

The Teenager and the Social Scientist

Chris Brickell

Abstract

Which came first, the teenager or the social scientist? This article explores the rise of the social scientific study of the adolescent in 1940s and 50s New Zealand. Our social science scene came of age during these decades, and teenagers became the object of much inquiry and social debate at the same time. Was this co-emergence coincidental? In this article I suggest that these two groups – adolescents and social scientists – were mutually constitutive. As Aileen Maxwell, Ada Gilling, Dorothy Crowther and A.E. Manning described and constructed mid-century youth cultures in particular ways, they also helped to create a platform and a public profile for social scientific writing. Is it stretching it too far to suggest that the social scientist was the ‘bodgie’ or the ‘widgie’ of the intellectual world?

Introduction: making people

Teenagers, legend has it, made their debut during the 1950s. Respectable grown-ups watched aghast while the milk bars filled with loud-mouthed, motorbike-riding youngsters who rejected the mores of polite society. Rock-and-roll was just around the corner, ready to dislodge the older, politer order of entertainments. This is an appealing picture in many ways, with its suggestion of a buttoned-down New Zealand society shaken up by a new generation.

It may be true that urban New Zealand was ‘all shook up’ during the 1950s – to borrow the title of Redmer Yska’s well-known book (Yska, 1993) – but teenagers were no overnight sensation. Modern youth have a complex pre-history and, as a specific character type, the teenager emerged over several decades (for analyses of the international context, see Davis, 1990; Savage, 2007; Schrum, 2004). Still, the early post-war years constituted an important era of relative affluence and increased urbanisation, and young people came to have new public presence. Social scientists played their part in this shift, and they underwent their own process of ‘becoming’ at around the same time. On the international stage, the ‘psychologist’, the ‘social worker’ and the

‘sociologist’ began to take shape as intellectual types, and sometimes competed for professional ascendancy (Kunzel, 1993; Lunbeck, 1994). This process would continue into the 1960s.

This article explores how teenagers and social scientists emerged simultaneously. How did the latter, I ask, make the teenager visible and, in the process, construct themselves as professional knowers of society? There is a general agreement, within sociology and cultural history at least, that childhood and adolescence are social constructions. Economic influences, linguistic practices, socially-mediated affectivity and a whole range of social interactions come together to create a particular sort of person. Young people have always existed, of course, but there are numerous social contingencies: the boundaries between youth and adulthood, the concepts that organise social practices, and the way those practices congeal into identities (Irvine, 1994; Lesko, 2001; Savage, 2007; Springhall, 1986).

Sociologists and other social scientists have been less inclined to see themselves and their own disciplines as socially constructed as well. Terrence McDonald tells of the reluctance to explore the ‘discourse of “science”, “cause”, “variable”, and “analysis”’, and the ways that discourse ‘is revealed, in its turn, to be historically contingent’ (McDonald, 1996: 105). Social scientific methods, the ideological underpinnings of social scientific writing, and the kinds of person who might explore social phenomena – the ‘sociologist’, the ‘psychologist’, and so on – are just as much the products of social, historical and linguistic shifts as teenagers themselves.

Let us turn to these processes of co-construction. Writing of ‘larrikins’ in the Australian context, Melissa Bellanta suggests that youth cultures emerge as a result of both ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ processes. On the one hand, concepts are imposed upon young people by those with the power to define: news media outlets, academics, local authorities or influential cultural commentators. Youth movements and subcultures also develop from within, and sometimes their members speak in similar terms to the adults who presume to know about them (Bellanta, 2012: xx). Social scientists are among those who have attempted to describe, delineate, and sometimes even diagnose teenage cultures. During the 1940s and 1950s, developments in psychology, social work and sociology – new understandings of personality, adjustment and maturity, new uses of the case history and ‘natural history’ methods, along with the

professionalization of knowledge about adolescence – all dovetailed with an intensified focus on the lives and ‘problems’ of teenagers.

I explore these themes by examining three New Zealand studies. These studies were not in themselves sociological, but they were produced within related contexts and all three gesture in interesting ways towards the emergence of sociology as a discipline. The first study, Maxwell and Gilling’s *The Working Girl of New Zealand*, is an Otago University Preventive Medicine dissertation completed in 1942. Dorothy Crowther’s study of youth cultures in Christchurch is the second text, a Canterbury University psychology department working paper that appeared in print in 1956, just two years after the appearance of the shocking ‘Mazengarb Report’ that told of rambunctious youth cultures, sexual impropriety and materialistic values (Mazengarb et al., 1954; Molloy, 1993). The third text is A.E. Manning’s curiously-titled 1958 book *The Bodgie: A Study in Abnormal Psychology*, available in New Zealand bookshops at the time.

Work and society in Dunedin

Aileen Maxwell and Ada Gilling were fifth-year preventive medicine students at Otago University. From 1923 onwards, students in the preventive medicine programme completed a dissertation on a health-related topic of their choice. The very first research projects examined topics solely within the public health sphere: tuberculosis, poor housing conditions, goitre and ‘lead poisoning in a paint factory’ (McEnroe, 1925). From the late 1930s, research on young people became more popular. Early examples were survey-based projects in which the students collected health-related data, laid out statistical tables and graphed relevant patterns. W.A. Carswell and J.S. McVeigh, for instance, conducted a health survey of adolescent school pupils in Dunedin (Carswell and McVeigh, 1937). Other students entered institutional settings – St Joseph’s boy’s home in one case, a YMCA camp in another – and assessed sanitary conditions and the health of individual inhabitants (Hall, 1939; Matthews, 1939). Noel Roydhouse offered a reasonably wide-ranging survey of the Otekaieke Special School for intellectually impaired boys and youths, in the countryside inland from Oamaru. Roydhouse explored ‘pupils and their education’, along with ‘public health aspects of the institution’ (Roydhouse, 1949; for a further discussion of Otekaieke see Bardsley, 2001).

While these dissertations showed evidence of a turn to youth, they offered little detail on the intricacies of individual lives or group dynamics. Instead, they concentrated on buildings (spaciousness, ventilation, the condition of the kitchens, numbers of bedrooms and bathrooms) and the state of individual health, rather than on social processes. There was, however, one significant departure from this pattern: Aileen Maxwell and Ada Gilling's dissertation *The Working Girl of New Zealand*, written in 1942. Maxwell and Gilling's study explored the situation of 103 teenage girls and young women in Dunedin, each of whom worked either in Woolworths, a popular general store, or in the factories of clothing firm Ross and Glendining.

The Working Girl provided information on tooth decay, headaches and eye strain, the stuff of preventive medicine, but Maxwell and Gilling's approach was much broader. These students' holistic approach contained a strong ethnographic component, even though they did not use that term. 'It has been our desire to study the working girl', they wrote:

[In order] to understand her joys and ambitions, her disappointments and rebuffs, we saw the necessity of understanding her environment ... To do that we had to enter that environment, not as medical students intent to learn, but as one of the girls, to see through her eyes, enjoy her fun and play her games. To that end we have lived with these girls, talked and played with them, and spent hours with them at their work (Maxwell and Gilling, 1942: 1).

The young researchers were determined to see 'through the eyes of those who guide their steps along the troubled path from school to shop and factory' (p. 1). Although they sought to explore health-related issues, they approached their participants 'not as patients in a hospital ward, but as normal healthy girls' (p. 2). This represents what Hans Pols calls the 'natural history model' of psychology. In this approach, popular in North America at the time, real-life spaces, rather than therapeutic or correctional settings, provided the research environment into which researchers ventured (Pols, 2002: 137).

First, Maxwell and Gilling gained an introduction to the Y.W.C.A.'s 'Tiki Club' which consisted mostly of 'industrial girls' aged between 14 and 20 (p. 11). Integrity and a sense of research ethics were important, and the researchers revealed the initial worries of their contact person at the Y.W.C.A.:

Hers had been the distressing experience of seeing previous visitors, through sheer lack of tact, instil a feeling of embarrassment and inferiority among the girls. But their welcome to us was reassuring and encouraging and we soon realised that they were determined to do

their bit in exchanging experiences with us, or rather “swapping yarns” as they more aptly put it. And so we learned of sciving, button-holing and machining – terms familiar to the girl in the Boot Factory, and heard the badinage that is rife when two rival firms meet. For well represented there that night were Ross & Glendining’s and McKinley’s Boot Factories (p. 11).

Initially there was a noticeable disjunction between the world of the researcher and that of the participant, but this boundary began to weaken: ‘We may have arrived as strangers to give them a glimpse of our lives as Medical Students, but as the evening drew to a close we found ourselves regarded as one of them, receiving and accepting an invitation to spend Easter with them in camp’ (p. 11). The camp was held at Larnach Castle, and there the researchers mingled with the fifty participants from ‘schools, shops, offices, industry, the Training College and Art School’. Maxwell and Gilling took part in “physical jerks” in the ball-room, discussion sessions, tramps, meal times and conducted what we might now call ‘focus groups’ with their research participants.

This project also included attempts at social analysis. Maxwell and Gilling noted that most of Ross and Glendining’s workers began with two years secondary education, but that increasing wartime demand for labour meant ‘girls are needed and more are applying for positions and so some are being taken on earlier’ (p. 23). In line with a wider shift that post-war labour markets would further accentuate, ‘young married women too are now finding work in the Factory’ (p. 23; see the broader discussion in Nolan, 2000: chap. 7). Not always was this a docile labour force. In the boot section, the Tiki Club girls ‘wage a constant warfare with the forewoman’ (p. 30). Hat factory workers, in contrast, lacked the ‘bold brave spirits of many of the others ... Indeed, we learned from the forewoman, that they cried very easily at even the slightest rebuke’ (p. 19).

Social stigma made an appearance too. Some of the young workers did not disclose to outsiders that they worked in a factory, ‘so demonstrating their awareness of the stigma that rests on factories and factory workers – a bequest from the days when “sweating” was the rule’ (p. 39). Here the ideological mingled with the material. Maxwell and Gilling’s interviews and observations unearthed the physical conditions of the young women’s work: poor heating and ventilation, insufficient breaks and overcrowding (p. 38). They noted that Woolworths workers, with good facilities for breaks and recreation, were better accommodated than those at Ross and Glendining.

The Working Girl's authors began to map aspects of social networks. They observed that friendships extended beyond the factories and into the outside world – among those in the hat factory, a number ‘frequently make up picture parties among themselves’ – and that many of the girls shared in a sporting life on the weekends (p. 19). The hat-makers formed a hockey team, boot factory workers played basketball together, and other pastimes were noted: ‘some of the older girls were rather concerned about the younger girls drinking in hotels after work’ (p. 25). Consumer culture was never far from the surface. Those in the gown factory stressed their trade ‘would be of use to them throughout their lives, for even now they could make their whole wardrobe’, and Maxwell and Gilling noted that it is ‘not unusual’ for workers to ‘despise any but the most expensive brand of stockings’ (p. 23).

So, what is sociologically significant here? Certainly it is not the theory, for there was none. Instead, the significance lies in methods, topics and general epistemological sympathies. Maxwell and Gilling’s approach was highly systematic. They collected statistics on levels of education, family size, living arrangements, length of employment, and set these out alongside a minimally ethnographic approach, participant observation and focus groups. Their study attended closely to elements of the means of production, the condition of shops and factory spaces, their effect on the health and wellbeing of its subjects, and the social world that developed there.

This dissertation contained one more interesting element: the visual. Eighteen photographs, taken by either the students or an assistant, showed aspects of the young women’s work and social lives. Members of the Tiki Club appear in group shots taken outside Larnach Castle. One photograph is captioned ‘Some of the industrial girls and the authors’, all of whom smile at the camera (Figure 1). In other images, the Ross and Glendining factory in Stafford Street appears from the outside, while a series of images shows the work spaces inside. In Figure 2, workers sew headbands onto hats, and the completed products cover every surface of the room. This photograph illustrates the disposition of workers to one another in this industrial setting: they sit around a table under the watchful gaze of a supervisor, and diligently apply themselves to the work. Eyes down, the hats – rather than their co-workers – are the focus of attention. Maxwell and Gilling’s discussion emphasises the material aspects of production. The authors note that ‘the glare makes their

work very trying'; 'that it is dirty work and the fluff is rather troublesome' (pp. 17-18).

The remainder of the photos show other corners of the Ross and Glendining establishment. In the gown section of the Stafford Street factory, we see the cutting out tables, machinists, fitters and finishers. A sprayer and a presser round out the depiction of the handkerchief department. Most of the young women attend to their work, but the viewer can imagine opportunities for more sociable interactions across the machines (see Figure 4).

Figure 1: 'Some of the industrial girls and the authors', outside Larnach Castle, 1942.



Figure 2: 'Hat factory', Ross and Glendining, Dunedin, 1942.



Figure 3: 'Handkerchief machinists', Ross and Glendining, Dunedin, 1942.



Figure 4: 'Sprayer', Ross and Glendining, Dunedin, 1942.



These images, and their research setting, evoke an early visual sociology. This movement emerged out of late nineteenth-century documentary photography. Well-known practitioners included P.H. Emerson, who photographed working life in English fishing villages, and Jacob Riis, recorder of inner-city immigrant experience in New York (Harper, 1988: 57; Riis, 1957). Between 1896 and 1916 ‘thirty-one articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* used photographs as evidence and illustration’ (Harper, 1988: 57). Most sociologists abandoned visual methods during the middle decades of the twentieth century (Stasz, 1979), although the sociologically-trained Lewis Hine continued to photograph women, men and children at work until his death in 1940. Hine’s images are a mixture of close-ups of workers with machinery: young women fix the edges of pantyhose and polish batches of glass stoppers, and groups of garment workers sew on buttons (Hine, 1981). Perhaps Maxwell and Gilling, with their mix of close ups and wide shots of factory work, knew about Hine’s work? We can only guess, as Hine is nowhere mentioned in their text or the dissertation’s brief bibliography (discussed in further detail later in this article).

Maxwell and Gilling gestured towards social science approaches of the later twentieth century too. They anticipated the concerns of progressive sociologists, making suggestions for improvements to working conditions: improved breaks and tea room facilities in particular (p. 71). Still, they worried that ‘little benefit may come to [the workers] from our study of these conditions’ (p. 74). These researchers also sought to wear away the boundaries between researchers and participants, noting that ‘our association with these girls has been of immense value to us beyond the mere gaining of new friendships’ (p. 74). In 1981, when British sociologist Ann Oakley reported on her interviews with women about childbirth and motherhood, she sought to weaken the boundary between the aloof interviewer and her interviewees (Oakley, 1981). Maxwell and Gilling trod much the same path.

There are similarities, too, between Maxwell and Gilling’s approach and that of Anna Kraak who, in 1996, carried out a period of ethnographic fieldwork in Dunedin’s Captain Cook Tavern. Not only were the ages of the research participants very similar but, like Maxwell and Gilling, Kraak immersed herself in the research context and aimed to minimise ‘the social distance between researcher and research subjects’ (Kraak, 1999: 157). While Maxwell and Gilling focussed on young women’s workplace issues, Kraak’s observations showed the contours of the relationships between young men and women in a

‘leisure place’ setting. Kraak’s pub, like Maxwell and Gilling’s factories, shaped participants’ lives – and the research agenda – in particular ways.

Street life in Christchurch

Dorothy Crowther’s *Street Society in Christchurch* is another mid-century treasure, now mostly forgotten (Crowther, 1956). A ‘Psychological Report’ – a working paper of sorts – *Street Society* was published at Canterbury University in 1956. Crowther drew inspiration from a series of articles in Christchurch newspapers earlier that year which told of young people congregating in the city’s ‘streets and milk-bars’ (Crowther, 1956: 1). The title of the ensuing report closely resembles that of *Street Corner Society*, William Foote Whyte’s famous 1943 study of Boston’s youth gangs (Whyte, 1955 [1943]). If Crowther was directly influenced by Whyte’s research, though – or its precursors, Thrasher’s *The Gang* (1942 [1927]) and Shaw’s *The Jack Roller* (1968 [1930]) – she did not report it. Her term ‘street society’ designated ‘those young people who frequent the streets for recreation and amusement’ (p. 3).

Like Maxwell and Gilling, Dorothy Crowther echoed the ‘natural history model’ of psychology. Beginning with the ‘random observation’ that young people tended to congregate in the streets, especially on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, Crowther’s research assistants, seven second-year psychology students, posed as curious onlookers in inner city Christchurch. They watched young people coming and going, and asked them about their lives. This was an early type of peer research approach, in which young researchers work with their participants, minimising social distance (Higgins, Nairn and Sligo, 2007).

A number of research questions framed the inquiry, paraphrased here for brevity: 1) do members of street society actually exist?; 2) do they signal their street society membership in their appearance?; 3) where do they congregate?; 4) what activities and behaviours are involved? (Crowther, 1956: 5-7). Crowther’s researchers pursued data collection systematically. They divided Christchurch’s central city into three blocks: The Square; the area between the Square and Armagh Street, and Colombo Street South. One evening, they also spent an hour in the beachside suburb of New Brighton. Over three nights, six student researchers ‘patrolled the town’, while another was stationed behind the counter in a milk bar (p. 4).

Crowther’s researchers described the social world they saw on the streets and in the refreshment venues, and they went on to describe a number of

‘loosely overlapping’ adolescent types. The ‘Teddy Boy’ was ‘a member of a closely knit gang’ and wore ‘a black drape coat, peg bottom trousers, black shoes with thick rubber soles, and a string tie’. He took his name from his Edwardian-style clothing, as did his precursors in the cities of Great Britain (Davis, 1990, ch.7). ‘Teddy Girls’ decked themselves out in ‘a man’s shirt with cuff links, a tight slitted black skirt, and flat back shoes’. The ‘milk bar cowboy’ – scarce on a Friday but ‘more numerous on Saturday’ – was less tidy than the Teddy Boy (Crowther, 1956: 5). His ‘leather jackets and trousers [were] tucked into the tops of wool-lined boots’. Male ‘bodgies’ and female ‘widgies’ wore their hair ‘long and brushed back’ (p. 3). One discussion went this way:

The Senior assistant asked one youth if that was a Bodgie haircut, he shrugged his shoulders and replied “I dunno. I just went in to a place and had it out”. Later I asked why he’d had it out like that – an upswept duckstail? He said, “I dunno” (p. 11).

All these youth types overlapped, but they could be distinguished from ‘normal street users’ by their ‘apparent aimlessness’ (p. 6). Crowther and her co-researchers described a youth geography as well as an adolescent taxonomy. Their subjects often ‘wander[ed] around the same set of streets, stopping every now and then for a word with another wandering group’ (p. 6). Here is a typical example:

One Teddy Boy (that is one youth dressed in Edwardian style clothing) was reported. Between 7.45 and 9.00pm on Friday 20th, accompanied by a youth dressed in check jacket and slacks, he wandered round the central shopping area, covering the same area several times. He twice stopped to talk for a moment to two youths, and once had several minutes conversation with a young, heavily made up girl. Finally he and his friend rode away on bicycles (p. 5).

Street Society’s readers get a keen sense of the relationships between spaces and groups, youths and adult authority:

The greatest number of young people appeared to congregate in the centre of the city from the Square to Armagh Street. Groups formed outside Crystal Palace in the Square, and outside a Milk Bar in Colombo Street North. These groups were continually moved on by the police. In some cases the groups moved on of their own accord on the approach of a constable. Comments such as “here we go again,” and “Let’s split up” were overheard. Milk Bar Cowboys were visible at most times outside the Crystal Palace, and between the Square and Armagh Street (p. 6).

A group of seven youths were seated at the back of the milk bar. Their ages appeared to be from 16 to 19, though one boy could have been as old as 21. They occupied two cubicles and were fooling aimlessly, scuffling over the top of the partition and throwing empty cigarette packets at each other. For this they were reprimanded by the milk bar attendant. They accepted the reprimand with good grace and desisted temporarily. Then the former behaviour was resumed (p. 8).

The researchers recorded conversations in these adolescent spaces, and tried to capture the local idiom:

After bagging her seat [a nineteen-year-old] moved to the counter for her order. On her way she swayed her hips past [seventeen-year-old] Reg who asked her if she was coming out with him tonight. She paused, posed in the manner of a Hollywood star and said, "Reg, the night I go out with you, I need my head read" (p. 10).

First youth: "What ar-ya-doin' tonight?" Second youth: "Oh, a-dunno." The first: "Yi goin' to the Maori Club?" The second: "Oh, a-dunno." The first: "'Ave-yi-gotta car? Couldja getta car? Yiv gotta car, haven't ya?" The second: "Me, no. I smashed mine up." The first: "What about yer mother's?" The second: "Don' be silly. Takes me all ma time to get hers any night, let alone a Sunday night." The first: "Couldn't ya get one then?" The second: "No, I couldn't get one". The first: "Oh, _____ ya" (p. 14).

At one point the researchers visited a youth club run by a 'Pastor Whiting', and there they listened to talk about motorbikes, day jobs and beer: "'Well, you'll be there on Wednesday night? I'll have two hidden under the bridge. Boss doesn't allow it in here'" (p. 16). Crowther's adolescents had different standards and priorities than adults, and this difference sometimes gave rise to conflict. While Whiting banned beer from his club, the street life gave rise to other interdictions: the police arrived and moved teenagers on, and adult passersby told youths 'their behaviour was "off"' (p. 6).

Street Society had a performative function, helping to discursively constitute the phenomenon it purported to describe. The report's writers constructed adolescence as a linguistically and spatially particular phenomenon, one marked out by clothing, activities and language. In a kind of reflexive loop, *Street Society*'s participants remade themselves as the subjects of investigation: one young man revealed he was 'writin' a book about a milk bar cowboy'. He elaborated: 'This milk bar cowboy, it's me. My impressions of a milk bar cowboy; I put in a bit about Saturday nights – about the cops. Wot I thought 'appened. It's real – it's true' (p. 17). In this moment at least, Crowther's

categories and self-descriptions neatly coincided; constructions from the ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ met in the middle.

Crowther’s *Street Society* did not merely attempt to describe or diagnose a social ‘problem’, and the report’s prevailing mode is more descriptive than evaluative. Nonetheless, Crowther did not entirely jettison the tropes of impaired self-direction, delinquency and familial lack that infused other New Zealand studies of the time, those with such titles as *Catholics and Delinquency*, *The Young Incurable* and *Five Case Histories of Girls Discharged from Burwood* (Bardwell, 1953; Goodland, 1953; O’Neill, 1950; see Brickell, 2013, for a discussion). These themes become especially clear in the case study sections of *Street Society*, sections that summarise and assess the circumstances of a number of boys and girls. All participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy.

Carol, 14, frequently went for late-evening jaunts on the back of boys’ motorcycles, and ‘was impervious to restraint and directions as to what hour she should be home’. Carol’s mother, Crowther tells the reader, ‘is a very worried woman’ (p. 33). Apprentice Brian, 19, styled himself a teddy boy, with blue drape coat and ‘teddy style haircut’:

He smokes and drinks and is a member of a gang of about twenty which includes a large proportion of Maoris. The gang work together, dress in much the same way, and go out together with people of the opposite sex and colour. They frequent dance halls and clubs where jiving is allowed, and have their selected milk bar, billiard saloon and hairdresser. Saturday afternoons are spent at an hotel. There are also frequent parties at Brian’s flat (p. 35).

It is difficult to tell whether or not the researcher approved of this world. What, if any, evaluation lurks behind the note about ‘people of the opposite sex and colour’? Crowther subjected other aspects of Brian’s life to a less equivocal diagnosis and criticism:

He is rather moody, slightly irritable and impatient, and is influenced by the moods and emotions of the people around him. His feelings are easily hurt and he is inclined to self-pity. He is definitely not a steady worker; he will work flat out for a time and then slack. Also he shirks any form of responsibility [...] His attitude to money is to get as much as possible, and to spend it as it comes in; he would like, if possible, to make money quickly and without working (p. 36).

In this excerpt, Brian's emotional life is positioned as insufficiently robust, and his inclinations cut across the assumption that a responsible, mature masculinity involves a commitment to hard work and saving (Olssen, 2003: 15).

Although Crowther employed something of a natural history model – she moved away from a therapeutic setting, after all – she nonetheless infused her work with the values of her own society. This occasionally comes across with a degree of cynicism. Fifteen-year-old Dorothy, Crowther writes, 'is very fat ... she admits to a weight of nine stone two, but this is probably a gross underestimate' (p. 28). Still, the reporting is not without its humour. Dorothy's social life is described in this way:

Since she was 13½ Dorothy has worn lipstick. Not until she was 14½ did her parents allow her to go out with boys, although she would have liked to do so before then. She has had one special boyfriend but the friendship is now over. At Pastor Whiting's Club, when one of her girl friends remarked, "Dorothy's boy friend isn't here tonight", Dorothy replied, "Thank God. If he walked in the door, I'd walk out" (p. 28).

Dorothy Crowther's study is significant for the ways it evoked a time, a place and a generation. In this little ethnography of inner-city milk bars and street corners, the young locals talk of hanging out and going out, getting cars and getting together, while adults look on. 'The behaviour of these young people is apparently aimless', Crowther wrote, 'but it must be recognised that it is not so in their eyes. The street provides some satisfaction which is otherwise lacking in their lives' (p. 39). Crowther's research agenda was less avowedly emancipatory than Maxwell and Gilling's – unlike the Otago researchers, she was content to describe a world rather than attempt to change it – but *Street Society* gave young people a voice. Crowther's report permanently embedded youth expression, language and life-worlds in the social scientific record.

Psychological abnormalities and social neurosis

In 1958, two years after Dorothy Crowther completed *Street Society in Christchurch*, A.H. & A.W. Reed, a commercial publisher, released a study by A.E. Manning. *The Bodgie: A Study in Abnormal Psychology* stood out on the shelves of the nation's bookstores, with its striking orange cover and expressive line drawings of teenagers. The back cover billed Manning as a psychologist, but it also revealed a broader training. Manning studied psychology, education and social sciences at Victoria and Auckland universities. Victoria's School of

Social Sciences was established in 1950 as a social work department with a focus on 'social problems': poverty, inadequate housing and 'juvenile delinquency' (Brickell, 2007a; 2013). Having completed his studies, Manning embarked upon 'a tour of research overseas' (Manning, 1958: back cover). He spent six months in Australia, and then a period back in New Zealand, collecting data for *The Bodgie*.

Manning followed aspects of Crowther's approach. His general observations were similar. He documented youth clothing styles, the characteristic coats, trousers, hairstyles and general mannerisms, noting that the 'bodgies' (boys) chose 'exotic colours' and the 'widgies' (girls) tended to be 'drab' (Manning, 1958: 9). Like Crowther, Manning offered case studies to his readers. He interviewed twenty New Zealand and Australian adolescents and engaged ten more in discussion groups. Manning recruited participants using a method we would now call 'snowball sampling': 'contact was made through one youth and gradually through him with others, until a group was built up' (p. 48).

Manning's aim was rather more normative than Crowther's. He wanted to 'clarify the sociological and psychological problems facing a world with a substratum of troubled youth' (p. 6). 'Delinquent juveniles' constituted one such problem. They were, Manning proposed, an evident 'symptom of social weakness' and the 'social problems that result from sociological mistakes' (pp. 6; 11). In his introductory chapters, under such headings as 'Lack of opportunity' and 'Frustration and the bodgie', Manning began to build up a sense of a post-war generation. Its inhabitants lived in the shadow of two world wars, worried about the new atomic age, and considered they had little to look forward to. 'I'll probably be shot or blown up by an atom bomb' was a common anxiety, a live-for-today attitude its corollary. As far as these young people were concerned, '[l]ife was not much good except to have a good time' (p. 13).

While Maxwell and Gilling had provided photographic evidence of young women's work cultures, *The Bodgie*'s publishers used line sketches in order to convey life-worlds. These were the work of Whanganui-born Dennis Turner, best known for his designs for the covers of Barry Crump books, an artist and designer who left New Zealand for England in 1963 (Thompson, 2007: 90). Turner's evocative sketches showed teenagers individually and in groups, riding motorbikes, listening to juke boxes and slouching against walls. Some look cocky, some bored, others defiant. In the examples shown here, two youths

drink beer, young women smoke and look aimless, and a group of teenagers hangs out in the kind of milk bar described in Crowther's study. Confronted with Turner's imagery, the reader can well imagine the conversations Crowther recorded in Christchurch's night time haunts.

Figure 5: Drinking beer, *The Bodgie*, p. 49.



Figure 6: Looking aimless, *The Bodgie*, p. 63.



Figure 7: Drinks and music, *The Bodgie*, p. 91.



Manning's approach to his subject matter was overwhelmingly psychological, an approach reflected in the book's subtitle: *A Study in Psychological Abnormality*. While Crowther had focussed on youth geographies and cultures, Manning offered a series of developmental narratives. Each life story began with a young person's upbringing – often unhappy, by Manning's reckoning – and ended with recent reflections. Nineteen-year-old Frank grew up on a sheep farm and moved to the city, where he boarded in 'a good home' and worked as a clerk. 'To relieve boredom in the evenings he would wander into the city and eventually found himself in a café where youths and girls foregathered', Manning noted. 'Their dress and air of freedom appealed to him and very soon he was one of them' (p. 49). Frank 'loved speeding on a motor-cycle and the thrill of appearing to float through space' and, although his speeding got him into trouble, he was prepared to weather the speeding tickets 'for the thrill of it all' (p. 50).

Modernity and milk bars, sensation and speed also appeared in the account of 18-year-old Irene. Irene worked behind the cosmetics counter in a drapery store, and one day she 'accepted an invitation to supper at a café':

Here she was introduced to several youths and girls and accepted an invitation to a motorcycle picnic. Her parents did not know the "where" and the "how", and simply accepted the invitation at face

value. She went to the picnic behind one of the boys and was stimulated by the speed (p. 63).

Jean, 17, was less interested in motorbikes. Instead, she met visiting warships on the wharves. Jean's carnal interests were obvious, if described rather euphemistically:

Contacts there were all too easy and she would take young visiting sailors home to supper with her. They were always made welcome and there was alcohol, though she herself neither drank nor smoked. She soon appreciated that American visitors liked such behaviour. She received generous gifts of money and was lavish with her favours (p. 66).

Jean, Manning concluded, 'needed detailed care' (p. 66). She compensated for her 'excessive' shyness by being 'completely brazen in her manner', a situation attributed to her family background. Jean's parents divorced and later she maintained a fraught relationship with her step-father. In Jean's life, 'school became a battleground of continual conflict between herself and authority, overt and repressed by turns' (p. 65).

This kind of psychologising appears throughout *The Bodgie*. Freudian presumptions made quite a showing, and Manning liberally sprinkled his assessments with references to 'adjustment', 'reactions', 'rationalisation' and 'sublimation'. He devoted a reasonable proportion of each case study to a diagnosis of young people's personality 'problems', and Jean was not the only one. Fay, 19, was 'very alert mentally' but had 'obsessional ideas' (p. 50), 22-year-old Graham was 'an hysteric who abreacted very readily' (p. 54), and Gail, 16, was '[o]verdressed, over-painted and overloaded with trinkets'; she 'looked painfully childish while aping sophistication' (p. 54). At one point, Manning wrote that a fondness for cigarettes mirrored a desire for the nipple (p. 58), and that psychologists might closely interrogate gum-chewing for its Freudian significance (p. 56). Manning's Freudian turn was hardly idiosyncratic, but nor was it universally held among psychologists during the 1950s. As one American author wrote in 1957, Freud's views 'are accepted in differing degrees by professional people' (Stone and Church, 1957: 165), while other 1950s writers on adolescence presented a Freudian perspective as one of several available standpoints (e.g. Garrison, 1951; see the discussion in Lunbeck, 1994).

Manning's work was not without an element of praxis. He staged therapeutic interventions in his discussion groups, and referred several interviewees to other psychiatrists who tried to 'cure' their psychological

problems. Just as Crowther's 'milk bar cowboy' wrote a novel about his own social position, some of Manning's young people engaged with the researchers' discourses too. A few 'became actively interested in what psychology really meant', whether or not they agreed with it (p. 32). Graeme, for instance, 'believed psycho-analysis and psycho-therapy were simply "confession", and "confession" is just a form of religious humbug to put more power in the hands of its high priests' (p. 52). One of Manning's 'widgie' interviewees was more enthusiastic. She renounced her street-wise ways, enrolled in teachers' training college, and 'cannot find enough to read about the psychology of little children' (p. 38). This particular research participant adopted and enacted the very regime of knowledge in which she had become embroiled.

Manning was far from consistent in his ideological position. He both pathologised and defended his adolescent interlocutors. On the one hand, Manning concluded that most bodgies and widgies were fundamentally troubled. They shared unhappiness in early childhood, strained home lives and a lack of parental supervision, and lacked moral and spiritual training (p. 84). The 'solution' lay in the eradication of those social conditions 'conducive to crime': 'hovels of houses, slums, undesirable films and literature' (p. 86).

At the same time, Manning was sympathetic towards the conditions that impeded young people's happiness: the conformity of the schoolroom, a crushing of individuality, and adults' lack of respect for young people's interests and future hopes. He decided that 'Rock-'n'-Roll dancing', the *bête noir* of traditionalists, was less harmful than its detractors insisted (p. 13). But Manning's critique ran deeper than that. For instance, he criticised the disciplining of teenagers' bodies. Youths were forced into 'little boy clothing', and they 'look and feel ridiculous' in 'shockingly shaped trousers of knee length' (p. 26). The teenage girl, 'in her shapeless nineteenth century clothes, is being forced by society into a mould of mediocrity' (p. 27). Such indignities, Manning wrote, constituted an 'encroachment' upon young people's 'personal liberty' (p. 16). These problems emerged from a psychological problem on a grand scale: 'a neurotic Society' that impeded its younger members' development (p. 86).

Like *The Working Girl of New Zealand* and *Street Society in Christchurch*, Manning's *Bodgie* is a complex text. In some respects it is a relatively conservative document, an evaluation of youth cultures from the perspective of a psychologically-inclined social scientist with an eye for a

‘social problem’. Those who did not comply – including Graeme, who saw ‘psycho-analysis and psycho-therapy’ as pseudo-religious ‘humbug’ – were diagnosed as sick and in need of ‘treatment’. The status of the social scientist as an expert knower of the world around him and her, a knower who demanded a respect for his privileged epistemological position, was not to be challenged. In other ways, however, Manning’s agenda was more socially transformative. He foreshadowed the critique of conformity and authoritarianism that appeared in New Zealand during the 1970s, in such youth-oriented publications as *Down Under the Plum Trees* and *The Little Red School Book* (Thornberry et al., 1972; Tuohy and Murphy, 1976). The authors of these publications spoke out against the moral supremacy of parents and teachers, and argued that authority figures were far from fallible (see Brickell, 2007b). Manning’s treatise advanced a more sexually traditional view than the countercultural, free love books of the 1970s, but his critique of authoritarianism laid the path for later writing.

Conclusion: The order of things

There is much to be written on the pre-history of the New Zealand teenager. Preliminary investigations suggest antipodean young people of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were vigorous boundary-pushers, seekers of fun, thrills and sometimes disreputable entertainments (Bellanta, 2012; Brickell, 2013). During and after World War II, though, New Zealand’s adolescents attracted new attention and publicity. This was driven, to some degree, by academics in search of research projects. Some, like A.E. Manning, decked out their writings in colours as bright as a bodgie’s socks, and placed them among the other books on the nation’s shelves.

Our academics – Maxwell, Gilling and Crowther as well as Manning – swam in something of an interdisciplinary soup. Teenagers’ social science interlocutors mixed and matched their approaches to young people’s cultures, while sources and methods varied widely. Of the three studies canvassed here, only Manning’s gives a clear indication of its influences. Reading lists follow each chapter, and refer to a large literature drawn from the fields of criminality and delinquency, psychosis and psychoanalysis, parenting and endocrinology. There is a bit of Bowlby, the post-war writer famed for his warnings on the worrisome consequences of ‘maternal deprivation’ in a world where increasing numbers of married women worked outside the home, and a dash of Lombroso, the nineteenth-century proponent of physiognomy and eugenics. There is little,

if any, sociology on Manning's lists. Still, his discussion groups with young people hint at the modern focus group, and his in-depth interviewing evokes sociology and anthropology as well as psychology. Manning's cases were sociologically significant too. The case study, wrote Ernest Burgess of Chicago University's sociology department, had become 'to sociology what the microscope was to biology' (Plummer, 2001: 108).

Maxwell and Gilling are rather more mysterious. While their report hints at ethnography, participant observation and visual sociology, their very brief bibliography includes no methodological literature at all. Indeed, there is nothing from either sociology or anthropology. Instead, a page-long list includes a few references to diet, health in industrial settings, and the benefits of physical education (Maxwell and Gilling, 1942: 75). On one level, this is a clear reflection of the preventive medicine origins of their report. Still, one wonders whether these two students read more widely and did not acknowledge the fact.

Crowther's study is the most enigmatic of all: it includes nary a single reference. *Street Society* surely owes its title – and possibly aspects of its method – to William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* from 1943, but nowhere is Whyte's work mentioned. The only clue hides in the acknowledgements, where Professor Henry Field is thanked for his comments on an earlier draft. Field was something of an all-purpose social scientist. Trained in philosophy and psychology, he went on to a career as professor of education at Canterbury University. Field was heavily influenced by international developments in the social sciences, and was interested in explicitly sociological approaches (McKenzie, 2010). His catholic interests probably helped to shape Crowther's analysis, in ways we can only imagine.

For all the similarities between these authors, there were differences too. The social science construction of adolescence was in flux, and different perspectives and methods competed for attention. Where there were elements of praxis, this differed widely. Maxwell and Gilling wanted to improve material conditions in the workplace, while Manning offered therapy to his interviewees. This research was performative, then, in more than one sense. It promised the transformation of individual lives – whether that involved boosting morning tea breaks or setting a young woman on a new path as an early childhood teacher – and its published results, Manning's study in particular, also helped to shape a public discourse about youth cultures.

So which came first: the chicken of adolescence, or the egg of social scientific knowledge? This is a tantalizing question to consider in the New Zealand context in particular, where international ideas were followed and rearticulated – even if the reference points were not always named. ‘Teenagers’ hit the headlines during the 1940s, and our politicians began to worry about a sexualized adolescence influenced by the corrupting consumer culture of rock and roll, comic books, makeup and milk bars (Brickell, 2009). The ‘teenager’ was much more delineable than the ‘youths’ of previous generations, and provided more of a research and policy focus.

Remarkably, perhaps, none of these social scientific studies actually used the term ‘teenager’. This is mysterious in one sense: the term became relatively well-known in New Zealand’s news media during the 1940s, a label for a generation enabled by post-war economic growth and a consolidating consumer culture (Brickell, 2006). Yet, the social scientists investigated the lives of precisely the same group that the newspapers addressed in their coverage of bobby socks and the bodgie menace. Perhaps the ‘teenager’ label remained the preserve of marketers and magazines, not the stuff of ‘serious’ social scientific writing. For all that, our investigators were important collators and cataloguers of information on teenagers’ lives, and diagnosers of their – and their society’s – foibles. Their methods, too, had ongoing significance, as the forerunners of today’s youth-based ethnographies (Kraak, 1999), visual sociology (Wood, 2010), peer research (Higgins, Nairn and Sligo, 2007) and action research (Kindon, Paine and Kesby, 2007).

The newly-minted social scientist emerged, looking rather like a psychologist or a preventive medicine student, but definitely a precursor to the sociologist of the 1960s and ’70s. The social scientist investigated, sometimes befriended, and wrote about the adolescents who worked in the shops and factories, hung out on street corners, smoked and rode motorbikes. The study of young people provided a means by which to develop and popularise social scientific work. The social scientist was in some respects the ‘bodgie’ or the ‘widgie’ of the intellectual world.

Acknowledgements

The photographs from Maxwell and Gilling’s *The Working Girl of New Zealand* are reproduced with the permission of Richard Germon, Health Sciences Librarian at Otago University. Dennis Turner’s line sketches from *The Bodgie: A Study in Psychological Abnormality* appear courtesy of Penguin Books (New Zealand).

References

- Bardwell, N. E. (1953) *The young incorrigible*, Diploma of Social Science Dissertation, Victoria University College.
- Bardsley, S. (2001) The Otekaieke special school for boys, 1908-1950. In B. Brookes & J. Thompson (Eds.) *'Unfortunate folk': Essays on mental health treatment 1863-1992* (pp. 123-136). Dunedin: Otago University Press.
- Bellanta, M. (2012) *Larrikins: A history*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.
- Brickell, C. (2006) The politics of post-war consumer culture, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 40(2): 133-155.
- Brickell, C. (2007a) Those "other sociologists": Social analysis before sociology, *New Zealand Sociology*, 22(2): 195-218.
- Brickell, C. (2007b) Sex education, homosexuality and social contestation in 1970s New Zealand, *Sex Education*, 7(4): 387-406.
- Brickell, C. (2009) Sexuality, morality and society. In G. Byrnes (ed.) *The new Oxford history of New Zealand* (pp. 465-486). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Brickell, C. (2013) On the case of youth: Case files, case studies, and the social construction of adolescence, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 6(1): 50-80.
- Carswell, W. R. & McVeigh, J. S. (1937) *A study of the health of the adolescent school-child of Dunedin*, Preventive Medicine Dissertation, Otago University.
- Crowther, D. (1956) *Street society in Christchurch*, Christchurch: Department of Psychology, Canterbury University College.
- Davis, J. (1990) *Youth and the condition of Britain: Images of adolescent conflict*, London: Athlone.
- Garrison, K. (1951) *Psychology of adolescence*, New York: Prentice Hall.
- Goodland, R. (1953) *Five case histories of girls discharged from Burwood*, School of Social Science Dissertation, Victoria University College.
- Hall, G. F. (1939) *St. Joseph's Boys' Home, Waverley, Dunedin: A physical and mental survey*, Preventive Medicine Dissertation, Otago University.
- Harper, D. (1988) Visual sociology: Expanding sociological vision, *The American Sociologist*, 19(1): 54-70.
- Higgins, J., Nairn, K. & Sligo, J. (2007) Peer research with youth: Negotiating (sub)cultural capital, place and participation in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In S. Kindon, R. Pain & M. Kesby (eds.) *Participatory action research: Connecting people, participation and place* (pp. 104-111). London: Routledge.
- Hine, L. (1981) *Women at Work: 153 photographs*, J. Doherty (ed.) New York: George Eastman House and Dover Publications.
- Irvine, J. (1994) Cultural differences and adolescent sexualities. In J. Irvine (ed.) *Sexual cultures and the construction of adolescent identities* (pp. 3-29). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kindon, S., Pain, R. & Kesby, M. (2007) Participatory action research: Origins, approaches and method. In S. Kindon, R. Pain & M. Kesby (eds.) *Participatory action research: Connecting people, participation and place* (pp. 9-18). London: Routledge.
- Kraak, A. (1999) It takes two to tango: The place of women in the construction of hegemonic masculinity in a student pub. In R. Law, H. Campbell & J. Dolan (eds.) *Masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (pp. 166-186). Palmerston North: Dunmore.
- Kunzel, R. (1993) *Fallen women, problem girls: Unmarried mothers and the professionalization of social work, 1890-1945*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lesko, N. (2001) *Act your age! A cultural construction of adolescence*, New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

- Lunbeck, E. (1994) *The psychiatric persuasion: Knowledge, gender, and power in modern America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- McDonald, T. (1996) What we talk about when we talk about history: The conversations of history and sociology. In T. McDonald (ed.) *The historic turn in the human sciences* (pp. 91-118). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- McEnroe, P.S. (1925) *Lead poisoning in a paint factory*, Preventive Medicine Dissertation, Otago University.
- McKenzie, D. (2010) Field, Henry Edward, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5f4/1>
- Manning, A. E. (1959) *The bodgie: A study in abnormal psychology*, Wellington: Reed.
- Matthews, J. D. (1939) *Y. M. C. A. Camp Adair: A public health study of a youth camp at Hunua, Auckland*, Preventive Medicine Dissertation, Otago University.
- Maxwell, A. & Gilling, A. (1942) *The working girl of New Zealand*, Preventive Medicine Dissertation, Otago University.
- Mazengarb, O. C. et al. (1954) Report of the special committee on moral delinquency in children and adolescents, Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1954, H-47.
- Molloy, M. (1993) Science, myth and the adolescent female: The Mazengarb Report, the Parker-Hulme trial and the Adoption Act of 1955, *Women's Studies Journal*, 9(1): 1-25.
- Nolan, M. (2000) *Breadwinning: New Zealand women and the state*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press.
- Olssen, E. (2003) Working gender, gendering work. In B. Brookes, A. Cooper & R. Law (eds.) *Sites of gender: Women, men and modernity in southern Dunedin, 1890-1939* (pp. 50-90). Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- Oakley, A. (1981) Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (ed.) *Doing feminist research* (pp. 30-62). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- O'Neill, D. P. (1950) *Catholics and delinquency*, Diploma of Social Science Dissertation, Victoria University College.
- Plummer, K. (2001) *Documents of life 2*, London: Sage.
- Pols, H. (2002) Between the laboratory and life: Child development research in Toronto, 1919-1956, *History of Psychology*, 5(2): 135-162.
- Riis, J. (1957) [1892] *How the other half lives: Studies among the tenements of New York*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- Roydhouse, N. (1949) *Otekaike Special School (Pupils and their education, and public health aspects of the institution)*, Preventive Medicine Dissertation, Otago University.
- Savage, J. (2007) *Teenage: The creation of youth, 1875-1945*, London: Viking.
- Schrum, K. (2004) *Some wore bobby sox: The emergence of teenage girls' culture, 1920-1945*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shaw, C. (1968 [1930]) *The jack-roller: A delinquent boy's own story*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Springhall, J. (1986) *Coming of age: Adolescence in Britain*, Dublin: Gill and MacMillan.
- Stasz, C. (1979) The early history of visual sociology, in J. Wagner (ed.) *Images of information: Still photography in the social sciences* (pp. 119-136). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Stone, L. J. & Church, J. (1957) *Childhood and adolescence: A Psychology of the growing person*, New York: Random House.
- Thompson, H. (2007) *Cover up: The art of the book cover in New Zealand*, Auckland: Random House.
- Thornberry, B. et al (1972) *The little red school book*, Wellington: Alister Taylor.

- Thrasher, F. (1942 [1927]) *The gang: A study of 1313 gangs in Chicago*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tuohy, F. & Murphy, M. (1976) *Down under the plum trees*, Martinborough: Alister Taylor.
- Whyte, W. F. (1955 [1943]) *Street corner society: The social structure of an Italian slum*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wood, B. (2010) Youth participation in society: Everyday citizenship perspectives from young people in New Zealand, *New Zealand Sociology*, 25(1): 103-24.
- Yska, R. (1993) *All shook up: The flash bodgie and the rise of the New Zealand teenager in the fifties*, Auckland: Penguin.

Chris Brickell is Associate Professor in Gender Studies at Otago University. His work deals with the sociology and history of sexuality, gender and visual materials, and a recent project examines the history of adolescence in New Zealand