster either dominant and oppressive discourses and practices, or more emancipatory and counter-hegemonic ones. Practitioners of critical pedagogy are concerned with the latter, and posit that education institutions should be primarily concerned with helping students to develop a critical consciousness. This entails pedagogic practices aimed at helping students to develop the skills to recognize authoritarian tendencies, unjust social practices, and to take action to correct oppressive institutional and individual practices in order to impact wider and democratic social change. While there are many forms of critical pedagogy, they are all guided by the central assumption that liberation from oppressive social settings can be brought about when people acquire a heightened and critical awareness of their social positioning, context, and history (Biesta, 1998; Friere, 1996; McLaren, 1997). In practice, this assumption takes the form of what Friere

(1970, p. 452) refers to as conscientization; viz., “the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality”.

Drawing on the critical tradition of past theorists, like Karl Marx, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, critical pedagogic approaches seek to demystify, decolonize, or otherwise make explicit dominant and oppressive discourses and practices that are taken for granted. Initially, critical pedagogy focused on class and adult literacy issues (Friere, 1996), however, contemporary forms of critical pedagogy have incorporated wider issues of race, gender, space, place, and post-structuralist concerns over identity and multi-culturalism. For example, Gruenwald (2003, p. 9) argues that most critical pedagogy theorizations have overlooked ecological concerns, and proposes a critical pedagogy of place that seeks to, “(a) identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments (reinhabitation); and (b) identify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places (decolonization)”. Other critical theorists like Giroux (2001) and Kellner (1998) concerned about the omnipresence of corporate mass media and its potential interpellating effects, propose a critical pedagogy of media-culture literacy, technology, and leisure time that, as Kellner (1998, p. 104) puts it, “summons educators, students, and citizens to rethink established curricula and teaching strategies to meet the challenge of empowering individuals to participate democratically in our increasingly multicultural and technological society”. Nonetheless, despite their many incarnations and permutations, all critical pedagogies are, as Biesta (1998, p. 499) argues, “in one way or another committed to the imperative of transforming the larger social order in the interest of justice, equality, democracy, and human freedom”.

Paralleling and overlapping critical pedagogy is work based on Dewey’s (1990) classic model of progressive education. Building on the classic Enlightenment ideals of reason and critique, and Rousseauian humanist notions of community and child-centred approaches to education, Dewey’s (1990) model is concerned with the development of essential cognitive, social, and vocational skills so pupils can grow to be self-reliant yet critical, conscientious, and

responsible citizens who can live in, and maintain, a decentralized democratic society.

I believe that the psychological and social sides are organically related and that education cannot be regarded as a compromise between the two, or a superimposition of one upon the other. We are told that the psychological definition of education is barren and formal - that it gives us only the idea of a development of all the mental powers without giving us any idea of the use to which these powers are put. On the other hand, it is urged that the social definition of education, as getting adjusted to civilization, makes of it a forced and external process, and results in subordinating the freedom of the individual to a preconceived social and political status (Dewey, 1897, p. 77).

How to best achieve this balance between nurturing individual abilities and fostering community solidarity continues to be hotly debated by contemporary practitioners of Dewey's progressive education model. However, these practitioners tend to emphasize hands on experimental learning, co-operative educational activities, multi-age classrooms, and in depth conceptual, practical, and contextual understanding of scientific, mathematical, and political knowledge (Kohn, 2008; Wenglinsky, 2004). These pedagogic approaches are contrasted and in direct opposition to the rote learning and behaviourist inspired pedagogies epitomized by contemporary neoliberal standards-based educational approaches discussed in section 1.3 (Ohanian, 2002).

According to Dewey (2011), democracy and education go hand in hand, and thus education settings must help students to develop their unique natural abilities, in addition to co-operative, empathetic, and tolerant dispositions that can facilitate collective decision-making and problem-solving in and out of school. Hence, progressive education, like critical pedagogy, is an inherently democratic-socialist political project, albeit not one based on Marxism. As Cohen et al., (2010, p. 76) note:

For Dewey, a democratic society was more than just the institution of government. It was a way of living together, of learning to cooperatively agree and disagree non-violently, and of appreciating

and learning from diversity and of coming to support one another for the good of the whole.

While there is no universally accepted framework that encompasses the political goals of progressive education as envisioned by Dewey (2011), the following comprehensive list of skills and dispositions identified by Cohen et al., (2010, p. 80), largely reflect those advocated by contemporary progressive educators.

**Essential skills:**

1. Learning to listen to ourselves and others.
2. Critical and reflective thinking abilities (e.g. being able to think about various points of view and goals; being able to understand, analyze and check the reliability of information about government; being able to analyze instances of social injustice and decide when some action or nonviolent protest is justified; being able to analyze how conditions in the community are connected to policy decisions).
3. Flexible problem solving/decision making abilities (e.g. the ability to resolve conflicts in creative and non-violent ways; being able to build consensus; being able to reach an informed decision about a candidate or conclusion about an issue).
4. Communicative abilities (e.g. being able to participate in discussion; learning to argue thoughtfully and directly for one's position and use evidence in support of it; being able to articulate the meaning of abstract concepts such as democracy and patriotism; being able to articulate the relationship between the common good and self-interest and use these ideas in making decisions; being able to express one's opinion on a political or civic matter when contacting an elected official or a media outlet).
5. Collaborative capacities (e.g. working together for a common goal; learning to compromise; being able to participate in a respectful and informed discussion about an issue; being able to act in a group in a way that includes others and communicates respect for their views; being able to envision a plan for action on community problems and mobilize others to pursue it).

**Essential dispositions:**

6. Responsibility (e.g. sense of personal responsibility at many levels including obeying the law and voting; respect for human rights and willingness to search out and listen to others' views; personal commitment to others and their well-being, and to justice).
7. An appreciation that we are social creatures and need others to survive and thrive, and an overlapping sense of social trust in the community.
8. Appreciation of and involvement with social justice (e.g. a nation is as strong as its weakest members; when certain groups are discriminated against it is not only unfair to them but, in the long run undermines society; support for justice, equality and other

democratic values and procedures).

9. Service to others or an appreciation that it is an honour and a pleasure to serve and help others.
10. Appreciation that – most of the time – others do the best they can (e.g. sense of realistic efficacy about citizen' actions).

However, despite their highly informative insights for educators concerned with nurturing democratic and egalitarian values and practices, both the Friirian (1996) and Deweyian (1990) traditions, along with the current work that has been influenced by them, are potentially limited in the following ways. First, the Friirian (1996) approach in all of its various and contemporary incarnations, is explicitly premised on the liberatory effects of conscientization; that is, on getting students to be more cognizant of their roles as both contributors to, and potential liberators from, oppressive modes. However, this emphasis on conscientization via classroom practices that, for example, encourage deep reflection, critical questioning, and textual deconstruction, no matter how nuanced, still stems from the classic Marxist false consciousness presupposition. As Friere (1970, pp. 452-453) argues:

Since the basic condition for conscientization is that its agent must be a subject (i.e., a conscious being), conscientization, like education, is specifically and exclusively a human process. It is as conscious beings that men are not only in the world, but with the world, together with other men. Only men, as "open" beings, are able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and grasping and expressing the world's reality in their creative language. Men can fulfill the necessary condition of being with the world because they are able to gain objective distance from it. Without this objectification, whereby man also objectifies himself, man would be limited to being in the world, lacking both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world

As argued earlier in this thesis, this consciousness presupposition, false or otherwise, assumes a phenomenological ontology of human cognition that overlooks important socio-cognitive dispositional forces, which play a powerful and unconscious role in individual perception, appreciation, and information

processing and filtering. These can potentially hinder or significantly constrain individual conscious awareness and the overall effectiveness of conscientization strategies. As my empirical findings partly suggest, making people cognizant of important political-economic issues and alternatives is necessary, but it is not sufficient in transforming them into more conscientious agents. Equally necessary I will argue, but mostly overlooked in the Friirian tradition is the development of pedagogic practices specifically designed to target those deep-seated dispositions of young people, which may block out political and social-justice concerns. That is, while some of the education practices typically associated with the Friirian approach, such as dialogue and open discussion centred lessons, textual deconstruction, and learning about the history and struggles of oppressed peoples, may help young people develop more critical, democratic, and socially progressive views and concomitant dispositions, these education practices may be ineffective with students, particularly older teenaged ones, who have developed their own unique sets of strong valence dispositions which may predispose them to be less appreciative and/or receptive of politics and social-justice concerns (for example, apolitical, self-interested, fatalistic, and apathetic dispositions). As Bourdieu (2000, p. 172) argues, “while making things explicit can help, only a thoroughgoing process of countertraining, involving repeated exercises, can, like an athlete’s training, durably transform habitus”. Second, the Deweyian (1997) approach, and much of the contemporary work that has drawn on it, tends to use the term ‘disposition’ in vague ways that sometimes diverges entirely from the original cognitive definition. For example, Edgar et al., (2002) tend to conflate dispositions with goals and objectives, while the Cohen et al., (2010) usage of the term (as displayed in the abovementioned framework) is unclear if it refers to democratic dispositions that should be taught and cultivated to the extent that they are enacted automatically by students, or whether democratic dispositions are merely values that students should learn and attempt to enact. This may be a minor pedantic point, but the concept of ‘disposition’ has a specific origin, application, and consequent and important theoretical implications for how to generate them. Hence, if such guidelines as those suggested by Cohen et al., (2010) above are meant to serve as an educational template for the development of the democratic and empathetic habits of minds of students, I believe that, for the sake of conceptual and semantic clarity and precision, we need to be more exact with, and



explicit about, what is meant by ‘dispositions’ as I will be in the following section. Furthermore, a more substantial potential limitation of the Deweyian (1990) approach is that it is meant to span a K-12 US education system (UK equivalent of primary to college education), where students are immersed in progressive educational settings from the very start of their education. While research suggests that the teaching and fostering of civic and democratic values and dispositions is most likely to take root when initiated during school age, the exact age-grade as to when it will be most effective, or more generally, what triggering mechanisms lead young people to develop a more critical examination of politics and society, is still largely unknown (Sherrod et al., 2002). As Sherrod et al., (2002, p. 265) have noted:

More developmental work is needed in fleshing out how, between the ages of 10 and 25, young people’s concepts of citizenship expand from a focus on obedience and support of the status quo to a more critical appraisal of a citizen as one who would be irresponsible if she or he blindly obeyed. What happens between childhood and adulthood that enables the young person to appreciate the importance of informed consent, to support the exercise of good judgment including critique of the status quo?

Conversely, the age-grade when progressive education might be the least effective is also unknown, but like conscientization strategies, progressive education may be less effective with students, particularly older teenaged students, who have already formed their own unique socio-cultural and political-economic schemata, some of which may significantly hinder or potentially filter out pedagogic attempts aimed at fostering civic and democratic values and dispositions. Hence, both the contemporary Frierean (1996) and Deweyian (1990) inspired critical and progressive pedagogies should take into account the potential socio-cognitive dispositions of students who may not have benefited from an earlier exposure to political-economic issues and concerns, and incorporate strategies aimed at targeting pre-existing dispositions which may hinder the fostering of empathetic, democratic, critical, and political values and dispositions. As Dewey (1897, p. 77) notes:

Without insight into the psychological structure and activities of the individual, the educative process will [...] be haphazard and arbitrary. If it chances to coincide with the child's activity it will get a leverage; if it does not, it will result in friction, or disintegration, or arrest of the child nature.

Lastly, both the Frierian (1996) and Deweyian (1990) approaches may also benefit from the inclusion of more explicit teaching about key substantive political issues. In the context of neoliberalism, my empirical findings would suggest these should include comprehensive lessons on welfare policies and services, alternative political-economic systems and practices, and human nature that expose students to the facts and empirical evidence relevant to these topics, and equip them with the ability to identify the errors or half-truths contained in widespread neoliberal discourses. Such lessons tend to be absent from existing and more instrumentalist US and UK forms of civics and politics education (Biesta & Lawy, 2006).

## **8.2 Actual Typological Characteristics, Dispositions, and Potential Lessons**

In this section, I will discuss how some of the shared dispositions expressed by my youth participants may both hinder or contribute to critical and progressive pedagogy, and will draw out the implications for a socio-cognitive approach to critical and progressive pedagogy.

In analyzing my data I attempted to discern if there were any significant influences on my participants' political cognitive frameworks that could be potentially standardized or somehow transferred over to activist strategies aimed at contesting neoliberal discourses and practices. However, this proved to be a rather futile search, as all of the political influences on my participants, even those on *Mainstream* young people (who expressed very limited political-economic knowledge), have come from a wide array of unique experiences to the extent that the only generalization that can be made from them, is that their political knowledge has been shaped by various influences. For example, even though, *Critical/Political* young people like Lupe, Jazmin, Arlene, Anthony, and Ben cite their parents or close relatives as being the initial catalysts that sparked the development of their political outlooks, or like Aimee, and Lisa who cite close friends as theirs, there is little that can be learned from these catalysts, other than

they can come from anywhere and can take root at anytime as described in section 5.5. So, rather than focus on the identification of influences I have chosen to mainly foreground how young people actively reify their political-economic understandings, as well as the socio-cognitive impediments (i.e., dispositional barriers) to that reification.

Whilst recognizing the need for larger sample sizes, more refined methods, and the addition of other and more precise classifications to my original typology (see section 9.2), I will for the time being assume that a significantly high proportion of LA and London young people ages 16-19, are likely to possess characteristics that can place them within one of the three typological classifications discussed in previous chapters and summarized below.

**Table 8.1: Typology: Defining Characteristics and Corresponding Dispositions**

<i>Critical/Political</i>	<i>Artsy/Indie</i>	<i>Mainstream</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They spend a significant amount of their time reading advanced literature on various topics, and engaging in leftist political and civic activities, as well artistic endeavours.</li> <li>• They express the need for education to stress critical thinking skills.</li> <li>• They consciously avoid shopping centres and brand clothing whenever possible, and display a DIY (do it yourself) ethic towards clothes, and actively engage with critical media (music, magazines, documentaries, Internet sites).</li> <li>• They express a sophisticated understanding of political-economic topics, such as welfare, causes of poverty, labour exploitation, capitalism, government, and alternative government and economic systems, a high level of empathy for the suffering of others, and principle concern with social justice issues.</li> <li>• They expressed a high level of internal political efficacy, and low level of external political efficacy.</li> <li>• Their political orientations fall along an Anarchist to Social-Democratic/Progressive spectrum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They spend a significant amount of their time in artistic endeavours and engaging with independent or alternative media-culture.</li> <li>• They express a pronounced affinity for an education centered on art and music.</li> <li>• They express and display a general indifference towards consumer culture, and purchase goods for their use value.</li> <li>• They express a limited engagement and appreciation for critical media, and are primarily interested in media-culture for its affective and aesthetic properties.</li> <li>• They express highly dissonant views on welfare, supporting welfare programmes, but believing they should be temporary.</li> <li>• They view the contemporary electoral process as the main medium for political change, support capitalism (but feel that it should be regulated), but are otherwise disinterested in politics.</li> <li>• They express a moderate level of internal political efficacy, and moderate level of external political efficacy.</li> <li>• Their political orientations fall between a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They spend a significant amount of their time hanging out with friends, playing sports, partying, and hanging out in shopping centres.</li> <li>• They generally express a more instrumentalist view of education.</li> <li>• They express and display a liking of corporate products, and actively engage with corporate media-culture, mostly uncritically.</li> <li>• They express more materialistic concerns and future aspirations, which are highly reflective of their specific media-culture preferences.</li> <li>• They express a mostly negative view of welfare recipients, viewing them as cheats, but maintaining some support for welfare programmes.</li> <li>• They have little to no knowledge on their own, or of alternative political-economic systems, but seem to believe that voting is important.</li> <li>• They support capitalism, and view it as a system that makes people independent and self-reliant.</li> <li>• They express a low level of internal political efficacy, and low to moderate level of external political efficacy.</li> <li>• Their political orientations fall between a</li> </ul>

	Left-liberal to Centre-liberal spectrum.	Centre-liberal to Right-liberal spectrum.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They consistently express critical, political, empathetic, and fatalistic dispositions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They consistently express aesthetic, affective, and apolitical dispositions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They consistently express self-interested, apathetic, consumerist, and uncritical dispositions</li> </ul>

<b>List of Dispositions</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Aesthetic Disposition</b>	Automatic inclinations to be primarily attracted to media-cultural texts for their aesthetic and/or sound dynamics.
<b>Affective Disposition</b>	Automatic inclination to be attracted to media-cultural texts, primarily for the emotions that they stir.
<b>Apolitical Disposition</b>	Automatic disinterest in, and aversion to, politics.
<b>Consumerist Disposition</b>	Automatic impulsive and compulsive tendency to buy consumer goods.
<b>Critical Disposition</b>	Automatic tendency to question and critique taken for granted assumptions.
<b>Empathetic Disposition</b>	A strong-valence inclination to be concerned with the suffering of others.
<b>Fatalistic Disposition</b>	Automatic tendency to assume that human nature is predominantly selfish, and therefore be dismissive of more decentralized and genuinely democratic forms of political-economic organisation.
<b>Self-Interested Disposition</b>	An automatic tendency to only be concerned with one's own interests, often with an unconscious disregard for the interests of others, e.g., when consuming corporate products that probably come from some exploitative source.
<b>Political Disposition</b>	Automatic tendency or inclination to want to connect or infuse otherwise neutral topics with political concerns or overtures.
<b>Uncritical Disposition</b>	Automatic tendency to not question prevailing norms and values.

Additionally, if it is accepted, as the mainstream of cognitive and social psychology argues, that cognitive dispositions, while largely manifesting beyond our conscious awareness, nonetheless play a key role in the way we perceive and filter out social information, and how we act in accordance with those perceptions

and filters, than their role in social reproduction should not be underestimated. Thus far, I have only identified ten dispositions, as listed above, but even this small sample offers noteworthy theoretical insights. For instance, some of these dispositions are conducive to the aims of critical and progressive pedagogy, e.g., critical, political, and empathetic dispositions. Some of these are neutral but can be oriented towards a critical and progressive pedagogy, e.g., affective and aesthetic dispositions (via politically charged art centred classroom activities), and some of these are potential barriers that critical and progressive pedagogues need to take into account and directly address, e.g., fatalistic, apolitical, self-interested, apathetic, and uncritical dispositions.

To be certain, it is arguable that *Critical/Political* young people are automatically inclined to be political and critical, and therefore, it probably did not take much initial exposure to political influences to ignite their politicization. Indeed, the development of their initial political awareness and attitudes, according to their responses, began at relatively young ages (around 11-14). However, young people that are more in line with *Artsy/Indie* or *Mainstream* characteristics, and who likely lack this political and critical predisposition, will need more significant and substantive exposure to political knowledge in order for them to generate more developed political-economic understandings. The obviousness of this hopefully not too controversial generalization or assumption, however, may overshadow the important discovery of the *Artsy/Indie* and *Mainstream* young people's unique dispositions that may render exposure to political knowledge and practices inefficacious. Hence, I argue that critical and progressive pedagogic strategies and practices must emphasize both conscientization and the cultivation of affective, attitudinal, and behavioural dispositions that are conducive to progressive social change and a democratic ethos. Moreover, these strategies must also target any pre-existing dispositions, which may hinder this cultivation; the overall goal being to cultivate within young people critical, democratic, co-operative, tolerant, and empathetic dispositions that are enacted both reflectively and automatically. In the next section, I discuss some of the content of such a curriculum, illustrating how this might be done, as inspired by an activity described to me by two of my *Critical/Political* participants.

### 8.3 Towards a Pedagogy of Dispositional Democracy

In this section I set out some indicative content of a curriculum aimed at enabling the pre-existing socio-cognitive dispositions of young people to surface so they are able to reflect on them, as well as providing them with important factual political knowledge.

Most people are not aware of their most deep-seated beliefs, emotions, and practices, and generally only become aware of some of them when they experience something that contradicts their pre-existing expectations or beliefs. Hence, because most beliefs and practices are tucked away in cognitive schematic compartments, people may not even realize that they are acting out according to a certain set of internalized belief and affective systems. However, by bringing these to the surface level, people can become more cognizant of them, and potentially be able to make more genuinely free and rational decisions. There were certain questions that seemed to prompt my participants to express dissonant and ambivalent thoughts, particularly when it came to questions about consumption. In response to this set of questions, participants from all three groups tended, to varying extents, to mention that they consume corporate goods, but a significant number of them expressed guilt over this when I probed them about the conditions under which the products that they like and consume are made. Given that consumption and media-culture are central to most Western young people's lives, a good starting point to help young people to develop socio-cognitive frameworks that more extensively connect their everyday experiences and practices with larger political-economic consequences and concerns is to develop classroom activities that, for example, go beyond superficial or brief lessons on sweatshops, to induce a feeling of cognitive dissonance amongst students. As discussed in section 2.5, cognitive dissonance can lead individuals to bring their deep-seated attitudes, emotions, and beliefs to the conscious surface, during instances when these run counter to their *ad hoc* experiences, which then leads to the reification or modification of those pre-existing schemata. In classroom settings, instances of cognitive dissonance can be potentially initiated so students may more consciously reflect on the consequences of their deep-seated attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and practices. An example of this is revealed in one of the following classroom practices described to me by my *Critical/Political* participants Lisa and Arlene.

- Rudy: Let's briefly go back to like some of the things you learned in class about sweatshop conditions. What are some of the things that you guys can think of?
- Lisa: It was working in cramped spaces where there is no air ventilation, and you're constantly breathing in all the dust particles in the air.
- Arlene: Like, for example, when we were on that topic our teachers made us do this sort of game where she was like our manager and we had to persuade her to boost our salary up, and some people were like coming up with ideas like oh well I'm pregnant, I need money for my family, or I'm sick, and she would just say, "I don't care, that's not my family".
- Rudy: So how were guys able to come up with a solution?
- Arlene: I remember I was very mad because in that class you would get very very passionate, and I was like no way, we have to walk out, we have to walk out. And I was like I retired, and everyone retired and we walked out of class.
- Rudy: You guys walked out of class?
- Arlene: Yeah, and like she did that with all of her classes but no other class walked out except for us. So we walked out and we were like striking outside of class, and everyone came out seeing that [we were striking] and we were striking, striking, striking. It was very funny.
- Lisa: She gave us an A for the project.
- Rudy: How did you guys come up with the decision to strike?
- Lisa: Because I felt like it wasn't worth it [to work] under such conditions. (World-Vision participants)

Now arguably, the teacher in this case, in effect, initiated a state of cognitive dissonance within her students by going against their work-place expectations and sense of fairness, which as Arlene notes, prompted a very powerful emotional response.<sup>75</sup> The students in this activity probably assumed that a boss would be fair and humane, and boost their salary or be otherwise accommodating to their fictional plight. That is, in acting out actual labour practices, the teacher directly challenged her students' pre-existing schemata for labour practices and consumption, initiating dissonant thoughts, which in Arlene and Lisa's case, seem to have contributed to their lasting ethical consumption practices.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> According to Dias et al., (2009, p. 784), "cognitive dissonance can be conceived both as a concept related to the tendency to avoid internal contradictions in certain situations, and as a higher order theory about information processing in the human mind". Research findings support the theory that people tend to avoid internal dissonance even when there are no punishments or rewards involved, and that this tendency operates at a mostly unconscious level.

<sup>76</sup> Without the benefit of having observed this activity at first hand, this will have to remain a tentative interpretation. However, Arlene and Lisa's account inspires a promising avenue for future research on the use of cognitive dissonance in the development of more effective critical and progressive pedagogic strategies.



Moreover, and quite remarkably, rather than give up or succumb to more fatalistic dispositions, the students in this class enacted direct democratic practices as a solution to the problem posed by their teacher. Hence, in initiating cognitive dissonance, this politically charged classroom activity helped Lisa and Arlene to not only make a clear connection between their everyday cultural practices, like consumption, and their wider political-economic consequences, like labour exploitation, but also helped to foster within them the sorts of transposable empathetic, critical, and political dispositions that they expressed throughout my time with them. Furthermore, this activity and others like them probably influenced, or at the very least reinforced Arlene's competency in direct democratic decision-making, which she and her World-Vision colleagues displayed when I first came across them.

Additionally, these types of simulation classroom activities can be retrofitted to incorporate in depth discussions on environmental problems, alternatives to current market arrangements, and labour practices, and on the broad canon of democratic theory and action. These can include examples of contemporary forms of democratic work-place practices that are being followed in different parts of the world (and even by Western corporations, e.g., see WorldBlu). These lessons should also include in depth discussions that demystify taken for granted economic notions, and specifically, those discourses that presents the 'economy' as a sort of omnipotent deity, rather than a collection of human practices that are diffused through various human institutions, and that are, therefore, subject to human control. Moreover, these lessons should be accompanied by equally in depth lessons on neoliberal theory and practices, so that young people can discern the differences between different forms of political-economic arrangements, and be able to make a more conscious choice as to which they support. In depth lessons on human nature would also be valuable. While I was not able to uncover why so many of my participants held a standard neoliberal ontological view of human nature, which arguably stops discussion let alone actual implementation of alternative systems in its tracks, exposing them to differing conceptions of human nature may prove a useful pedagogic tactic that can get young people to think about the potential for humans to act in very different ways. There is a lengthy academic literature in place, spanning the social sciences and currently growing in the cognitive sciences that consistently demonstrates that while human beings do

indeed display self-interested dispositions, they also display altruistic, autonomous, empathetic, creative, and co-operative dispositions (Graeber, 2004; Olson, 2008; Patel, 2010; Sloane et al., 2012). Which set is more pronounced is largely determined by the political-economic and concomitant socio-cultural structures that humans choose to implement and reproduce. As F. B. M. de Waal (in Olson, 2008, p. 1) notes, “you need to indoctrinate empathy out of people in order to arrive at extreme capitalist positions”. Engaging young people and teachers alike with this empirical literature, can get them to think critically about this very important factor from which all possibilities for genuine alternative political-economic models stem, and whether they agree with it or not, it may at the very least prompt them not to take human selfishness for granted. As Mallott, (2011, p. 74) argues in advancing anarchist pedagogy that is supported by empirical findings:

While many anarchist writers correctly understand that ones view of human nature is going to determine ones understanding of what kind of societies humans are capable of successfully creating thereby shaping future possibilities and interpretations of historical events, they tend to fail to transgress the idea that ones conception of human nature is purely subjective and a matter of personal preference or political commitments.

Furthermore, Giroux (2000) recommends that a critical examination of how contemporary corporate culture and cultural artifacts contribute to discourses that propagate and legitimate race, class, gender, and political inequalities, as well as to the commodification of youth and culture for corporate profits, must be included in the curriculum of any critical pedagogic project. It was especially evident from the London *Mainstream* participants that the dominant media-culture materialistic ideals and aspirations were being accepted without much decoding or critical examination. While it is not my intention to suggest that young people should accept alternative socio-cultural discourses, they should be presented with the tools to comprehensively analyze existing and competing socio-cultural and political-economic discourses so that they can make a more conscious choice about which to accept and reproduce. As it stands, their acceptance of market

norms and values seems to stem from their underexposure to competing discourses. An incorporation of cultural studies into pedagogy, where contemporary and popular media texts that most young people engage with are scrutinized and dissected for their ideological content, can contribute to the goal of getting young people to be more critically aware of the inner workings of neoliberal consumer capitalism and its implications. It may not be the case that once armed with the critical tools to dissect corporate media-texts and the dominant socio-cultural and political-economic discourses imbued in them that young people will then automatically reject or contest them. However, as argued throughout this thesis, critical and political cognitive frameworks that are informed by accurate and detailed information are a necessary precondition for more critical practices. As Giroux (2000, p. 7) notes:

Struggles over culture are not a weak substitute for a ‘real’ politics, but are central to any struggle willing to forge relations among discursive and material relations of power, theory and practice, as well as pedagogy and social change.

Lastly, all of these lessons, as in the Friirian (1994) and Deweywian (1997) traditions, should themselves be taught in a more democratic fashion that moves away from the standard banking, behaviourist, and authoritarian model of contemporary education. Democratic pedagogic practices can serve to instill within young people a democratic ethos and sense of non-hierarchical organization. It is clear from the existing literature as discussed in section 3.4, as well as from some of the accounts of my participants, that the teaching of politics in particular, necessitates, and is in fact more enjoyable and conducive to learning when young people are actively involved in discussions and encouraged to share their opinions and beliefs. Many of my Zoo participants, for instance, pointed out that it was being allowed to openly talk about controversial political issues in the safety of the classroom that opened their eyes to, and made them appreciate, other people’s points of view.

## 8.4 Course Preface

- Rudy: Now do you think that they're able to comprehend some of these complicated political and economic issues at an early age, you know things like war, environmental degradation, government?
- Warren: That's a good question. I think one of the things about them being taught in school is that they just become academic subjects that they get graded on, and that's then becomes boring to them. Just like some of the classic novels for instance that I never read because I was supposed to read them. There is always that fear that if you teach something to a kid in school they're going to associate it with something they don't care about. So I don't know if it's making the impact at the same rate that it's being taught to them. But you know if you talk to them for 100 hours about social justice, they're at least going to hear an hour of it, rather than if you talk to them about it for an hour and they'll only hear a minute of it. So that's really the best I can say if it's working.
- Rudy: Right, but you think the exposure is good?
- Warren: Yes, I think the exposure is really good. I don't think that there is any harm in it. (Youth Worker Bresee Foundation)

In the following section, I will describe a course and corresponding set of classroom activities that largely draws on the classroom practices of existing critical pedagogies and progressive schools. However, this proposed course takes into consideration all of the elements discussed in this chapter thus far, viz., the socio-cognitive limitations of existing critical pedagogies, the specific dispositions, political-economic knowledge, and influential political educational experiences of my youth participants, and key curriculum content that is often missing from conventional politics courses including empirically informed discussions on human nature, welfare, alternative political-economic systems, workplace organization, and cultural content analyses. This course is different from conventional politics courses in two key aspects. First, it is primarily designed for educators who may not have the institutional and/or community support typically afforded to educators working in progressive schools (Apple & Beane, 1999). Hence it is meant to be used by educators working in conventional schools, and be taught to young people who have never attended a progressive school or had much exposure to critical or political pedagogy of any kind. To be certain, the majority of the *Critical/Indie*, *Artsy/Indie*, and (in particular) *Mainstream* young people had received a very limited political education from their schools with only Arlene and Lisa attending a social justice oriented school. However, teachers and pupils from progressive and social-justice oriented schools may benefit from it as well, and

activities 5, 6, and 7 (described in the following section) were initially inspired by Arlene and Lisa's classroom activity described above in section 8.3.

Second, in order to address the possibility of pre-existing socio-cognitive filters and limited political exposure which can compromise the effectiveness of critical pedagogies, as discussed above in section 8.1, the set of activities are informed by the major preliminary findings of the empirical psychological work on cognitive dissonance, empathy, and fairness, which suggest the following: 1) As discussed in section 2.5, research by Dias et al., (2009) and Ramaprasad (1993), has found that cognitive dissonance may be an intrinsic property of the human mind that predisposes individuals to hold internally consistent mental schemata to the extent that the holding of two dissonant schemata will push individuals to consciously or unconsciously ignore, repress, rationalize, or reconfigure one of them in order to achieve internal consistency. 2) Recent empirical studies from the fields of social neuroscience and developmental psychology suggest that empathy and fairness may be innate properties of human nature that predispose individuals to value fairness and to feel the pain of others when observing the suffering of others directly or indirectly via sounds and images (Jackson et al., 2006; Sloane et al., 2012). Although these findings are still very much preliminary, they suggest that human beings have the capacity to value fairness, empathy, and seek to hold internally consistent views and practices. Incidentally, these were tendencies that I repeatedly observed in my youth participants. For example, in the previous three chapters I described several instances where my youth participants from all three classifications expressed an empathic concern for others as exemplified in the following extract:

- Rudy: What are some of things in the world that you care the most about?  
Diana: I like caring a lot about others, as well, as how can you say poverty. Like I care a lot about people that aren't, don't have benefits like I do. [...] Cause like in other countries that are suffering, I care a lot about them, and I kind of want equality and just want to help them out.  
Rudy: These ideas about equality, like how do you think you got these ideas, like how are you prone to thinking this way?  
Diana: For me it was people it was seeing other people suffer in Peru. And seeing the corruption [and] the way the police work. (*Artsy/Indie* and *Zoo* participant)

Additionally, a propensity to value fairness and justice was a pronounced characteristic of the *Critical/Political* and some of the *Artsy/Indie* young people. And paradoxically, as discussed briefly in section 7.3, even in the cases where *Mainstream* youth participants' expressed emphatically negative views and attitudes towards welfare programmes and recipients, these could be related to their potentially inherent sense of fairness and justice which is disturbed by accounts of people cheating the welfare system. This is a speculative interpretation; however, with the exception of one participant, all the *Mainstream* young people supported welfare provisions, and their call for more stringent regulatory schemes was entirely premised on their concern for fraud and insistence that everyone get their fair share of provisions. And lastly, I have also noted how several of my participants from all three classifications expressed what can arguably be considered instances of cognitive dissonance when discussing issues of labour exploitation and consumption.

Therefore building on all of these preliminary findings, activities 5, 6, and 7, for example, are designed to affectively trigger participants' potentially existing empathic and fairness predispositions, as well as their deep seated beliefs and expectations. If there is a clash between these, than their predisposition towards cognitive consonance, in conjunction with the highly salient and affective stimuli of the activities (which would be difficult to ignore or filter out) should, in theory, force participants to be more cognizant of and deliberative in relation to their views and expectations. Furthermore, the consequent cognitive resolution could have lasting effects (e.g., see Briñol et al., 2009), as is seemingly the case in Arlene and Lisa's accounts described above and in section 5.1. Thus, this course may help to circumvent the fatalist, uncritical, apolitical, apathetic, and self-interested dispositions (see Table 8.1), which are likely to be common amongst large numbers of young people (especially amongst those with limited exposure to critical and political perspectives), and which can lead young people to filter out critical and political pedagogy and knowledge. Additionally, this proposed course also contains activities designed to synergistically play on young people's aesthetic and affective dispositions in a way that orients these to critical and political deliberations (e.g., see activities 1 and 14). That is, young people whose characteristics are similar to those of the *Artsy/Indie* classification, and which include a notable apolitical disposition, may be more responsive to political

knowledge if it is presented with activities that emphasize aesthetic resources. However, no one of course can ever hope to address all of the unique cognitive and socio-cognitive dispositions of every single pupil, nor am I claiming that what is outlined in the following section will even work in circumventing the socio-cognitive filters that I observed in my youth participants. What is offered, is simply a modest, largely provisional, and scattershot approach.

### **8.5 Sample Course: A Socio-Cognitive Approach**

Area: Social Studies/Civics/Politics

Suggested Ages: (13-18)

Length of time needed: approximately 10-15 hours.

Materials Required: Access to YouTube and Google Video, television or projector that is attached to an Internet connection, construction paper, markers.

Concepts Taught: Neoliberal Globalization, Capitalism, Political-Economic Systems, Content Analysis, Welfare, Human Nature.

Course Title: Shoes, Sweatshops, and Democracy

Anticipatory Set: In order to effectively engage students with the following material, it is essential that the teacher:

- Reviews contemporary introductory neuroscience articles on human empathy and co-operation. (Suggested readings include Gary Olson's (2008). *We Empathize, Therefore We Are: Toward A Moral Neuropolitics*, and Engemman et al., (2012) *Games People Play-toward an enactive view of co-operation in social neuroscience*).
- Reviews contemporary articles on democratic workplace organizations and practices. (Suggested readings and specific examples can be obtained from <http://www.worldblu.com/>).
- Review contemporary articles on alternative economic frameworks, e.g., participatory economics. (Suggested readings and information can be obtained from <http://www.zcommunications.org/zparecon/parecon.htm>).
- Reviews some specific aspects of the contemporary welfare/benefits/public policies of their respective national settings. (Suggested readings for UK teachers can be obtained from <http://www.taxresearch.org.uk>. US teachers

can obtain information from <http://www.ips-dc.org/>, and from current articles on welfare by Frances Fox Piven).

Objectives: By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Express a fundamental understanding on how to dissect media texts, e.g., by being able to conduct a basic content analysis.
- Connect some of their socio-cultural practices like material and media consumption, to larger political-economic concerns and consequences.
- Tell the difference between liberal and authoritarian neoliberalism, Keynesian social-democracy, and democratic and authoritarian socialism, and representative and direct democracy.
- Express a fundamental understanding of the various conceptions of human nature, and how these feed into conceptions of political-economic organization.

Purpose:

1. To help students develop a comprehensive understanding of existing political-economic modes and their implications and outcomes, and potential alternatives. Additionally, to help students form connections between their socio-cultural practices and the larger political-economic consequences of those practices.
2. To attempt to bring out any fatalistic, apathetic, apolitical, uncritical, and self-interested dispositions, and to help foster critical, political, empathetic, and co-operative dispositions that can take their place.

Input and Check for Understanding:

The teacher will employ in depth Socratic questioning throughout this lesson and activity to ensure that students understand the various concepts and problems being discussed.

Suggested activities:

1. At the beginning of the first lesson, the teacher will take a poll asking students to vote on contemporary popular songs that they are currently



listening to. The only requisite is that the songs must include lyrics, specifically those valorising materialism and consumption (most of which can be accessed from the Billboard top 40 website). After a democratic process, the two or three most popular songs agreed upon by majority of the students, will have their corresponding official music video accessed on YouTube.

2. Split the classroom into small groups of 3-4 students per group. Inform them that their task is to perform a content analysis of each song. This will entail playing each song, and having students analyze both the types of images being displayed and the types of messages that are being overtly expressed by the lyrics. Have the students write down their observations and then discuss them within their groups. Play the songs as many times as necessary. The teacher should take care to prompt students to think about the more implicit messages of each song.
3. After a discussion on the materialistic and consumerist messages that have been extracted, have students discuss whether they believe that these songs influence what they buy. The teacher should take care to prompt students to think deeply about their consumption practices and their corresponding beliefs.
4. The teacher will then show the short documentary *The Story of Stuff*, and ask students what they think about it.
5. (Key Activity) After the discussion from step 4, the teacher will break up the classroom into different small groups. During this activity the teacher will tell the students to pretend that they are now employees making Nike shoes and that the teacher is now the boss. The teacher/boss using pairs of shoes as props (students can volunteer theirs), will point to different parts of the shoe, and tell each group that they are responsible for assembling each component part. Next, the teacher should ask students how much time they think that they should have to assemble each piece, and how much they think they are going to get paid, and supplant student responses with correct information. (Note, this information can be obtained from <http://www.globallabourrights.org/>).
6. Each group is then given a different scenario e.g., pregnancy, sudden death of a family member, or an illness, and then expected to come up with ways

to convince the boss for time off or more money. (Note: at this crucial juncture it is imperative that the teacher rejects all the students' pleas, and attempts as much as possible to get a strong affective reaction out of them.)

7. Have students discuss how these existing labour practices made them feel, and why they think that such practices are so rampant and accepted. Next have an in depth lesson and discussion on some of the basic structural imperatives and characteristics of neoliberal globalization and capitalism. At this juncture, the teacher should prompt students to ask themselves, is this the only way, and why?
8. Introduce students to competing political-economic systems and models, including Keynesian Social Democracy (with an emphasis on welfare and contemporary welfare policies), and democratic and authoritarian forms of socialism. The teacher should take care to show students comprehensive examples of each. (Note, when discussing Neoliberalism and Keynesian Social Democracy, in depth lessons on welfare policies must be discussed. The teacher should attempt to bring out student's conceptions of welfare, and address as many misconceptions as possible by providing them with factual information). Moreover, the teacher must take care to get students to understand the differences between political systems, e.g., authoritarian, representative, democratic, and their overlap with economic systems, e.g., capitalism, socialism, mixed-economies.
9. Introduce students to alternative labour practices. This can be facilitated by showing documentaries like the *The Take*, as well as short and accessible descriptions of Parecon as theorized by Michael Albert and Robin Handel. After this, ask students to think about which political-economic system most reflects these labour practices.
10. Break students into different small groups and get them to think about what type of workplace they would like to work in. As the teacher, you should not push one way or the other, but rather have students debate and discuss amongst themselves, and write down a comprehensive work-lay out including types of management structures, pay, and division of labour, and their rationale for this set-up. Next have the group discuss the merits of each others' work lay outs.

11. Break up students into different small groups, and have them discuss which political-economic system they would prefer to implement and live under and why. Have them debate the merits of their preferred systems with the other groups, and think about what the possible impediments to implementing them might be. The teacher should ensure a respectful and tolerant exchange of ideas and opinions, while at the same time ensuring that all students get an equal chance to voice their views.
12. Have in depth discussions, supported by empirical studies, on the various conceptions and dimensions of human nature.
13. Break up students into different small groups, and have them once again, in light of the discussion on human nature, discuss what form of political-economic system they would like, and believe is feasible.
14. Finally, break up students into different small groups. Next, play random songs from the Billboard top 40, and get students to dissect them for their ideological content. Get students to answer the following questions:
  - a. What are the messages of these songs?
  - b. Whose interests are these songs promoting?
  - c. What political-economic ideology do these songs reflect?

Please note that it is the teachers' job as a facilitator of knowledge to present factual and empirically validated information in an objective a mode as possible, while helping students to question their deep-seated beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and practices. The teacher should at all points avoid displaying or otherwise expressing an open political preference, and allow for each student to make up their own mind on political positions. However, the teacher should also emphasize and point out to students the many local and international organizations that are working on issues of poverty, labour rights, human rights, environmentalism etc.

### **8.6 End Thoughts:**

This chapter has reviewed the central tenets and political objectives of critical and progressive pedagogy as well as their potential limitations, and discussed some of the ways that findings from my study can help to potentially address these limitations. In particular, it has laid the framework for a theoretical socio-cognitive

approach to critical and progressive pedagogy, which has included some suggestions for a series of lesson activities.

Before concluding, it is worth briefly pointing out some key challenges that would make such a curriculum difficult to implement. First, initiating a state of cognitive dissonance requires on the part of teachers at least a basic understanding of this concept and the methods used to activate it. Hence, in addition to all of the other concepts and material suggested for this lesson, it requires a significant amount of preparation time on the teacher's part, which he or she may not be able to spare. Second, there is no guarantee that having students simulate a sweatshop environment will succeed in getting their predispositions to surface. And certainly, it will be hard for teachers to assess whether or not their students experience cognitive dissonance during this lesson in the first place, without having had training in social psychology, and/or having access to the help of a social psychologist. Third, given the realities of the standards-based practices that most UK and US teachers have to abide by, they may not have the time, or indeed even be allowed to implement such a curriculum. However, teachers concerned with fostering democracy and social justice generally find clever ways to bypass their schools' constraints, and in this instance, this curriculum is rather flexible in its time requirements and application. Moreover, its content is comprehensive, and is meant to offer students a breadth of political-economic knowledge, and in that sense can perhaps be sold to head teachers, principals, and parents on those grounds. That is, it is not an exercise in political indoctrination. Rather, it is a comprehensive series of activities designed to teach students the basics of political-economy, and to specifically educate them about what democracy actually entails, in order for them to make informed decisions about the political-economic arrangements and accompanying socio-cultural norms and values that they would wish to support. It is hard to imagine that anyone, regardless of their political position, could be against this basic objective.

That said, it cannot be emphasized enough that the activities set out in the above section have not yet been trialed. I can therefore make no claims to their efficacy in achieving the goals of getting young people to develop lasting critical, political, empathetic, democratic, and co-operative dispositional and reflective attitudes, beliefs, tendencies, and practices. One of the aims of these activities is to bring to the surface some of the dispositions that young people may have that

might pre-dispose them to filter out political and social justice concerns. How far this curriculum can go in targeting such deep-seated dispositions is unknown. However, at the very least, it is unlikely to undermine this objective, and at best, can help to nurture young people's political convictions and knowledge, their tolerance and respect for the views of others, and a passion for the public good that can transcend their narrow self-interests.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Conclusion**

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This thesis has explored some of the socio-cultural and political-economic dispositions, emotions, thoughts, and to a more limited extent, practices and experiences of young people living in the neoliberal urban societies of LA and London. It has examined, among other factors, their political awareness, media-culture interests and interpretations, their leisure time activities, future aspirations, and the implications of all of these things for the contribution of these young people to the reproduction or contestation of neoliberal discourses and practices. The thesis has also sought to map out and unpack some of the content, central tendencies, and conceptual, lexical, and semantic associations that constitute these young people's socio-cultural and political-economic schemata, and discussed some of the insights that these can contribute to a socio-cognitive approach to critical and progressive pedagogy aimed at helping young people develop a more cognizant awareness of neoliberal discourses and practices and their roles in reproducing or contesting them. This chapter begins with an overview of some the main themes discussed, and lessons found, in each chapter. It then proceeds to a discussion of some of the limitations of this study, and the lessons learned that can inform future research on this topic.

#### **9.1 Overview of Chapter Themes and Lessons**

In Chapter 1, I discussed the genealogy and ontological claims of neoliberal theory, and traced some of the structural consequences that neoliberal policies have had for UK and US societies. In particular, I described some of the ways that neoliberal ideology has structurally and discursively shaped major political-economic and socio-cultural UK and US institutions (e.g., corporations, think-tanks, welfare institutions, schools, non-profit organizations, and culture industries), creating what Plehwe et al., (2007) refer to as a network of hegemonic constellations that, in effect, legitimate and promote neoliberalism domestically and globally. From the analysis offered in this chapter, I outlined some of the possible implications that neoliberalism may pose for the political-economic and socio-cultural cognitive frameworks and concordant practices of contemporary urban UK and US young people.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the leading theories on capitalist social reproduction and its corresponding media driven consumer culture. This included some of the works of the classic and contemporary Frankfurt schools, the classic Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, and some of the key concepts and arguments from the works of Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, and Teun van Dijk. I paid particular attention to the empirical validity and criticisms of these approaches, and argued that a synthesis of their strengths, coupled with often neglected insights from cognitive and social psychology is needed to comprehensively theorize and research neoliberal hegemony and its multi-faceted and wide reaching material and discursive effects. I ended this chapter by setting out the broad conceptual framework that guided the methodology and data analysis for the empirical component of this thesis.

In Chapter 3, I connected the discussions of Chapters 1 and 2 to the wide literature on young people and youth culture. Specifically, I used the guidelines laid out in Chapter 2 to analyze four of the most prevalent themes found in the contemporary literature on young people and youth culture. These themes consisted of young people's accounts of identity construction, their agentic use of media-culture, the effects of media-culture on young people's socio-cognitive development, and youth political and civic engagement. From this preliminary meta-analysis, both gaps and insights were identified that further informed the empirical component of this thesis.

In Chapter 4, I described the methodology used for the empirical component of this thesis. By drawing on all the lessons and insights that came out of the literature reviewed in the first three chapters, I discussed the ontological orientations of my study, and laid out the research design and methodology. This methodology consisted of a broad array of qualitative inductive, critical-ethnographic, interview, and triangulation methods that were employed to collect data from a cross-sectional sample of LA and London millenials. This chapter also described the research sites where I carried out this study, the processes by which I gained access to them and the participants, the interviews with participants, and the ethical considerations that needed to be addressed. I ended the chapter by explaining how I conducted the data analysis using a combination of thematic, critical discourse, and socio-cognitive inspired analytic strategies culminating in

the construction of a three-fold actual/real typology of LA and London young people, which I categorized as: *Critical/Political*, *Artsy/Indie*, and *Mainstream*.

In Chapter 5, I described the first classification of my typology of LA and London young people: *Critical/Political*. From these participants' accounts of their socio-cultural experiences and political-economic knowledge, and particularly from their interpretations of their preferred media texts, I tentatively suggested that their cognitive frameworks of the social world are imbued with transposable critical, political, and empathetic dispositions. These dispositions, manifested as automatically expressed attitudes, inclinations, and rapid shifts between domain specific subjects, tended to lead and correspond to politically informed and detailed responses that were consistently critical of existing and dominant socio-cultural and political-economic discourses and practices. My account of these dispositions drew upon a socio-cognitive inspired critical discourse and bundle association analysis of the lexical, semantic, and conceptual associations, as well as voice intonations, facial expressions, and response times from the interviews with these participants. Of particular note, I highlighted how these young people's informed opinions on various domain specific subjects like education, media-culture, consumerism, welfare, and politics, and their abilities to rapidly, automatically, and seemingly unconsciously move across and make connections between them, suggests that their underlying socio-cultural and political-economic schemata, are intimately and intricately integrated.

I also noted how even though most of the young people in this classification answered most of my questions in a similar manner. That is, they shared many of the same views and opinions on various subjects, only three of them held a conception of political-economic organization that was ontologically antithetical to the standard neoliberal model. The others expressed a preference for what can be considered a more Keynesian/Left Neoliberal social democratic system (excluding Sam who identified as a Trotskyist socialist), which is probably premised on their ontological presuppositions which hold that human beings are too selfish to be able to implement and maintain a more radical alternative, however more preferable that alternative may be. This automatic belief that humans are predominantly selfish, appeared to be a deeply ingrained disposition in most of these young people, despite their politically precocious and highly empathetic views - one that, in effect, lends itself to the passive acceptance, and



thus consequent reproduction of, neoliberalism. Nonetheless, uncovering these fatalistic dispositions provided a valuable insight that helped me in forming recommendations that can contribute to a more socio-cognitive approach to critical and progressive pedagogy discussed in Chapter 8.

In Chapter 6, I described some of major socio-cultural experiences and leisure activities of the second classification of young people: *Artsy/Indie*. From the responses of these artistically inclined young people, I argued that a preoccupation with varying forms of cultural production provided these young people with a space to avoid the dominant neoliberal discourses of consumer capitalism. I also noted how this proactive engagement with artistic pursuits corresponds to their affective and aesthetic dispositions and tentative rejection of mainstream-culture. However, while expressing a degree of compassion for the suffering of others, which however ambivalent was most noticeable in their support for welfare programmes, these young people exhibited dispositions that were largely centred around individualistic aesthetic pursuits, which seem to correspond to their apolitical dispositional tendencies to avoid engagement with current political issues and struggles. From these insights, I argued that it is entirely possible that since these *Artsy/Indie* young people seem to have a dispositional aversion to political concerns, pedagogic strategies aimed at developing their critical and political dispositions (and by inference those of other young people who can be loosely situated within this classification) may fall on deaf ears. Moreover, by unpacking some of the central tendencies of their political-economic schemata, I also noted how their political-economic knowledge, while more substantial than that of the *Mainstream* young people, was still underdeveloped relative to that of the *Critical/Political* young people. Overall, the findings from this chapter suggest that at the very least, these young people may benefit from a more tailored and socio-cognitive approach to pedagogy that takes into account their aesthetic and apolitical dispositions.

In Chapter 7, I described the *Mainstream* young people. Out of all three classifications, the *Mainstream* young people were the ones who most readily echoed the dominant neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and upward mobility. Contra the cultural populist thesis that positions young people as sovereign agents who are beyond the influence of corporate culture, I argued and highlighted how these young people expressed career aspirations, and self-

interested, apathetic, and consumeristic dispositions that mirrored those promoted by their favourite media texts, which were generally highly corporatized.. Moreover, given that these young people expressed especially under-developed political-economic schemata, it is unlikely that they actively adopted such discourses after having compared and contrasted them with opposing ones.

However, in unpacking some of the central tendencies of their socio-cultural and political-economic schemata, I also highlighted potential spaces for neoliberal contestation. Moreover, unlike the *Artsy/Indie* young people who expressed a more pronounced apolitical disposition, these young people's political apathy may be a result of their relative underexposure to political-economic knowledge and practices, with the majority of the London participants, in particular, commenting that they have not had any lessons in civics or politics during their time in secondary schools. Hence, it would be inaccurate to classify these young people as apolitical, since they are not actively avoiding political-economic information and ideas; it is simply that their surrounding interpellating environments (e.g., schools, youth centres, and media-culture) have only presented them with one particular set of mostly neoliberal consumerist discourses. This was nonetheless potentially a positive insight, as there is no telling what the effects of a more critical and progressive pedagogy of the sort described in Chapter 8 may have on their political consciousness. However, unless such efforts are implemented, and implemented thoroughly, it is very likely that this group of young people will continue to reproduce neoliberal discourses and practices at a mostly dispositional level.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I reviewed the central tenets and political objectives of critical and progressive pedagogy. Drawing on the empirical findings of my study, I argued that these types of pedagogies seem to overlook the dispositional barriers that some young people may have developed and which can significantly filter out political information and social justice concerns. Moreover, I indicated what a socio-cognitive approach to pedagogy, aimed at fostering democratic, empathetic, critical, tolerant, and political dispositions, and at helping to displace pre-existing fatalistic, uncritical, apathetic, and apolitical dispositions, might entail. Following this, I laid out a series of activities that may help to achieve these goals. I ended the chapter with concluding remarks emphasizing the limitations of these proposed activities.

## 9.2 Methodological Limitations and Lessons

The data collection and analysis methods used for the empirical component of this thesis relied on inductive and sociological approaches, and were designed to generate preliminary accounts of the intersection between neoliberal structures and discourses, and contemporary young people's cognitive frameworks for making sense of the neoliberal world they inhabit. However, a number of important limitations revealed themselves that can inform future research. In this section, I briefly detail some of these limitations, and propose some of the ways that a revised methodology can help to address these limitations in future research in order to support the development of more comprehensive accounts of young people's cognitive frameworks and corresponding practices.

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 4, I was at times too rigid in the application of my interview schedule, and overlooked important cues from my participants where I should have probed them further in order to get richer data. Secondly, I was not able to ask all of my participants the same questions, which makes my typology all the more tentative, exploratory, and prototypical in nature. It is possible that had I had the opportunity to ask all my participants the same questions, the ensuing data analysis of their responses would have revealed more exact classifications than the three broad ones that I constructed. Thirdly, the discrepancy in sample sizes between the LA and London participants contributed to constructing the *Artsy/Indie* classification with only LA participants. Additionally a lack of more London participants may also be the reason for why I did not observe any significant differences between the participants that could be attributed to national settings. Fourthly, the response times, facial expressions, and valence strength variables that I used to support my claims concerning the description of my youth participants' dispositions, were based on approximate measurement derived from my subjective observations. Correspondingly, the interview methods that I used, as Vaisey (2009) argues, while good for generating detailed narratives and filtered or censored accounts, are mostly ineffective in gathering participants' unconscious cognitive processes. However, I maintain that the qualitative and inductive methods and linguistic analysis that I utilized, are empirically valid qualifiers that shed some light on my participants' unconscious cognitive frameworks, but which can be complemented with more exact social-psychological methods in future research. Taking all of these limitations and the

lessons they offer into consideration, the following methodological revisions could be applied to future research:

- *Deeper Ethnography*: More extensive participant observations in youth centres specifically, where young people tend to feel more at ease than they would in schools, is necessary to observe young people's practices, in order to more comprehensively detail how these relate to their expressed views, beliefs, and practices. Cyber ethnography that explores young peoples' blogs, social networking sites can also be employed to gather information on young people's consumptive habits, media-cultural preferences, and political understandings and leanings.<sup>77</sup>
- *Larger and Purposive Sample Sizes*: In addition to larger sample sizes future sampling methods must include protocols to draw in a more extensive range of young people, e.g. conservative and/or religious young people.
- *Quantitative Surveys*: In conjunction with larger sample sizes, the construction of surveys that ask young people about their consumption habits, musical tastes, and political-economic beliefs and attitudes can be used in order to explore if significant statistical correlations exist between these variables, as well as the proportion of young people that approximate to each type.
- *Lexical-decision tasks*: These include the use of computerized priming software (e.g., SuperLab or E-Prime) in order to create programmes that can better gauge participants' implicit attitudes and knowledge. That is, these methods are specifically designed to explore people's semantic memory, mental representations, and implicit attitudes and their corresponding valence by measuring their reaction times to a given stimulus (Zemack-Rugar et al., 2007). As the same stimuli are applied to all participants under controlled settings, and their reaction times are

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<sup>77</sup> While traditional ethnography whereby researchers fully immerse themselves in the everyday activities and lives of their participants and their environments is often recommended for research on young people and their experiences, I find this approach to be unnecessary for this particular research. I do not have the space to go into detail on this topic, but I believe that the types of ethnography that I propose, in conjunction with the other methods outlined, should sufficiently generate data that accounts for the nuances and complexities of young people's lives, experiences, views, and practices.

measured in milliseconds by specialized software, these methods address the limitations of the more subjective observations and measurements that I employed. In other words, they can help elicit data that will make the dispositional characteristics of my existing typology, and of other potential subsequent classifications, more precise and objective, particularly as the controlled settings will also help to ensure that all participants involved are examined for the same variables.

- *Problem-Solving tasks:* These include think aloud protocols or timed written responses that induce participants to use abstract and conceptual reasoning in order to solve complicated problems based on hypothetical scenarios. These types of methods can be used to explore the development of young peoples' political schemata, and the ways that they draw on their pre-existing knowledge frameworks and attitudes to solve political conflicts (Torney-Purta, 1992). For example, Adelson and O'Neil's (1966) classic study on young people's political cognitive development included the following question: Imagine that 1,000 people have left their society and moved to an abandoned island. How would you organize this new society and its government? They found that older adolescents had more nuanced understandings about laws, authority, and freedom as compared to younger adolescents who tended to express a more benevolent view of leaders and the status quo. In my proposed research, in addition to eliciting data that can lead to the assessment of the development of young people's political schemata, these methods may also elicit data, which can help add more characteristics to the existing typology, such as types of political reasoning, and/or contribute to the construction of new classifications.
- *Potential Questions to add to the interview schedule:*
  - 1) How would you characterize your style of dress, and what do you think influences it?
  - 2) How much do you think your government spends on welfare/benefits programmes?
  - 3) What do you think about labour unions?
  - 4) Do you think there is such a thing as human nature? Why/why not? And if they think there is, what are its main characteristics?

While these proposed methodological revisions may seem overly ambitious and would probably require extensive collaboration with social psychologists, they offer a comprehensive and multi-dimensional methodology that complement one another. Moreover, I believe them to be feasible and necessary in future research on the relationships between neoliberal discourses and young people's socio-cognitive frameworks, processes, and corresponding practices.

Finally, the trans-disciplinary approach that I have taken throughout this thesis means that I have sacrificed depth in certain areas. However, as I have explained and argued throughout this thesis, I maintain that neoliberalism has political-economic structural imperatives and socio-cognitive dimensions that must be included to some extent in all sociological research concerned to properly understand the social reproduction or contestation of neoliberalism. With this in mind, I have read and carefully studied widely on the areas outside of my immediate disciplinary boundaries (in some cases consulting with respective and established experts), and have made it a priority throughout this thesis to both draw attention to the limitations of the study, and provide the reader with an extensive and comprehensive literature review, footnotes, and reference list. Through this approach, I have sought to contribute, albeit in a modest way, to more nuanced understandings of contemporary political socialization and processes of social-reproduction and/or social change, and to the emerging interdisciplinary fields of youth politics, global media studies, and socio-cognition.

### **9.3 Conclusion:**

*Human nature is neither a biologically fixed and innate sum total of drives nor is it a lifeless shadow of cultural patterns to which it adapts itself smoothly, it is the product of human evolution, but it also has certain inherent mechanism and laws. There are certain factors in man's nature which are fixed and unchangeable, the necessity to satisfy the physiologically conditioned drives and the necessity to avoid isolation and moral aloneness. We have seen that the individual has to accept the mode of life rooted in the system of production and distribution peculiar for any given society. In the process of dynamic adaption to culture, a number of powerful drives develop which*

*motivate the actions and feeling of the individual. The individual may or may not be conscious of these drives, but in any case they are forceful and demand satisfaction once they have developed* (Fromm 2001, p. 17).

There is no direct causal mechanism linking thought to action. Individual human behaviour is far too complex, and thoughts alone, whether conscious or unconscious, are only one of many confounding variables that determine behaviour. Nonetheless, exploring the multifaceted ways in which neoliberalism and all of its various and concomitant discursive articulations actually permeate the thought processes of individuals (and their interaction with other processes, e.g., environmental, sociological, and emotional ones) is key to understanding its reproduction, and to uncovering spaces where neoliberal discourses are and may be contested. In this thesis, I have attempted to map out some of most important structural and ideological consequences of neoliberalism relevant to contemporary UK and US societies, the various ways in which neoliberal discourses are distributed via major socio-cultural institutional outlets, how they surround UK and US millenials, and the consequent relationships between those discourses and the socio-cognitive frameworks of my sample of LA and London millenials. The preliminary results from my research indicate that, far from being *homo-economicus*, all of my participants expressed variations of sympathetic and empathetic tendencies. Despite being immersed in what my youth worker participant Jerald referred to, in the LA context, as a 360 media environment (LA is an important centre and home of neoliberal media-culture as is London), all of my youth participants held a variety of anti-neoliberal views. After agonizingly trying to pinpoint the institutional setting where exposure to critical perspectives can have the biggest impact, I found that I did not have sufficient data to draw any robust conclusions of this kind. And frankly, even if I had spent more time with these young people, conducted dozens more interviews, and had strapped them to a machine (if such a machine could be invented) to more comprehensively map out their inner cognitive processes, it is unlikely that I could ever discover why it is that some young people are more critical and political than others.

Moreover, in terms of conceptions of human nature and political-economic organization, which are arguably the most important factors in the reproduction or contestation of hegemonic structural and discursive forms, only three of my forty-

three youth participants were able to articulate conceptions that are antithetical to neoliberalism. The rest could not, which at least provisionally suggests that they are likely to enact more or less conscious dispositions and practices that in some way reproduce some mode of neoliberalism. However, what did seem to be a striking revelation is that even the most minimal exposure to critical perspectives, be it from media, family, school, or youth centres, can have the potential to open up a young person to more critical evaluations of their society. That is, no matter how much they are bombarded with specific discourses that reinforce their neoliberal worldview, and for how long, one teacher, one song, one movie, one friend, or one relative that is critical of such a worldview, has the potential to alter a young person's views (as described in sections 5.5 and 6.5). If there is any lesson to be learned from this case study, it is that people who are interested in challenging neoliberalism, can make an impact, but they have to do a better job spreading those critical discourses, and they have to start presenting young people with viable and radically different alternatives to neoliberalism, which first starts with a fundamental and in depth examination of human nature, its possibilities, what democracy means, and to what extent society should be democratic. My participants, however hopeless they sometimes sounded, seemed more than willing to at least listen to accounts of those alternatives, and more than intellectually competent enough to meaningfully engage with them. As one of my youth worker participants (echoing Bourdieu, 1990) declared, albeit somewhat pessimistically:

If you grow up in a family or you grow up in a school where there is a theme of political action or social change, it's going to be much easier or more natural for someone to grow into that. So if you take someone that is growing up in a family where there is no consciousness at all that you can do anything to improve your life or the life around you, that all you have to do is work and buy these things, and you're just a slave to that machine, then, by the time you're a 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grader, one class is not going to turn you around. It's not going to make much of a difference. They're [young people] going to have to start connecting the dots, but there has to be dots for them to connect. And that comes from mentors and other influences.

-Jerald (Youth Worker Bresee Foundation)



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## **Appendix A: Interview Schedule for Young People**

### **After School Activities, Leisure time:**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, name, age, hobbies, what you normally do after school or in your free time?
2. Are there any after-school programmes or youth centers that you go to? If so, why, and what type of activities do participate in?
3. If you do attend a youth center, what types of subjects are taught there? Are any particular programmes that they emphasize or expect you to participate in?
4. If you had more free time, what would you do with it?

### **Perceptions on education:**

1. What high school did you go to?
2. How do you feel about your education thus far?
3. What would you change about it if you could?
4. What do you feel the role of education should be? That is, what do you think schools should be teaching students?

### **Consumption:**

1. Do you ever go to the mall or shopping centers? If so, do you like going to those places? Why or why not? How often would you say you go to these places?
2. Do you purchase brand name clothing and electronics, why or why not?
3. If so, can you describe to me what you're thinking when you purchase something you really want? For example, let's say you're buying a nice pair of shoes, what exactly is going through your mind, your thoughts, your feelings?
4. Furthermore, do you know where these brand-name clothes and electronics are made, and under what conditions they are made?
5. If so, where did you learn that, and what do you think about the situation of the workers that make the products you buy?
6. If not, why do you not consider their situations when purchasing your items?

7. What about the impact on the environment that occurs because of the production of these items, do you know anything about that? If so, what are your thoughts?

**Opinions on socio-economic issues and politics:**

1. How do you think the current political system that you live under works?
2. So for instance what do you think about the current Obama administration/ Cameron administration?
3. Our economic system is described as a capitalist system of private property rights and competing privately owned businesses where individuals are rewarded based on how hard or how little they work, what do you think of this economic arrangement?
4. Do you know about any other political and economic alternatives?
5. Do you think it is the government's job to do something about social problems like poverty and global warming, or do you think these problems should be mostly addressed by private charities and organizations that do not rely on taxation but on voluntary donations?
6. Why do you think that some people are homeless, unemployed, or poor?
7. What do you think about government welfare programmes?
8. As an individual, do you think that you have, or can have (if you wanted to) a say in government, and how the government is run? That is, how do you think you can influence the government, what kinds of actions do you think are necessary to make governments responsive to the wants of their citizens?
9. What do you think about voting, do you think it is effective as a way to get the government to do what citizens want, or to influence government policies? And do you vote, or would vote, and for whom? Why or Why not?
10. Do you think that the mainstream/major political parties represent the interests of their supporters?
11. What do you think can be done to help solve some of these large social problems that we face like homelessness, poverty, and global warming?
12. Are some of the political views you expressed different from those of your parents?

**Family life:**

1. What do you think your parents expect of you, that is, what do you think they want you to do in life? Are their aspirations for your future, different



from your own? If so can you tell me how? For example, is there a particular career path that they would like you to take or that they give you advice on?

2. What do your parents do for a living? Would you like to have a job similar to theirs?
3. Do you think parents feel that your education is preparing you for your future aspirations, that is, are there any subjects they wish that schools would teach you?

### **Media and Culture Intake and Interpretation:**

1. What type of music/television/film do you watch or listen to? Why do watch or listen to them, and what type of messages do you interpret from them?
2. Can you think of 1 song, 1 TV show, and 1 film that you really like and why?
3. Do you ever surf the Internet? If so, what type of websites do you visit and why?
5. Do you blog on the Internet, if so, what about, or do you visit blogs, and if so, what about?
6. What types of newspapers and magazines do you read if any?
7. Where do you get your news from? And when you watch the news, do you think that the newscasters are telling you the truth about events?
8. What are your favorite news sections that watch?
9. Do you listen to any political music, or watch political TV shows, movies, or internet sites? Why or why not?

### **Personal Aspirations and Biography:**

1. Finally, what do you want to do in your future? Is there a particular career that you want to do, and why?
2. Who do you look up to the most and why?
3. Are there any famous people you look up to and why?
4. What are some of things in the world that care about the most?

## **Appendix B: Interview Schedule for Youth Workers**

### **Education:**

1. What type of subjects do you teach, and or what does your work with young people entail, and about how much time would you say you spend with your students?
2. Some schools I have visited have a mandatory geography class where all 9<sup>th</sup> graders are taught about social issues like economic globalization, theories on poverty, and even sweatshop working conditions. Are such subjects taught to young people in your after-school non-profit organization)?
3. If so, what do you think the impact of such a class has on your students' social consciousness?
4. If not, do you believe that such a class would be beneficial to your students, why or why not? And why do you think such a class is not offered by your after-school non-profit organization?

### **Opinions on Student Aspirations:**

1. What would you say are your students' major aspirations in life?
2. What do you think are the biggest influences on your students' values, attitudes, and life aspirations? And why do you think this?
3. Who do you think are major role models for your students?

### **Media and Culture:**

1. From your experiences, what are the most popular forms of media-culture that your students engage with? Can you think of specific examples?
2. What type of lessons do you think your students learn from these media artifacts? That is, what do you think are some of the main messages they receive or interpret from media? And, why do you think this?

**Appendix C**  
Demographic Information of Each Youth Participant

**Los Angeles Participants**

(Each participant is listed here in the group where they were interviewed as discussed in Chapter 4.)<sup>78</sup>

**South-Central Los Angeles (Group): Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Luz
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Mexican
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working Class: Her parents are garment workers.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and spent most of her life in South-Central Los Angeles, and was born in Mexico.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Undecided, and is currently concerned with her immigration status which does not allow her to work.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to anarcho-punk, grind core, Talking Heads, Pink Floyd, reads novels by Dostoyevski, and watches political documentaries.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Lupe
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Mexican

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<sup>78</sup> Their socio-economic status is inferred from their parents' employment occupations, geographical residency and upbringing, and/or their unique accents.

<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in South-Central Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Undecided, but wants to study history or anthropology at a university.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to punk music and bands like Talking Heads. Reads novels by Kafka, and watches mostly indie films and political documentaries.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Gloria
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Mexican
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Lower middle-class: Her mother is a school counselor.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in South-Central Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become an independent filmmaker.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Pink Floyd, Muse. Watches the Daily Show, Stephen Colbert Show, and Family Guy, and her Favourite movie is Me You and Everyone You Know (an American/British indie romance-comedy).

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Tiffany
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Female

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Salvadorian
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-class: Her father is a private construction contractor, and her mother owns a water distribution store.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in South-Central Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to pursue a career in anything related to animal care or husbandry.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Electronic Dance Music. Watches Nip/Tuck (an American drama series), and one of her favourite movies is Innocent Voices (A Mexican film about the Salvadorian Civil War).

### Zoo (Group): Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Anthony
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Studio City district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	N/A
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to R&B and soul music, and watches a lot of PBS shows, Rachel Maddow, and the Daily Show.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Joey
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up and lives in the Sherman Oaks district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a journalist.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to punk rock, reads Adbusters magazine, and watches political documentaries.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Ben
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: His parents are academics.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Silverlake district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Want to become an academic or research scientist.

<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to the Red Hot Chili Peppers (a US alternative rock band), and watches Anime films and science documentaries.
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<b>Pseudonym</b>	Jesse
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Mexican
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class:
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the San Fernando district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a musician.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to anything that is not produced by the Disney Corporation. Watches Family Guy.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Evyn
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	African-American
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in North Hollywood.

<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a video game developer.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Electric Dance Music, reads Mangas (Japanese comics), and watches Animae films and shows.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Phillip
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in Studio City district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a musician.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Pink Floyd, and indie rock bands. Watches the Office (American version).

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Zack
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class



<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Tahunga district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a musician.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Damien Rice and Iron and Wine. Watches Family Guy, South Park, and Jackass. His favourite movie is the Polar Bear Express.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Diana
<b>Age</b>	16
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Peruvian
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: Her father works for the department of water and power.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Atwater Village district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Undecided
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Korean pop, and reads Korean Romance novels. Her favourite book is Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Emir
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Turkish

<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Born and grew up in Turkey and immigrated to the US when he was 16, and resides in North Hollywood.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	N/A
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap, and watches the show the Office (American version), James Bond films, and Fails videos on YouTube.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Ela
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Jewish
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives in Lake Balboa, and spent a small time living in Israel.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to be a model.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Britney Spears and Dr. Dre. Reads celebrity news magazines including People and Vogue, and watches CSI and Gossip Girl.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Dennis
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Male

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White/Bulgarian
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: His mother is an artist and his dad is an engineer.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	He was born in Bulgaria, but spent the majority of his life in the North Hollywood district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to be an entrepreneur/financial investor.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Bulgarian music, dub-step, Pink Floyd, and watches Skins (UK version) and Lost (US drama).

<b>Pseudonym</b>	John
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White/Greek
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: His parents are restaurateurs.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Studio City district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Undecided.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to old-school rap.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Becky
<b>Age</b>	17

<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Jewish
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: Her father is a rocket scientist.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Studio City district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to work with animals.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to country music, and her favourite movie is the Frisco Kid.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Karina
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Salvadorian
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class: Her father is a security guard, and her mother is a cashier for a pharmacy.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in South Gate, a small city bordering LA.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to work with animals.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Bruce Springsteen and Buddy Holly, and likes movies with the actor River Phoenix.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Maurine
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<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the North Hollywood district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to work with animals.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to the pop-punk band All American Rejects, reads music blogs and newspapers, and watches Fox News.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Maria
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latina
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up in Downtown LA.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to work with animals.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Watches animals related shows on PBS and National Geographic.

### World Vision (Group): Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Arlene
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latina/Salvadorian
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: Her parents own a small garment business.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up in the Downtown/Pico Union neighbourhood of LA.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to be a teacher.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	N/A

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Lisa
<b>Age</b>	16
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Asia/Filipino
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up in the Downtown/Pico Union neighbourhood of LA.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	Wants to be an artist.

<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to comedian George Carlin, and watches political documentaries.
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<b>Pseudonym</b>	Desmon
<b>Age</b>	16
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Asian/Filipino
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up in the Downtown/Pico Union neighbourhood of LA.
<b>Career Aspirations</b>	N/A
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Watches Anime shows and movies.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Senai
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Salvadorian
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up in the Downtown/Pico Union neighbourhood of LA.

<b>Career Aspiration</b>	N/A
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	N/A

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Elizabeth
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Mexican
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up in the Downtown/Pico Union neighbourhood of LA.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a teacher.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	N/A

**Bresee Foundation (Group): Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Fernanda
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Mexican



<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class: Her father is a construction worker.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Pico Union district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a nurse and own a chain of nursing homes.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap and singers Rhianna and Nicky Minaj, and watches the shows Bad Girls Club and The Jersey Shore.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Jose
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Salvadorian
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Grew up and lives in Rampart district of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a filmmaker.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to metal and mainstream pop music, and watches independent films.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Jazmin
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Irish-Mexican
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the McArthur Park area of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a tattoo artist or youth worker.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to punk rock and hardcore metal, and watches political documentaries.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Veronica
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Latino/Mexican
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class: Her parents are garment workers.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Born in Mexico, and grew up in Pico Union Area of Los Angeles.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a documentary filmmaker.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap and pop, mainstream Mexican music, and watches The Jersey Shore and Bad Girls Club.

## London Participants

### Islington (Group): Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Aimee
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class. Her father works for a newspaper and her mother is a yoga teacher.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Islington area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to pursue a career in art or music.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to punk-rock and folk-punk bands, and reads music and political blogs on the Internet.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	James
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: His parents are both teachers.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Islington area of London.

<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to pursue a career in art or film production.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to punk rock and folk-punk music, watches movies directed by Alfred Hitcock, RT News, and RSA animated lectures.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Sam
<b>Age</b>	16
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: His mother is a special education needs teacher, and his father is a company researcher.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Islington area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Undecided
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to Pink Floyd and Bob Dylan, and reads the Guardian and the New Statesman.

**Bermondsey (Group): Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Jack
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White British

<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Bermondsey area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a youth worker.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream British rap and watches East Enders and Holyoaks.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Josh
<b>Age</b>	16
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Bermondsey area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Expressed an interest in becoming a youth worker.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to rappers like M&M.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Lindsey
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Bermondsey area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a hairdresser.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap music, and watches East Enders and Holyoaks.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Alice
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Bermondsey area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a child psychologist.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap and pop and watches East Enders.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Anthony
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Bermondsey area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a physical therapist for a football team.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap, and watches Football programming.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Dilanda
<b>Age</b>	16
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Black British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Middle-Class: Her parents are teachers.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Bermondsey area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to be a child psychologist.

<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap and pop, and watches East Enders and Holyoaks.
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### Hackney (Group): Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Tirian
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Black British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class: His mother is retired.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Hackney area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become a famous chef like Jamie Oliver.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap, the rapper Drake and watches shows with Jamie Oliver.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Sean
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Black British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class. His mother is a homemaker, and his father is a clothing merchant.



<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Hackney area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to run a business of some sort.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap, the rappers Drake and P-Diddy and watches East Enders.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Iris
<b>Age</b>	17
<b>Gender</b>	Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	British of Algerian and Portuguese descent.
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class:
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Hackney area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Want to become a model.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to mainstream rap and pop, singer Alicia Keys, watches the show Top Model (both UK and US versions), and cites Save The Last Dance as her favourite movie.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Tyrone
<b>Age</b>	19
<b>Gender</b>	Male

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Black British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class: His father is a black cab driver.
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Hackney area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to own a black cab and/or fast food chicken restaurant.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to R&B, mainstream rap, rapper Drake, watches Made in Chelsea, and reads the Sun.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Jenkins
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Black British
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	Working-Class:
<b>Predominant Geographic Residence/s</b>	Lives and grew up in the Hackney area of London.
<b>Career Aspiration</b>	Wants to become an international business mogul like Alan Sugar.
<b>Major Media-Culture Preferences</b>	Listens to R&B, mainstream rap, watches the Wire, The Apprentice (UK version), Dr. Who, and reads the Financial Times.