Quality of Life in Australia

An analysis of public perceptions

Richard Eckersley

Number 23
September 1999

THE AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE

Quality of Life in Australia

An analysis of public perceptions

Richard Eckersley

National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health
The Australian National University

Discussion Paper Number 23
September 1999

ISSN 1322-5421

Contents

Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

Boxes

Preface

While all participants in policy debates in Australia agree that the objective is to create a better society, the question of what makes people better off is rarely discussed. Indeed, there is a suffocating consensus about what is needed to improve national well-being – more economic growth.

More than ever before, economic growth is the touchstone of policy success. Every day newspapers quote political leaders and commentators arguing that we need more economic growth to improve our level of national well-being, to build a better society. The release of the quarterly national accounts unfailingly receives extensive coverage as if they provide a technical barometer of our nation's progress. GDP appears to provide a measure of prosperity that is immune to argument.

But in the presence of sustained economic growth throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Australians have been strangely restive. There is a widespread perception, confirmed by social researchers such as Hugh Mackay, that life in Australia is not improving, but is in fact deteriorating. If growth is so good for us, how come it seems that things are getting worse?

The Australia Institute has for some time been questioning the preoccupation with growth at all costs. The Institute built a more comprehensive index of changes in national prosperity known as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). Incorporating twenty three additional factors – including income inequality, the costs of unemployment, the value of household work, damage to the environment and the costs of crime – the calculations showed that from the 1970s the GPI began to diverge from GDP, so that while growth continued to rise the broader measure of national prosperity indicated that Australians are no better off than they were twenty years ago.

The present study investigates these same issues but uses a different method. By asking people directly about life in Australia and what would make them feel happier it adds to the body of evidence that suggests that our policy makers give too much emphasis to economic growth at the expense of other aspects of economic and social life. Sooner or later our policy makers need to be weaned from their dependence on growth at all costs, and I hope this new research will contribute to the process.

Clive Hamilton
Executive Director

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their help in preparing this paper:

Hugh Mackay, for his generosity over many years with The Mackay Reports, which have been enormously useful to me in my research; Clive Hamilton, Michael Pusey and Barbara Spalding for providing valuable feedback on drafts of this paper; Bob Cummins for his contributions to my discussion of life satisfaction; Alan Black for access to data from the 1995 Australian Values Survey; and Rachel Roads at Newspoll for her assistance with the 1999 survey. I also want to express my gratitude to Renata Bryce for preparing the figures in the paper and editing the text. Finally, I thank Bob Douglas for giving me the opportunity, through a visiting fellowship at NCEPH, to continue my work on progress and well-being.

The overriding aim of our agenda is to deliver Australia an annual (economic) growth rate of over 4% on average during the decade to 2010.

The Prime Minister, John Howard
Address to World Economic Forum
March 1998

People believe that Australia's future is bright, but they are troubled by the feeling that so much emphasis is placed on the need for economic growth – and personal wealth – that quality of life is often a casualty.

Hugh Mackay
The Mind and Mood of Australia
June 1999

Executive Summary

If the goal of progress is to improve quality of life, not just standard of living, then we need better measures of quality of life. Quality of life is both objective and subjective, so its measurement should include how people feel about their lives.

A new survey of public perceptions of quality of life shows that only 24% of Australians think that life in Australia is getting better; the same proportion believe that the 1990s have been the decade of highest quality of life. Over a third (36%) say life is getting worse, with slightly more (38%) saying it is staying about the same. About half say the 1970s or 1980s were the best decade.

The survey also found that 75% of Australians rated 'being able to spend more time with your family and friends' as very important in improving their personal quality of life, while 66% rated 'having less stress and pressure in your life' as very important. Only 38% rated as very important 'having more money to buy things'

The results of the survey, commissioned by the Australia Institute, contradict recent claims of a new mood of optimism in Australia, although they do suggest a lift in public mood within the past two years: in 1997, only 13% of Australians thought quality of life was improving, while about half thought it was declining.

The survey was undertaken as part of an analysis of recent research into public attitudes about quality of life in Australia. The study reveals a sense of personal optimism and belief in Australia that has probably always existed. There appears to be a lifting of the national mood, but it may be superficial and short term. And there remains an under-current of pessimism and concern in the national psyche that has grown over the past 20 years.

The analysis does not support the view that the improvement in national spirits is due mainly to the robust health of the Australian economy. A wide gap remains between Australia's economic performance and public opinion about Australian society and the direction of change.

Australians are looking for a different national and social vision. Instead of one narrowly focused on material progress, they want a coherent story that better reflects human needs and expresses a better balance between economic welfare, social equity and environmental sustainability.

Instead of 'going for growth', Australia should be 'going beyond growth'. What polls are measuring, and qualitative surveys are explaining, is a growing tension between values and lifestyle, a tension being heightened by the promotion of a fast-paced, high-pressure, hyper-consumer lifestyle on which current economic performance depends.

Australians are torn between a sound common sense and a basic decency on the one hand, and the appeal of constant distraction and gratification on the other. The tension between Australians' values and their lifestyle may well become the defining dynamic of life in Australia in the early decades of the 21st century.

1. Introduction

Modern life is characterised by ambiguity, ambivalence and paradox. Nowhere is this more obvious than in attempts to measure quality of life and the mood of the nation. Are Australians satisfied with life, or dissatisfied? Optimistic about the future, or pessimistic? Eager consumers, or reluctant? Proud of Australia, or disappointed?

There is evidence to support all of these propositions. The contradictions and inconsistencies are part of modern times and human nature. Yet it is important that we try to deepen our understanding of the national psyche if we are to manage and direct social change in ways that enhance overall quality of life. We can explain some of the apparent ambivalence and ambiguity. Surveys highlight different dimensions of public perceptions depending on their focus and the wording of the questions asked.

How people feel about their own lives is different from how they feel about life in general. Their opinion of trends in quality of life in Australia differs from their feelings about Australia as 'home'. Some attitudes to life are remarkably stable, changing little over decades; others are volatile, swinging from troughs to peaks in cycles of a few years or less. Public opinion can reflect people's personal resilience, adaptability and capacity to find a measure of fulfilment and satisfaction whatever their circumstances; it can also reveal their tendency to 'edit' what they will admit about themselves – even to themselves.

Subjective measures of quality of life are important, supplying a crucial dimension missing from objective indicators of national performance or progress such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or life expectancy. But we need to be very clear about what it is they are measuring. Measures of personal quality of life may reveal little about whether living conditions are changing for the better or the worse. Despite this, most opinion polls use – and in some cases have used for decades – questions framed in personal terms. Most cross-country comparisons of subjective well-being are based on personal questions. These studies are often used, in both the research literature and the popular media, as a basis for ranking national performance.

In contrast, there appears to be little use made of questions based on perceptions of national or social well-being. On balance, these seem more useful in evaluating our progress as a nation or society. However, measures of social quality of life may have their own inherent biases. We have less knowledge about these biases than we do those of personal well-being.

Against this background, the Australia Institute commissioned Newspoll to survey public opinion on several aspects of quality of life as part of a broader study of people's perceptions of quality of life in Australia. The survey had three objectives: to repeat a question asked two years ago to assess short-term shifts in public attitudes; to understand better the basis of these perceptions; and to generate interest in exploring this issue in more depth and detail.

2. Measuring quality of life: An analysis

2.1 Survey findings

Three questions about quality of life were included in a Newspoll survey of 1200 Australians aged 18 and over, conducted by telephone in May 1999. The findings are discussed in more detail in Section 3 of this paper, including differences between demographic groups. Only the overall findings are given here as part of the analysis of recent studies of public perceptions of quality of life in Australia. The questions related to:

- Whether 'the overall quality of life of people in Australia' is getting better, worse or staying the same;
- In what decade 'overall quality of life in Australia has been at its highest'; and
- The importance of four factors in improving people's 'own personal quality of life'.

Trends in quality of life

Most Australians do not believe life is getting better. About a quarter (24%) believe overall quality of life is getting better, 36% think it is getting worse and 38% say it is staying about the same (2% do not know) – see Figure 1. The 1999 results suggest a significant improvement in public perceptions about quality of life since June 1997 – see Figure 2. Then, in response to an identical question in a Newspoll survey commissioned by CSIRO, 52% of Australians believed life was getting worse, with only 13% believing it was getting better, while 33% said quality of life was staying about the same (2% did not know) (Eckersley, 1998a). The results also suggest that the spread of opinion across demographic groups has increased on some measures.

There are significant differences between men and women, income and age groups, capital city and other residents, and States (with Victorians standing out as the most positive). The spread of opinion across demographic groups increased on some measures between 1997 and 1999. These differences are discussed in Section 3.

The best decade

Opinion about the best decade for quality of life in Australia is fairly evenly spread over the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. About a quarter of Australians nominate each of these decades as the time when quality of life in Australia has been highest, with the percentage then declining through the 1960s, 1950s, and earlier – see Figure 3. Demographic differences are similar to those for trends in quality of life.

Responses to this question are clearly linked to the first question. For example, 51% of those who choose the 1990s as the best decade also think life is getting better, while among those who choose the 1980s as the best decade, 47% think quality of life is staying about the same. In contrast, 50% or more of those who think the 1970s or earlier were the best time think quality of life is declining.

Figure 1 Perceptions of trends in quality of life, 1999

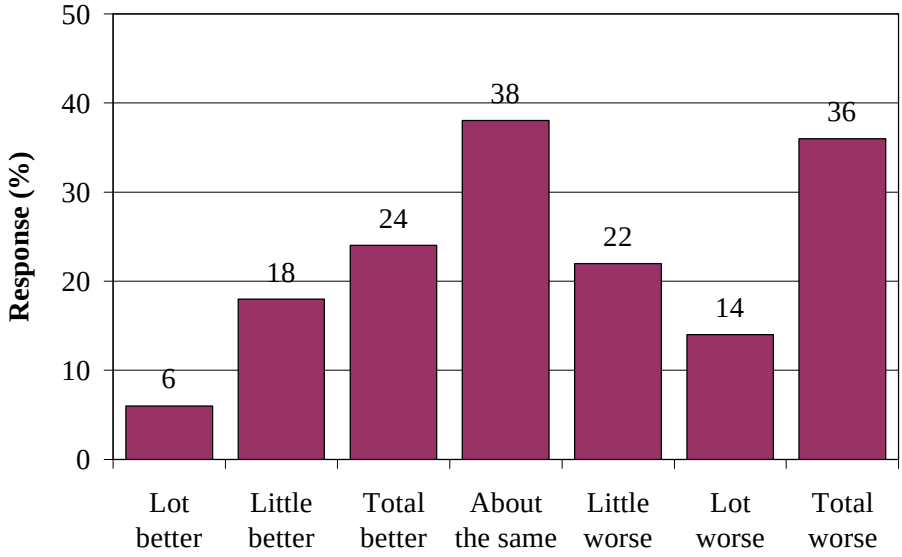


Figure 2 Perceptions of trends in quality of life, 1997

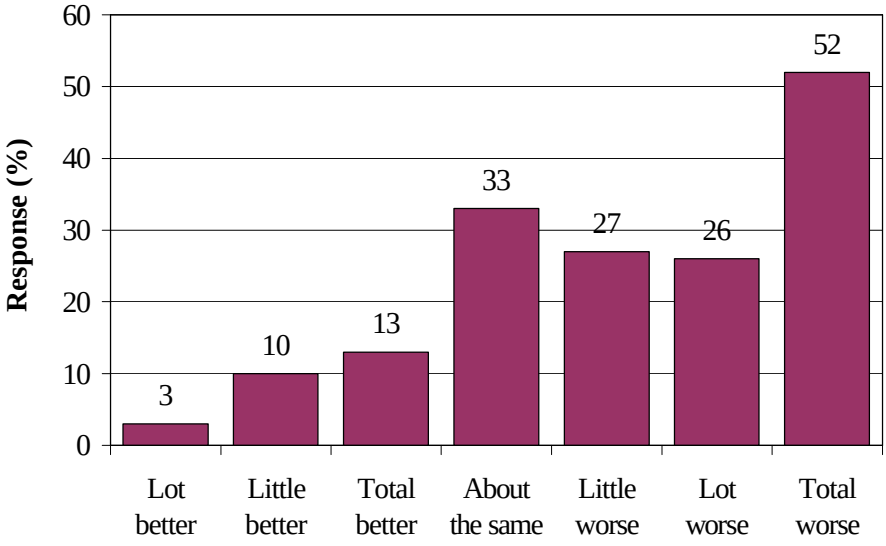
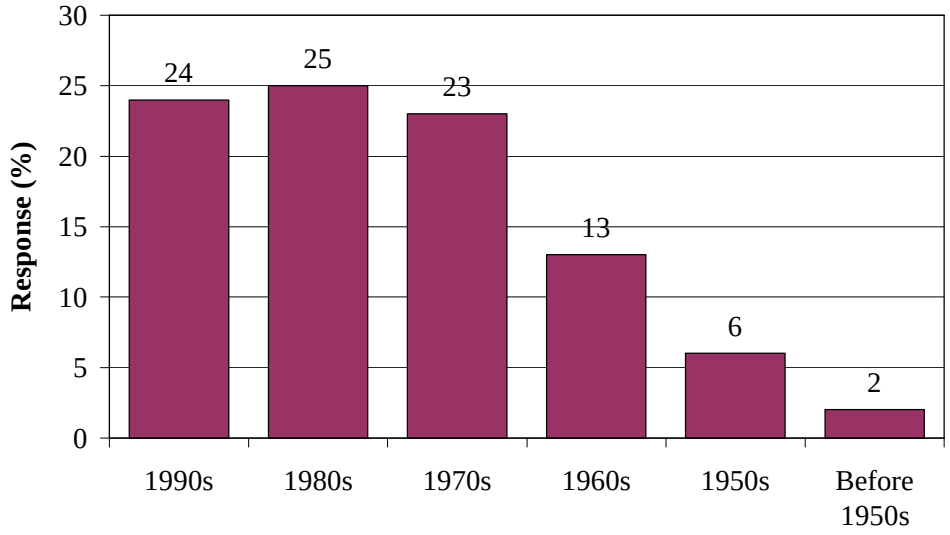


Figure 3 Choice of decade of highest quality of life



Improving personal quality of life

Australians rate spending more time with family and friends and having less stress in their lives as more important to improving their quality of life than having more money or doing more for their community. Three-quarters (75%) rate 'being able to spend more time with family and friends' as very important and 66% 'having less stress and pressure' in their lives as very important, compared to only 38% who rate 'having more money to buy things' and 36% feeling they 'are doing more for your community' as very important. Conversely, 23% rate 'having more money' as not important, compared to 19% for 'doing more for their community', 16% 'having less stress', and 9% 'spending more time with family and friends' – see Table 1.

Table 1 Importance of factors in improving personal quality of life

Factor	More time with family and friends %	Less stress and pressure %	More money to buy things %	Doing more for community %
Very important	75	66	38	36
Somewhat important	16	18	39	44
Not important	9	16	23	19

2.2 Measurement issues

Personal quality of life

Recent reports have heralded a new mood of optimism in Australia. A survey by Brian Sweeney and Associates for Grey Advertising – the eighth in their annual *Eye on Australia* series (N=505) – recorded 'the most positive community outlook and expectation' in areas such as satisfaction with life, concern about the economic outlook and household finances since the series' inception in 1992 (Grey Advertising 1999). 'For the first time this decade, Australian consumers have thrown off the shackles of pessimism that characterised the early 1990s.' They have become self-indulgent and are 'prepared to pamper themselves when it comes to spending'.

A report in *The Bulletin* of another study by Taylor Nelson Sofres for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA), which included 12 focus groups and a survey (N=512), says the results suggest 1999 is the year Australians as a nation 'shifted up a gear' (Bagnall 1999). 'We know our own power. And we're looking forward to unleashing it.' The report quotes a researcher as saying, 'We were expecting people to have some fear of change, but … I think people have come to terms with change and grown in confidence'.

However, questions that ask about people's own situation yield very different results from those about the state of society or the nation. And a major reason why these recent accounts of the 'new mood of optimism' in Australia need to be qualified is that key questions were framed in personal terms.

The vast majority of people say they are happy, satisfied with their lives and optimistic about their future. They have always said so. This finding is remarkably consistent across countries and over time. At about the same time surveys were finding most Australians thought overall quality of life was declining, the 1995-96 National Social Science Survey (N=2,259) indicated 81% of Australians were 'mostly satisfied', 'pleased', 'very pleased' or 'delighted' with their 'life as a whole', and 85% felt this way about their standard of living (Kelley et al. 1995). The 1995 World Values Survey (Australian component, N=2,048) asked people to rate their satisfaction with 'your life as a whole these days' from 1 (dissatisfied) to 10 (satisfied), and found 77% of Australians rated it at 7-10 (Alan Black, Edith Cowan University, Perth, pers. com.). The survey also found 95% of Australians said that, 'taking all things together', they were 'quite happy' or 'very happy', with 43% claiming to be 'very happy'.

The Grey survey found that people's satisfaction with 'your life today' averaged 3.61 on a scale of 1-5 in 1999, up from 3.24 in 1992 (Grey 1999). However, comparisons of the results of the questions asked in the two 1995 surveys above and in the 1983 Australian Values Study (N=1,228) demonstrate the relative stability of these findings over time (AVS 1983). If anything, the results suggest a fall in well-being: while the proportion of Australians saying they were 'very happy' increased, the more precise questions on life satisfaction show a decline between 1983 and 1995 – see Table 2.

Table 2 Australians' happiness and satisfaction: 1983 vs 1995

Question[1]	Category	1983 %	1995 %
Happiness (4-point scale, very to not at all happy)	Very happy	35.5	43.0
	Quite happy	60.0	51.6
	Total happy	95.5	94.6
	Unhappy	4.5	5.4
	Average %SM*	76.7*	79.0*
Satisfaction with life (8/9-point scale, delighted to terrible)	Total satisfied	93.3	81.2
	Mixed feelings	4.5	12.6
	Total dissatisfied	2.3	3.8
	Average %SM*	76.5*	67.7*
Satisfaction with life (scale 1-10)	Total 7-10 (satisfied)	83	77
	Total 5-6	13	16
	Total 1-4 (dissatisfied)	4	8
	Average %SM*	76.7*	73.1*
Satisfaction with standard of living (8/9-point scale, delighted to terrible)	Total satisfied	89.0	84.9
	Mixed feelings	7.4	9.2
	Total dissatisfied	3.7	3.4
	Average %SM*	73.4*	68.7*

1. Australian Values Study 1983, World Values Survey 1995, National Social Science Survey 1995.
* Average expressed as a percentage of the scale maximum, as calculated by Cummins (Deakin University, Melbourne, pers. com.), using the full scales.

As evidence of the 'new mood of optimism' in Australia, *The Bulletin* article on the CBA survey highlights the finding that 56% of Australians felt 'excited' or 'very excited' about their own future (Bagnall 1999). Again, this mood of personal optimism is not new. The 1983 Australian Values Study found 87% of Australians agreed they usually felt their 'own future will be bright'; 13% disagreed (AVS 1983). In an unpublished 1988 study by the Australian Commission for the Future (N=1,047), 80% of Australians said they were 'very' or 'on the whole optimistic or hopeful' about their personal future; only 18% were 'somewhat' or 'very pessimistic or concerned'. (The difference between these results and the CBA findings probably does not reflect a lesser optimism today, but rather the wording of the questions, in particular the use of a fairly strong term, 'excited', in the CBA survey.)

Research suggests people adapt to their circumstances. When these change, for better or worse, they 'recalibrate'. People adjust expectations and use illusions to maintain over time a relatively stable, and positive, rating of life satisfaction or quality of life – see Box 1. Indeed, their health and sanity may depend on their adaptability.

Box 1 Staying satisfied with life

Most people are mostly happy most of the time.

Myers (1997) says humans have an enormous capacity to adapt to fame, fortune – and affliction. 'Our human capacity for adaptation helps explain why, despite the elation of triumph and the anguish of tragedy, lottery winners and paraplegics usually return to their pre-existing happiness. And it explains why material wants can prove insatiable.'

Cummins (1998, 1999) argues that the uniformity of population measures of personal life satisfaction suggests that it is held under 'homeostatic control', rather like blood pressure is. This control attempts to maintain the life satisfaction of populations above about 70% of the maximum possible score. He and a colleague propose that 'positive cognitive illusions' are central to this homeostasis, saying there is 'an intimate relationship between illusory self-beliefs and life satisfaction' (Cummins and Nistico, in press). The factor most closely associated with subjective quality of life is satisfaction with the self, and, in particular, positive beliefs of self-worth, control and optimism, they say. Illusions allow the existence of these self-beliefs as 'buffers of reality' – that is, the beliefs do not accurately reflect the objective realities of life.

Headey and Wearing (1988) have called one of these illusions the 'human sense of relative superiority'. In almost all countries that have been studied, most people rate their subjective well-being well above average. Headey and Wearing suggest that this might be because almost all human beings explicitly believe that their own performance in major life roles is well above average. Other research, they note, has found that depressed people are more realistic in assessing their own performance than people who are not depressed. A sense of relative superiority appears to be normal and an important aspect of human psychology. 'People who feel average (let alone below average) in their main roles have lost a crucial prop to self-esteem and well-being.'

This does not mean that what happens in the social, economic and political spheres does not matter at a personal level, but that the relationship between the objective and subjective worlds is not linear – that is, a change in the former does not produce a corresponding and equal change in the latter.

Whatever the explanations, there is clear evidence for a positive bias in responses to personal questions. Pusey (1998a) asked in his survey of 'middle Australians' who were the winners and losers from 'the economic change that Australia has experienced over the last 15 years or so'. The proportion saying 'people like me' were losers was considerably smaller than that for 'ordinary people generally', 'people in the middle' or 'wage and salary earners', while the proportion saying 'people like me' were winners was correspondingly higher than for the other categories.

Even asking people to label themselves as, say, an optimist or pessimist about national or global conditions may affect responses (let's face it, optimism is a social virtue, pessimism a vice). For example, in contrast to the optimism about personal futures, the Australian Commission for the Future survey found only 44% were 'very' or 'on the whole' optimistic or hopeful about the future of humanity, while 53% were 'very' or 'somewhat' pessimistic or concerned. However, optimism appears to decline further if the question is not framed in terms of a direct choice of attitudes (optimistic/pessimistic, better/worse etc).

When respondents were asked an open question (ie, they could respond in their own words) about *images* of the future of the world, and their responses grouped, only 26% described optimistic images, while 54% offered pessimistic images and 29% neutral images. Social decay, environmental destruction and global conflict dominated the negative images. Asked about their *feelings* about the future of the world, only 28% expressed positive feelings, while 63% expressed negative and 16% ambivalent feelings (the totals exceed 100% because more than one response was allowed). Open poll questions are closer to qualitative studies which, when exploring social conditions and trends, also tend to produce more negative outcomes than 'closed' opinion polls (Eckersley 1999).

Optimism and Australia as 'home'

Differences between personal and national or social perspectives are not the only important distinction to be made in understanding the public mood. The choice and wording of questions can be crucial in other respects. For example, the CBA survey notes, as part of the 'new optimism', the majority agreement with several positive statements about Australia, including that 91% agree that 'things are good in Australia compared to the rest of the world' (Bagnall 1999). Once again, this is not a new sentiment. Mackay has repeatedly noted in his research the co-existence of this belief with a sense of pessimism about social conditions and trends (Mackay 1999).

The 'contradiction' – although it is quite valid and understandable – was starkly exposed in a Saulwick Poll (1989). In a series of questions about how life in Australia at the end of the 1980s compared with life at the beginning of the decade: 50% said Australia had become a less pleasant place to live (17% more pleasant); 36% said Australia was a less fair society (23% more fair); 55% said there was less economic equality (23% more equality); 72% said Australia was a harder place to bring up children (9% easier); 44% said people had less control over their lives (20% more control); 73% said life was tougher for young people (13% easier); 63% said Australia was more dependent on the rest of the world (13% less dependent); and 55% said the country was worse governed (31% better governed). And yet, asked in the final question to describe Australia as a place to live, 52% said 'very good' and 35% said 'good' (total 87%). Only 11% said 'fair' and 2% 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Social change and quality of life

In marked contrast to the stability of measures of personal satisfaction and optimism, indicators of the public mood about the state of national affairs can be highly volatile. Much has been reported in the media in the past year or so about how good Americans are feeling about themselves now, especially compared to the prevailing mood of self-doubt and pessimism of the mid-1990s. Reflecting this, a Gallup Poll question on whether Americans are satisfied or dissatisfied 'with the way things are going in the US at this time' shows that 71% were satisfied in February 1999, an all-time high and up from 24% in January 1996 (Gallup 1999).

However, the response appears to be a reflection of transient contemporary political and economic conditions, rather than any long-term shifts in American life. Results are highly variable, swinging over the past 20 years from troughs as low as 12% satisfied to peaks of over 60% satisfied in cycles as short as 5 months (more usually several years). These cycles are presumably linked to economic and political

performance and events. Satisfaction may be on the decline again; by April 1999, it had dropped to 51% and in June stood at 55%.

While the evidence suggests perceptions of our personal quality of life are biased towards the positive, when we turn to the broader, social perspectives on quality of life we face possible biases in the other direction. For example, the wider worldview includes many elements that are not part of the personal experience of most people (such as wars, environmental destruction, poverty and serious crime). This worldview may be distorted by media representations that emphasise these negatives. Also, people may tend, in this broader view, to take for granted past improvements, and focus instead on aspects of life they believe have deteriorated, or at least have not improved or met their expectations, which, in Western nations, keep getting higher. Reinforcing this tendency, Western culture is dominated by dystopian, rather than utopian, images of the future, and these may taint people's view of progress.

The more remote social concerns may have relatively little impact on personal well-being because of its very nature (Wearing and Headey 1998). In the 1988 Australian Commission for the Future study, respondents who were pessimistic about the future of humanity were asked if their concerns 'in general diminish or reduce your enjoyment of life'. Only 2% said 'very much' and 13% 'quite a lot', while 48% said 'not much' and 35% 'not at all' (still, this means 63% of this group were personally affected to some degree).

While the mass media are often blamed for promoting a bleak worldview, research suggests people do distinguish between media imagery and the 'real world'. For example, a recent Australian study of fear of crime found that the media are not necessarily as influential as previously thought in increasing this fear (NCAVAC 1998). It found most people use the media selectively, 'filtering out the information they think is realistic and accurate from what is sensationalist or fantasy'. Uslaner (1998) argues that his research shows television is not responsible for people's impression of a 'mean world'.

The images that dominate the view of life getting worse – images of social decline, division and alienation; family breakdown, conflict and isolation; environmental depletion and degradation; and regional and ethnic conflict and friction – do have a basis in reality, including in people's own experience of life. Nevertheless, the media may keep them focused on, and aware of, these realities. And people's judgements are probably rarely located consciously within a total historical context, according to which aspects of quality of life have improved.

The question about whether life is getting better or worse asked in the 1997 and 1999 Newspoll surveys was intended to measure public sentiments about long-term trends in national quality of life, not people's own personal situation or 'current affairs'. The relative consistency of the results across demographic groups (at least in 1997), and with the results of the second 1999 question about the best decade of quality of life, suggests this is the case. However, the significant improvement and the apparent widening of demographic differences between 1997 and 1999 do indicate that, not surprisingly, perceptions about long-term changes are influenced by personal attributes and circumstances and relatively short-term shifts in social conditions and public mood.

When it comes their own lives, most people believe life gets better. They consistently rate the present better than the past, and expect the future to be better than the present – at least over a timeframe of 10 years (Gallup 1998). The response to the question about the best decade for quality of life presents a different pattern in perceptions of national life. The response does not appear to reveal any tendency to idealise a past stage of life such as youth. Rather it reflects the span of people's life experience; opinion is spread across the decades people have lived through, with almost all young people, for example, choosing 1990s or 1980s – see Figure 7. This suggests the response would be, in effect, biased towards the most recent decades because all the adult population has experienced them.

Even so, the pattern of responses to the 'best decade' question may reflect – apart from the age effect – nothing more than that in times of instability and change the past looks rosier and public acceptance or preference lags a decade or two behind the present. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the implication of the responses to this question – that quality of life improved through the 1950s, 1960s and into the 1970s, then plateaued – is consistent with the trend in the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) for Australia. The GPI adjusts GDP for a wide range of social, economic and environmental factors to attempt to give a better measure of 'genuine progress' (Hamilton 1998).

We will need more comprehensive surveys over a longer period of time to resolve these issues.

2.3 Social quality of life and values

There is more to the public view about quality of life than the issue of optimism versus pessimism. At deeper levels, the surveys are fundamentally about values, priorities and goals – both personal and national – and the degree of tension between these. The legitimacy and validity of subjective measures of national quality of life are strengthened by the close association between quality of life and values: many people perceive quality of life to be declining because moral values are perceived to be declining. Values provide the operational framework of social systems and their functioning. They determine how we get along together and manage our affairs; they shape our identities, beliefs and goals. Many surveys, both qualitative and quantitative, have brought out the relationship between values and quality of life.

The 1988 Commission for the Future survey included an open question that asked, 'what do Australians need to do, either as individuals or as a nation, to manage change better and improve future prospects?' By far the most common response, given by 42% of respondents, related to the need to change personal values and behaviour. People mentioned the need to work harder, work together, work for the good of the country, be less greedy, less selfish, and raise moral standards. This category was followed by the need for better government, mentioned by 29%, which covered both the desire for stronger leadership and the need for greater participation in the political process. After these came improving the economy (22%), better education (19%) and protecting the environment (13%).

A decade later, the deeply moral nature of Australians' concerns about their country and its future has, if anything, intensified. A 1997 report by the Clemenger/BBDO Group, *The Silent Majority III - The Everyday Problems of the Average Australian*

(1997) – the third in a series which began in 1977 – documents 'the distress of a nation divided, deeply anxious about its children and its future'. 'The trivial problems that beset Australians twenty years ago in the first *Silent Majority* study – the length of the cord on electrical appliances or the short life span of school textbooks – have disappeared. In their place are concerns about perceived inequities in the delivery of welfare, the behavior of the mass media, the operation of the criminal justice system and the betrayal of trust by community leaders' – see Box 2.

A 1996 survey, the Middle Australia Project, produced similar findings to those of the 1997 poll on quality of life (Pusey 1998a, 1998b). Of a sample of 400 'middle Australians', 51% said that, for 'ordinary middle Australians like us', quality of life was declining and 39% that it was improving, while 10% did not know (a 'remain the same' option was not included in this question). The study found that the most common ways in which quality of life was perceived to be falling were: too much greed and consumerism; the breakdown in community and social life; too much pressure on families, parents and marriages; falling living standards; and employers demanding too much.

The study suggests Australians are experiencing economic change as harmful pressure on the family (Pusey 1998b). Over 90% of people believed family life was changing, with 54% saying it was changing a lot. Of all those who said family life was changing, two thirds said the negative aspects of these changes stood out most. These included: the breakdown of traditional values; too much consumerism and pressure to

Box 2 The views of the silent majority in Australia

The Silent Majority III is the latest in a continuing research series which identifies and tracks what really concerns the majority of Australians. It replicates research carried out in 1977 and 1988 and offers insight into the changes that have occurred in community attitudes over the past twenty years. The study found that major changes have occurred since The Silent Majority I and II and that in 1997 Australians:

- Are thoughtful and analytical about many problems. In contrast with a decade or two ago, the issues of greatest concern in the late 90s are 'big' topics embracing moral, ethical and economic issues within our community.
- Deeply resent a society that seems to penalize those who battle to look after themselves and reward those who take unfair advantage of the system.
- Believe strongly that people in positions of power and influence abuse public trust and are more likely to be part of the problem than the solution.
- Worry intensely about the welfare of their children in a violent and predatory world.
- Feel powerless to control their lives in the face of rapid economic restructuring and social change.
- Are clustered at the extremes of opinion rather than in a consensual middle.

Extracted from: *The Silent Majority III - The Everyday Problems of the Average Australian* (Clemenger/BBDO 1997)

get more money and buy things; a breakdown of communication between family members; and greater isolation of families from extended family networks and the community. (The third that saw the changes as positive cited the more equal relationship between men and women, the sharing of housework and more freedom.)

Over half of those surveyed (54%) claimed to be 'a bit unhappy' about 'what is happening with middle Australia today', while 10% were 'angry or resentful'; only 25% were 'calm and satisfied' (Pusey 1998a). Asked to whom or what they directed their resentment about the situation, the two thirds who felt unhappy or angry most commonly nominated politicians, the economic system and big business.

Mackay (1997) says that his qualitative research reveals growing community concern in Australia about the gap between people's values and the way they live. People crave greater simplicity in their lives, yet continue to complicate them. They would like to be less materialistic, but seem to acquire more and more. People are concerned that 'we don't seem to know where to stop': many developments which are motivated by positive and worthwhile aspirations often turn out to be excessive (Mackay 1998a). No matter how much people might want to be moderate and balanced, they seem incapable of it. Mackay has detected in his recent research growing sympathy for the 'simplicity' movement. 'Underlying such attitudes is the widespread belief that, although we are all attracted by material comfort and prosperity, here again we may not have known when to stop.'

Some of the results of the 'optimistic' CBA survey are consistent with these findings (Bagnall 1999). 'Having extra money for things like luxuries and travel' ranked last in a list of seven items judged 'very important' to success, well behind the top-scorer, 'having a close and happy family' And in contrast to government priorities, 'maintaining a high standard of living' ranked last in a list of 16 critical issues headed by educational access, children and young people's well-being, and health care – things many Australians believe are being sacrificed to *increase* standard of living.

While not directly comparable with these findings, a 1978 survey by Irving Saulwick and Associates for *The Sydney Morning Herald* (12 June 1978) suggests a defining shift in national priorities. Twenty years ago, 'a high rate of economic growth' and 'a stable economy' ranked highest as 'the single policy issue which Australians consider the most important'. Economic issues (44%) easily outscored issues of personal and national safety (28%), democratic and civil liberties issues (19%) and humanitarian and aesthetic issues (10%) – see Table 3. While the results might reflect different stages of the economic cycle between the two years (GDP per capita declined slightly in 1978), they appear to indicate a deeper change in public sentiment.

The Australian findings are echoed in US research. A study, *Yearning for Balance*, undertaken by the Harwood Group for the Merck Family Fund and available through the Center for a New American Dream (1995), underscores Americans' deep concerns with their way of life. Based on focus group discussions and a national survey (N=800), the study was undertaken to examine patterns of consumption in the US and the consequences for society and the environment.

Table 3 National priorities, 1978 vs 1999

1978 Single policy issue Australians consider the most important [1] – per cent		1999 The issues Australians consider critical [2] – per cent	
A high rate of economic growth	19	Ensuring everyone has access to good education	88
A stable economy	18	Providing a quality life for our children	85
Strong defence forces	14	Providing quality health care for everyone	84
Participation by people in Government	9	Building self-esteem amongst young people	83
Fighting rising prices	8	Creating work opportunities for all Australians	81
Maintaining order in the nation	7	Building an acceptable society for all Australians	80
The fight against crime	7	Feeling safe and secure	76
Participation in work and community decision-making	6	Protecting our natural environment	75
A society where ideas are more important than money	5	Solving the drug problem	72
A less impersonal, more humane society	4	Preventing gap widening between rich and poor	66
Protecting freedom of speech	4	Creating strong vision for Australia's future	66
A more beautiful environment	<1	Keeping a strong Australian identity	63
		Reforming the tax system	60
		Having good relations with other countries	60
		Keeping up with changes in technology	56
		Maintaining a high standard of living	55

1. Herald survey (SMH, 12/6/1978)
2. CBA survey (Bagnall 1999)

The report says that Americans believe their priorities are 'out of whack' – with materialism, greed and selfishness increasingly dominating American life and crowding out more meaningful values based on family, responsibility and community. They are alarmed about the future – feeling the material side of the American Dream is spinning out of control. However, they are ambivalent about making changes in their own lives and in society – their deepest aspirations are non-material, but they also want financial security and material comfort.

Asked to rate on a 10-point scale, what would make them more satisfied with their lives, 66% rated at 8 or higher spending more time with families and friends, 56% having less stress in their lives, and 47% feeling they were doing more to make a

difference in their community. In contrast, only about one in five rated at this high level having a nicer car, a bigger house or apartment, or more nice things in their homes. (This greater emphasis on community, compared to the Australia Institute/Newspoll results, may reflect Americans' greater reliance on community action rather than government intervention, or the much fuller context the American survey provided.)

In a later survey (N=800), the Center for a New American Dream (1997) found that 41% of Americans (53% of those who answered the question) said that they did not really need more than 10% of the things they bought (with 9% saying they did not need over 50% of what they bought). Over half (55%) said they would be willing to reduce their 'material possessions and earnings' by 'a lot' or 'some' in order to have less stress and more time with friends and family.

The *Yearning for Balance* study says Americans want to talk about values. People said in the survey and focus groups that they share a deep and abiding concern about the core values driving their society; they believe that materialism, greed, and excess characterise the way they live and underlie many of their worst social ills. The report notes that focus group participants agreed firmly that there is a tension between their own priorities and those of society.

'They view this tension as underlying many of the other concerns they raised ... When pressed on their views, people insist they are talking about a single core problem with many aspects, not a list of separate issues.' 'Too much of a good thing' was the phrase many people used, with freedom and material abundance uppermost in their minds. Compared to the rest of society, Americans saw themselves as attaching much greater importance in their lives to responsibility, family life, friendship, generosity and religious faith, and less importance to prosperity and wealth. They did not feel the same dissonance with respect to other important aspects of life including financial security, career success, pleasure and having fun, and freedom.

The report says the tension between the values people profess and the way they live 'has become the elephant in the living room of American life – the phenomenon which we all seem to know is there, yet is so big we are afraid to talk about it. Politicians do not mention the subject; little appears on the op-ed pages; pundits and civic leaders are mostly silent' – see Box 3.

These concerns run deeper than those about contemporary economic or political affairs. At the time Gallup recorded high levels of satisfaction with 'the way things are going in the US', other surveys were confirming these findings of deep disquiet about the values driving American society. Conducted in July/August 1998 by *The Washington Post*, Harvard University and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (1998), the surveys (N=2,025, 1,200) found that 76% of Americans thought the country was 'pretty seriously off on the wrong track' when it came to values and moral beliefs. Over half (55%) believed 'people and groups that hold values similar to yours' were losing influence in American life in general, while 66% said Americans were 'greatly divided' over the most important values.

Box 3 Yearning for balance in America

Americans are upset about the course they are on, but find it difficult to imagine how that course could be altered. Beset by a whirlwind of change – economic, technological, cultural, political – people feel increasingly disconnected and atomized from one another. They have lost their bearings; they feel cast adrift. Racing around, frazzled, exhausted, people feel they barely have time to stop and think about their own priorities, much less discuss them with others. The easiest thing is to turn on the TV, close the blinds, and hope that things are different in the morning.

Yet this research identified some openings as well – some opportunities for moving forward. The degree of consensus uncovered by the survey and focus groups about the nature of the problem Americans face is an essential ingredient for creating broadly-supported, meaningful, and sustainable change. People from all walks of life share similar concerns about a culture of materialism and excess, and the consequences for future generations. Many are surprised and excited to find that others share their views.

The challenge now is to find ways for people to move forward together – to create a public conversation around the issues of consumption, materialism, and the environment that can lead to real change. Here are five principles that emerge from this research for creating that conversation.

People want to talk about values. Americans said in the survey and focus groups that they share a deep and abiding concern about the core values driving their society; they believe that materialism, greed, and excess characterize the way they live and underlie many of their worst social ills.

Children and future generations are a crucial entry point. Every time children or future generations were mentioned in the focus groups, interest and engagement in the conversation perked up; every time they were mentioned in the survey, huge majorities registered strong views. Children are ground zero on this issue – their values and their future are at stake, and people are trying, unsuccessfully, to envision a better world for their kids.

There is a yearning for balance. The frenzied, excessive quality of American life today has left people yearning for balance in their lives and in their society. They feel that an essential side of life centered on family, friends and community has been pushed aside by the dominant ethic of ‘more, more, more’, and they are looking for ways to restore some equilibrium.

People need to work through their ambivalence. People feel strongly ambivalent about their society’s preoccupation with material goods. While condemning greed and excess, they admit to a little greed of their own; understandably, they prefer wealth to poverty and wish to live in some degree of material comfort. The third point in this triangle of ambivalence is a strong belief in freedom of choice and an aversion to tell or be told how to live.

People are looking for a sense of possibility. People associate the public discourse today with acrimony, divisiveness, and gridlock; most do not want any part of that. This issue offers an opportunity to move out of that paradigm by uncovering people's latent sense that a better way is possible. When they hear each other describe common concerns about misplaced values, children, and the environment, and have a chance to explain their longing for a more balanced life, a spark appears -- people begin to imagine the possibility of change.

Extracted and adapted from: *Yearning for Balance* (Center for a New American Dream, 1995)

These findings should not be dismissed as simply a tendency for people to give the 'right' answers to survey questions or in group discussions. They reflect a moral tension that is part of human nature, and has always been a key dynamic of human history. Culture plays a major part in determining the balance of the outcome.

In her book, *A Distant Mirror - the Calamitous 14th Century*, the historian Barbara Tuchman (1989, pp. xv-xxii), twice winner of the Pulitzer Prize, saw in that century a reflection of our own times. 'If our last decade or two of collapsing assumptions has been a period of unusual discomfort,' she writes, 'it is reassuring to know that the human species has lived through worse before.'

The Black Death, which killed a third of the population between Iceland and India, was only one of the 14th century's problems. It was a violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering and disintegrating age – quite simply, a bad time for humanity. Tuchman notes that in Europe a gulf had opened between Christian beliefs and conduct, not least within the Church itself, and between the ideal of chivalry and the behaviour of the nobility. When the gap between the ideal and real becomes too wide, she says, the system breaks down. 'Legend and story have always reflected this; in the Arthurian romances the Round Table is shattered from within. The sword is returned to the lake; the effort begins anew. Violent, destructive, greedy, fallible as he may be, man retains his vision of order and resumes his search.'

Furthermore, the legitimacy of the survey findings is supported by a wide range of research that shows that the values people say they want to live by are, in fact, the values most conducive to well-being, while those they see driving society are harmful to it – see Box 4.

2.4 The public mood and future visions

People's perceptions about Australian society and its future can also be gauged from research into their preferred futures. A 1995 study of young Australians' expected and preferred futures for Australia in 2010 found young people's hopes for Australia were not only very different from their expectations, but also different from what they are promised under current priorities (Eckersley 1999). Their dreams for Australia are of a society that places less emphasis on the individual, competition and material wealth, and more on community and family, cooperation and the environment. Some expressed their wishes in terms of a greater recognition of the 'natural', 'human' or 'spiritual' aspects of life.

Asked to nominate which of two positive scenarios for Australia for 2010 came closer to the type of society they both expected and preferred, almost two thirds of the young people said they expected 'a fast-paced, internationally competitive society, with the emphasis on the individual, wealth generation and enjoying the good life'. However eight in ten said they would prefer ' a greener, more stable society, where the emphasis is on cooperation, community and family, more equal distribution of wealth, and greater economic self-sufficiency'.

Box 4 Values, meaning and well-being

Psychological well-being is closely related to meaning in life, with positive life meaning being related to strong religious beliefs, self-transcendent values, membership in groups, dedication to a cause and clear life goals (Zika and Chamberlain 1992). Headey and Wearing (1992, p191) note that: 'A sense of meaning and purpose is the single attitude most strongly associated with life satisfaction.' Seligman (1990) argues that one necessary condition for meaning is the attachment to something larger than the self, and the larger that entity, the more meaning people can derive: 'The self, to put it another way, is a very poor site for meaning.'

Other research (Kasser and Ryan 1993, 1996; Kasser, in press) shows that people for whom 'extrinsic goals' such as fame, fortune and attractiveness are a priority in life tend to experience more anxiety and depression and lower overall well-being than people oriented towards 'intrinsic' goals of close relationships, self-acceptance and contributing to the community. People oriented towards extrinsic goals had shorter relationships with friends and lovers, and relationships more characterised by jealousy and less by trust and caring. Referring to 'a dark side of the American dream' the authors say that the culture in some ways seems to be built on precisely what turned out to be detrimental to mental health.

If the tension between values and lifestyles reflects a conflict between personal life goals – which seems likely – then this tension is itself a source of trouble. Goal conflict is a consistently strong predictor of diminished well-being (Emmons et al. 1998).

Research in other fields is also relevant to our choice of values:

Wealth and happiness: Our way of life is defined by an ever-rising standard of living. But research shows wealth is a poor predictor of happiness (Myers and Diener 1996). People have not become happier as their societies have become richer. In most countries, the correlation between income and happiness is negligible; only in the poorest countries is income a good measure of well-being. In general people in rich countries appear to be happier than those in poorer countries, but the margin may be slim, and based on factors other than wealth. Even the very rich are only slightly happier than the average citizen, and those whose incomes have increased over a ten-year period are no happier than those whose incomes have not.

Inequality and health: Inequality is bad for a nation's health (NCEPH 1999, RACP 1999). People on lower incomes die younger and suffer more serious illness than those on higher incomes. The same is true of people who are less-educated compared to those who are well-educated. The health gradient is relatively uniform: at any point on the social scale, people have, on average, better health than those below them and worse health than those above. Reducing social inequality not only narrows the health gap, it also appears to improve the health of the whole population, so benefiting everyone, rich and poor alike. It both levels and lifts a nation's health.

Young people's well-being: Rates of psychological and social problems among young people have risen in almost all developed nations over the past 50 years (Eckersley 1997, 1998b). While these trends have yet to be explained, it is possible that a culture of rising expectations and individualism is part of the explanation. Highly-publicised problems like youth suicide and drug overdoses are only the tip of an iceberg of suffering among the young, with recent studies showing that a fifth to a third of young people today experience significant psychological distress or disturbance.

Box 4 continued

The natural environment: Globally, we are still moving away from ecological sustainability, not towards it. The World Wide Fund for Nature's 'Living Planet Index', based on an assessment of forest, freshwater and marine ecosystems, declined by about 30% between 1970 and 1995, 'meaning that the world has lost nearly a third of its natural wealth in that time' (WWF 1998). The WWF also says that, globally, consumption pressure, a measure of the impact of people on natural ecosystems based on resource consumption and pollution data, is increasing by about 5% a year. At this rate, consumption pressure will double in about 15 years.

The United Nations Environment Program (1997), in its first review of the global environmental outlook, says that the earth's environment is continuing to degrade. 'Significant environmental problems remain deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of all societies in all regions. Progress towards a global sustainable future is just too slow.'

Despite the lessons of history, religion and science, there are several cultural trends working against a values framework conducive to well-being. They include:

Consumerism: Most if not all societies have tended to reinforce values that emphasise social obligations and self-restraint and discourage values that promote self-indulgence and anti-social behaviour. For example, according to the 13th century theologian, St Thomas Aquinas, the seven deadly sins are pride (self-centredness), envy, avarice (greed), wrath (violence), gluttony, sloth (apathy) and lust; the seven cardinal virtues are faith, hope, charity (compassion), prudence (good sense), temperance (moderation), fortitude (courage, perseverance) and religion. Consumerism effectively reverses these lists. We cannot quarantine other aspects of life from the moral consequences of ever-increasing consumption.

Economism: Economics is amoral – that is, it is not concerned with the morality of the choices consumers make to maximise their utility, or personal satisfaction. The more economics dictate our choices, individually and as a society (which is what is meant by economism) the more marginalised moral considerations become. The market may often be an efficient way of deciding how something is done, but not what is done and why.

Postmodernism: Postmodernity, or late modernity, describes a world coming to terms with its limitations, including the end of the modern dream of creating a perfect social order through the rational instruments of science, technology and bureaucracy. It is world characterised by relativism, pluralism, ambivalence, ambiguity, transience, fragmentation and contingency. Its danger is an 'anything goes' morality. Values cease to require any external validation, or to have any authority or reference beyond the individual and the moment. 'Personalised' values become another aspect of moral marginalisation and individual isolation.

Pessimism: While most people are personally optimistic, they are socially pessimistic. Once people give up on the dream of creating a better world, then the whole dynamic of society shifts. It affects, perhaps subtly and indirectly, people's attitudes to just about every aspect of their lives – personal relationships, education, work, citizenship – once again increasing the risks of 'distancing' the individual from society.

Individualism: Under the influence of these cultural shifts, the meaning of individualism has changed. Increasingly, it is being expressed as self-centredness, the gratification of personal wants, a pre-occupation with entitlements, an abrogation of responsibilities and a withering of collective effort. This individualism is destructive to both personal and social well-being.

In a similar vein, Mackay (1995) says that in response to feelings of instability, insecurity and uncertainty as Australian society is transformed and redefined, Australians harbor certain dreams: the 'urban village', where people know and care for each other; 'happy families', because when families are in disarray, society suffers; 'shared values', to help create a more cohesive sense of community; and more jobs, for anyone who wants one.

The 1995 National Social Science Survey (Kelley et al 1995) indicates Australians see Australian society reversing a historical trend towards greater equality and, contrary to their wishes, becoming more unequal in the future. For example, while 10% saw Australia today as a society with 'a small elite at the top, very few people in the middle and a great mass of people at the bottom', 22% foresaw this society in 30 years time. Almost half (48%) said Australia should be a society with 'most people in the middle'. And while 30% thought this described Australia today, only 24% thought it would in the future – see Table 4.

Table 4 Perceptions of Australian society: past, present and future

Time/preferred	A – A small elite at the top, very few people in the middle and the great mass of people at the bottom %	B – A society like a pyramid, with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle, and most at the bottom %	C – A pyramid except that just a few people are at the very bottom %	D – A society with most people in the middle %	E – Many people near the top and only a few people near the bottom %
40 years ago	18	28	23	21	4
10 years ago	7	27	28	31	2
Today	10	27	28	30	1
30 years time	22	23	18	24	6
What it should be	2	6	11	48	28

Source: 1995-96 National Social Science Survey (Kelley et al 1995).

Protection of the natural environment is essential to maintaining a high quality of life. And here the ambivalence and ambiguity of the public mood is obvious. For example, the 1995 National Social Science Survey found that 88% agreed it was 'quite possible to have both a prosperous economy and a healthy environment' (1% disagreed), while 49% agreed that Australia needed economic growth 'to protect the environment' (16% disagreed). Only 8% agreed that 'economic growth always harms the environment' (57% disagreed).

Yet 79% also agreed that 'Australians will increasingly have to make hard choices between economic growth and protection of the environment' (5% disagreed). Asked which statement was closer to their opinion – 'we must sacrifice economic growth in order to preserve and protect the environment' or 'we must be prepared to sacrifice environmental quality for economic growth' – 59% opted to sacrifice economic growth, while 28% chose to sacrifice environmental quality. Furthermore, in order to

protect the environment, 36% said they would be 'very' or 'fairly' willing to accept cuts in their standard of living (27% were unwilling), 47% were willing to pay higher taxes (22% were unwilling), and 60% were willing to pay higher prices (10% were unwilling).

Market researcher, Colmar Brunton's, first wave of 'monitoring the mood of the new millennium', released in February 1999, found Australians viewed the late 1990s as a time of extreme social change and upheaval, marked by a deterioration of social and family values and personal security (Colmar Brunton 1999). They saw their future lifestyles as relatively unchanged in material terms, even slightly improved, but believed community and family life would continue to deteriorate and that their personal and spiritual lives would be poorer. Frightening, confused, chaotic, traumatic, insular, dangerous and decadent were among the key words used to describe the future they expected. In contrast the future they wanted was described in terms like: simple, happy, peace, the possible return to religion, community, tolerant, safe and ordered.

In Colmar Brunton's second wave (in press) they found people were less angry but more apprehensive. There was strong cynicism about the new millennium. People saw it as an opportunity to 'start afresh', to 'get it right this time' – a time for reflection and re-evaluation. Yet they feared the opportunity would be lost amidst the hype and commercialism; it would be 'just another New Year's Eve'.

This sentiment is also evident in Hugh Mackay's research. In his review of 1998, he points to a significant shift in the process of adapting to a changing world, including towards greater insulation and disengagement. There were signs people's spirits might lift (Mackay 1998b). 'Australians' faith in Australia's potential is undiminished: they continue to believe that this is the best country on earth and they find it almost inconceivable that anyone would prefer to live anywhere else. That declaration of underlying optimism is based on a view of Australia in the future, rather than Australia now. It is as though Australians are waiting for something good to happen.'

In his latest report on the mind and mood of Australia, Mackay (1999) says there is a distinct surge of optimism among Australians. Yet he cautions against any simple interpretation of this development. Superficially Australians are quite chirpy, he says, but the mood is fragile and co-exists with a pessimism that still runs deep in our national psyche. He attributes the better spirits to three factors: the tendency to disengage from a difficult and complex national agenda; an adaptation to the changes reshaping Australian society; and the (long-awaited) pull of the new millennium. 'Almost regardless of the difficulties they may be facing, many Australians seem determined to enter into the millennial spirit by looking for a brighter future.'

Mackay says that the new optimism reflects people's determination to fight a growing sense of powerlessness by exerting more control over their lives. This can be by seeking more balance, embracing religion, being stricter with the children, calling for more regulation of society – or simply deciding to have more fun, to rise above what depresses them and focus on the football, the cricket, the movies or gambling.

Mackay points to the contradictions and complexities of the present mood. The economic good news is contributing to the sense of optimism, but it is not good news

to those who are not sharing the gains, and to those who fear Australia is becoming a less equitable society. Australians are also aware that the self-centredness and self-indulgence that is part of the process of insulation and disengagement are also making us a less compassionate society. This is part of a larger concern, Mackay says, 'that, as Australia becomes a more relentlessly materialistic society, we are losing many of the values which once characterised our more egalitarian and less competitive society'.

So there is something of a clash between optimism and pessimism, he says: 'the urge to have more fun co-exists with a cross-current of pessimism that makes it hard to read this turning of the tide, and even harder to see which direction it will ultimately take. The mood is still tentative and contradictory … often within the same person' – see Box 5.

There are other signs of a change in public mood, other evidence of a more positive outlook. The shift in public sentiment recorded by the 1997 and 1999 Newspoll surveys and other research coincides with the rise and apparent demise of One Nation. (The nature of modern life makes anger a difficult emotion to maintain; indifference is easier.) The 1999 results of *The Bulletin* Morgan Poll on the public standing of different occupations suggest that trust in those with financial and political power and influence – politicians, lawyers, business executives, bank managers and journalists – bottomed in 1997-98 and is rising again – see Table 5 (*The Bulletin* 1996,1997,1999).

Table 5 Trends in public trust

Year	1976	1981	1986	1991	1997	1998	1999
Occupation							
Doctors	62	63	63	69	66	69	74
School teachers	56	55	57	59	64	71	71
Dentists	62	62	63	64	60	61	65
Police	52	56	56	54	55	60	62
University lecturers	47	51	51	56	52	57	56
Lawyers	43	38	39	38	29	26	34
Bank managers	66	61	60	40	32	36	33
Business executives	22	22	23	15	16	18	22
State MPs	21	16	17	10	9	7	13
Federal MPs	19	15	16	10	9	7	13
Union leaders	9	8	5	7	12	13	11
Newspaper journalists	12	13	12	8	7	9	9
Advertising people	9	9	11	8	8	7	9
Car salespeople	4	3	3	3	3	2	3

Figures refer to percentage of people rating the occupation high or very high for ethics and honesty.
Source: The Bulletin Morgan Poll, 1996, 1997, 1999.

Box 5 The mind and mood of Australia

When Australians talk about politics, the GST, the republic or any other issues on the national agenda, there is a lack of involvement … almost to the point where people feel as though they are 'adrift'. They seem removed from such issues in a way that suggests that they feel as if they are mere spectators, rather than participants in a vital democratic process.

Australians are feeling as if they are losing control over more and more aspects of their lives. A feeling of *powerlessness* permeates the middle and lower strata of society. …To hear contemporary Australians talk, it sounds as if they can recall a time when life *did* seem to be more under control than it is now, and when individual citizens felt as though they had more power. Some of this might be mere nostalgia, but the people themselves are quite clear about the fact that they are experiencing a *loss* of that previous sense of control.

For some years, *The Mackay Report* has been describing an emerging trend in which consumers are feeling somewhat dissatisfied with their own emphasis on materialism….Now there are signs that the pendulum might be swinging towards a new set of values…as people come to realise that dollar values seem to be being attached to everything, to the detriment of other values. … [People] want to add other dimensions to their value system. … to place more emphasis on things like their *personal relationships*, their exposure to *experiences that will enrich them emotionally or spiritually*, and even to more aesthetic gratifications.

Australians are beginning to wonder whether politics is exclusively about economics, and whether economic issues are going to take precedence over all others. Where there is tension between the social conscience and the bottom line … it is increasingly assumed that the bottom line will always win.

…there is a widespread belief that some of the traditional values – loyalty, mutual obligation, the work ethic, egalitarianism – are in decline, and Australia has become a rather less attractive place as a result. Some people sense this moral decline in a general 'don't care' attitude; others perceive it as a more worrying tendency for Australians to become more ruthless, more competitive, and more aggressive.

One of the most significant ways in which Australians believe contemporary society is changing is in the closeness of trouble to people who previously regarded themselves as being immune 'to all that kind of thing'. When the conversation turns to suicide or drug abuse or muggings, people now feel that they are talking about their own cities, their own neighbourhoods and communities and, increasingly, their own circle of friends and family.

The words *pressure* and *stress* are commonly used in discussion of contemporary life. Even among people who describe themselves as being 'quite affluent', the pressures of over-busy lives often take their toll; for those who are also under economic pressure, life sometimes seems so stressful as to be almost intolerable.

When parents compare their own childhood with the childhood of their children, the paradox of modern life is starkly revealed: on the one hand, they typically describe their children as having many more material benefits – and educational opportunities – than they had; on the other hand, they see childhood as less innocent, more harried and more stressful for the children themselves.

Extracted from: Mackay, H. (1999), *Mind & Mood '99*, The Mackay Report.

3. Measuring quality of life: Results of the Newspoll survey

Three questions about quality of life were included in a Newspoll survey of 1200 Australians aged 18 and over, conducted by telephone in May 1999. The survey was based on a stratified random sample covering all capital cities and areas outside capital cities in all States. Results were weighted by age, gender, education and area to reflect the national population distribution.

The three questions were:

1. Thinking now about the overall quality of life of people in Australia, taking into account social, economic and environmental conditions and trends, would you say that life in Australia is getting better, worse or staying about the same? (Those who said better or worse were then asked if that was a lot or a little better or worse.)

2. In about what decade do you think the overall quality of life in Australia has been at its highest? Would you say it was in the 1990s, 1980s, 1970s, 1960s, 1950s, or before the 1950s? (The order of the list was rotated.)

3. Thinking about what might improve your own personal quality of life, would you say that each of the following things would be important or not important in improving your own quality of life? Firstly, being able to spend more time with your family and friends; having less stress and pressure in your life; having more money to buy things; feeling you are doing more for your community? (If people said something was important, they were then asked if that was very or somewhat important. The items were rotated in order.)

3.1 Trends in quality of life

About a quarter (24%) of Australians believe overall quality of life is getting better, 36% think it is getting worse and 38% say it is staying about the same (2% do not know). Those on high incomes are more positive than those on low incomes, those aged under 35 more positive than those over 35, city people more positive than country people, the better educated more positive than the less-educated, those in full-time work more positive than part-time workers and those not in paid work, and men more positive than women. The percentage saying life is getting better ranges across these demographic groups from 15% to 36%, while that saying it is worse ranges from 21% to 43%.

Another interesting, but puzzling, finding is that Victorians stand out as the most positive people, with 37% saying life is getting better compared with 14-23% for the other States – see Figure 4. However, according to another recent survey, Victorians are not the most satisfied with their own lives, or the most optimistic about improvements in household finances (Grey Advertising 1999). Victoria does not stand out from other states in having relatively less socio-economic disadvantage (Glover and Harris, in preparation). Nor are Victorians the richest, healthiest or best educated of Australians (ABS 1999). The Victorian Gross State Product per capita is equal to that of NSW and less than WA's; Victoria's household disposable income per capita places it second behind NSW. Perhaps cultural differences among the States explain the results.

The 1999 results suggest a significant improvement in public perceptions about quality of life since June 1997 – see Table 6. Then, in response to an identical question in a Newspoll survey commissioned by CSIRO, 52% of Australians believed life was getting worse, with only 13% believing it was getting better, while 33% said quality of life was staying about the same (2% did not know). The improvement has come mainly from fewer people thinking life has got a lot worse (down from 26% to 14%) and more thinking it has got a little better (up from 10% to 18%). The percentage saying life was getting better in 1997 ranged from 9% to 19%, that it was getting worse from 42% to 59%. Thus results suggest that the spread of opinion across demographic groups has increased on some measures, notably between genders and income groups on whether life is getting better – see Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 4 Percentage who say life is getting better, by State

Figure 5 Percentage who say life is getting better, by gender

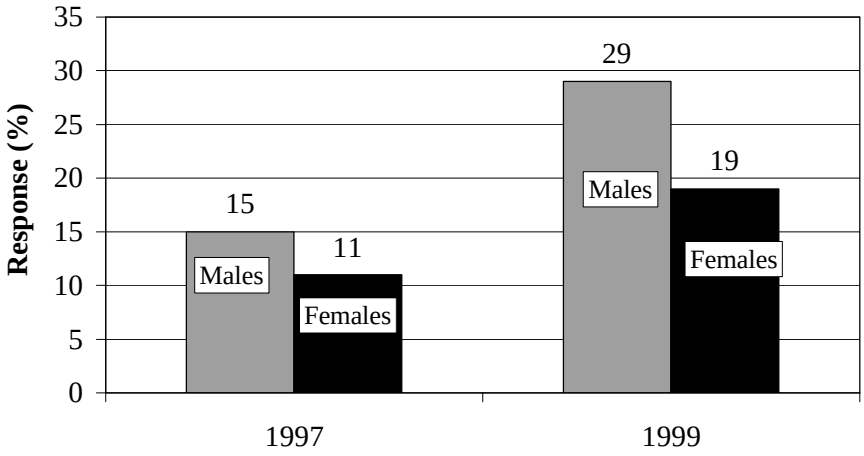
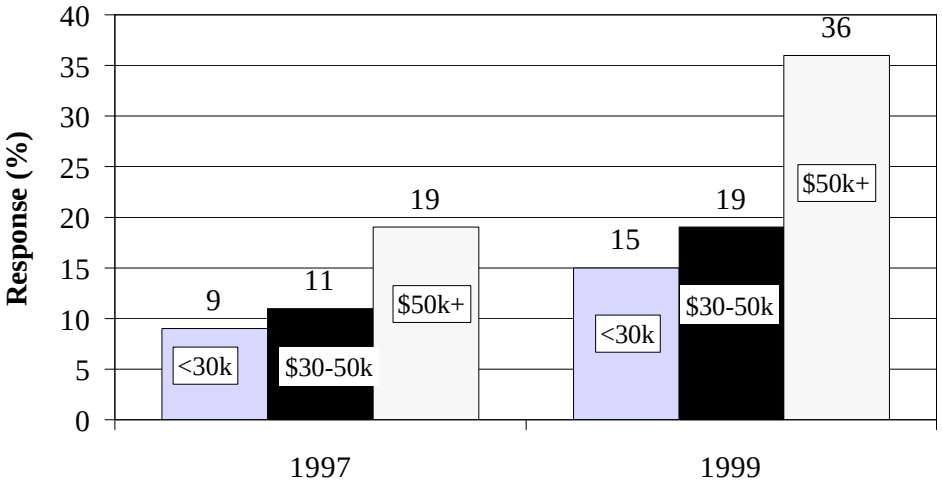


Figure 6 Percentage who say life is getting better, by income



3.2 The best decade

About a quarter of Australians (24%) say the 1990s are the decade in which quality of life in Australia has been highest, the same proportion as say life is getting better; 25% believe the 1980s were the best decade, 23% the 1970s, 13% the 1960s, 6% the 1950s, and 2% before the 1950s (8% do not know). Not surprisingly, the results are strongly age-related: for example, 45% of those aged 18-24 chose the 1990s, but only 17% of those 50 and over. Conversely, only 6% of those 18-24 chose the 1970s, compared to 32% of those 35-49 – see Figure 7.

Other demographic differences are also to be expected, and consistent with the responses to Question 1 – see Table 7. The better-off and better-educated are more likely to choose the 1990s and 1980s, and less likely to choose the 1970s or earlier decades – see Figure 8. Capital city residents are significantly more likely to choose the 1990s than residents elsewhere. However, there is no gender difference. Once again, Victoria stands out, with 32% of Victorians choosing the 1990s, well above other States – see Figure 9.

People could nominate more than one decade in answering this question, but only a small proportion did so. The largest 'spread' occurred with the 1960s, with 5% of those who chose the decade also choosing the 1950s and 5% 1970s.

Table 6 Perceptions of trends in quality of life, 1997 and 1999

Response (%)		Total better		Total worse		About same		Lot better		Little better		Little worse		Lot worse	
Year		**1997**	**1999**	**1997**	**1999**	**1997**	**1999**	**1997**	**1999**	**1997**	**1999**	**1997**	**1999**	**1997**	**1999**
Total		13	24	52	36	33	38	3	6	10	18	27	22	26	14
Males	*a*	15	29	51	37	33	33	4	7	11	22 *b*	28	23	23	13
Females	*b*	11	19	54	35	33	44 *a*	3	6	9	14	25	21	28	14
Capital city	*c*	16	27	50	32	33	39	4	8 *d*	12	19	26	18	24	13
X-city	*d*	9	19	56	43	33	37	1	4	8	16	28	28 *c*	28	15
18-24 yrs	*e*	15	27	44	21	39	51 *fgh*	1	5	14	22 *h*	34	15	10	6
25-34yrs	*f*	14	29	46	31	39	38	3	5	11	24 *gh*	24	25 *e*	22	7
35-49yrs	*g*	15	22	55	39	29	38	3	6	11	16	30	25 *e*	25	14 *ef*
50+yrs	*h*	10	22	57	41	31	34	4	8	7	14	22	21	34	20 *efg*
<$30k	*i*	9	15	59	43	31	40	3	5	6	10	26	22	33	21 *jk*
$30-50k	*j*	11	19	54	39	33	39	2	5	9	14	30	27 *k*	24	12 *k*
$50k+	*k*	19	36	42	25	37	38	4	9 *ij*	15	27 *ij*	24	18	18	7
Full-time	*l*	16	30	48	32	35	37	4	7	12	23 *mn*	26	20	22	11
Part-time	*m*	11	17	49	39	38	43	1	7	9	10	29	28 *ln*	20	11
Not working	*n*	11	21	58	39	29	37	3	5	9	16	26	21	32	19 *lm*

The income figures in the table are for combined household income from all sources before tax.
NB: A letter beside a figure indicates it is significantly larger than the corresponding figure (ie, in the same column) in the row designated by the letter (95% confidence level). The significance levels are not available for 1997 data, or the 1999 data for 'total better' and 'total worse'.

Figure 7 Choice of decade of highest quality of life, by age

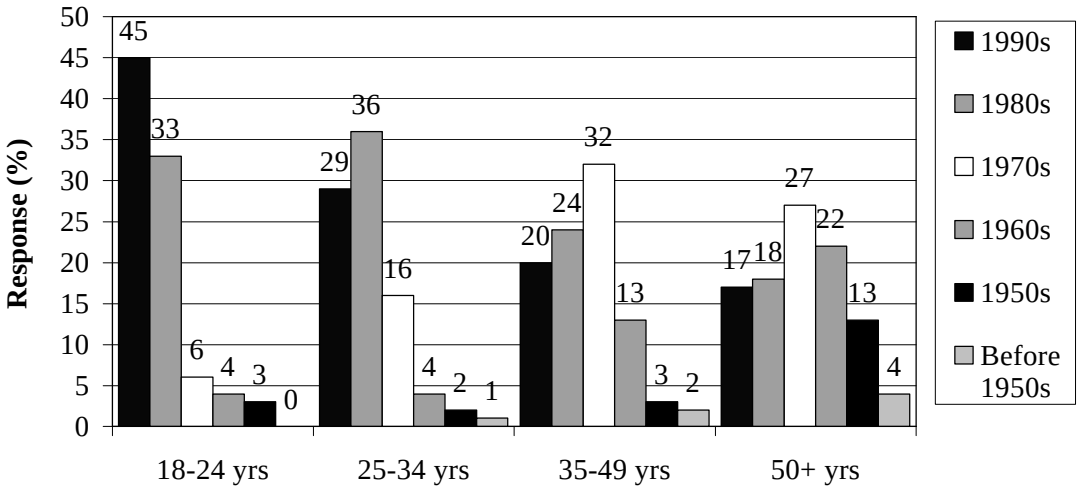


Figure 8 Choice of decade of highest quality of life, by income

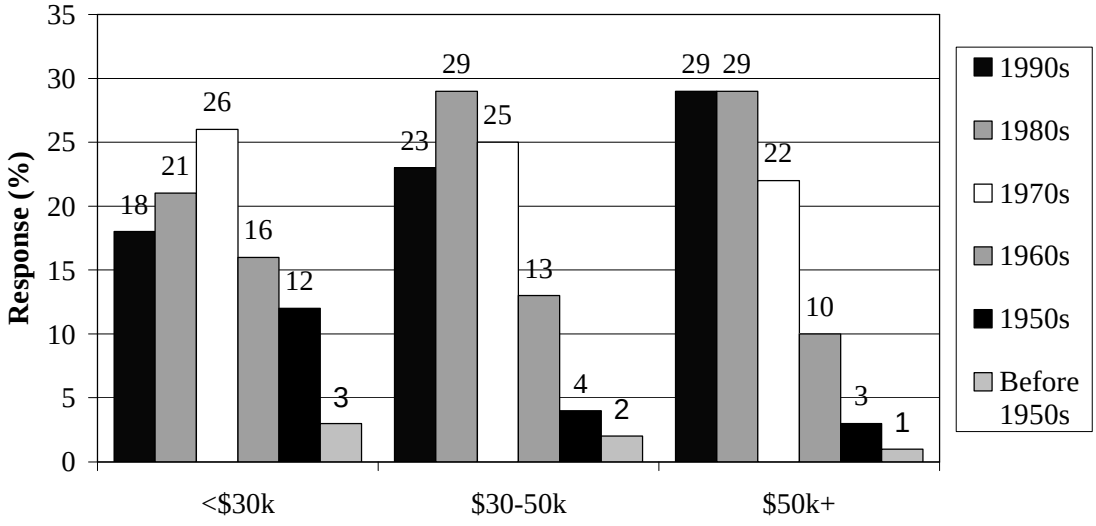


Figure 9 Percentage who think the 1990s is the best decade, by State

Table 7 Perceptions of the decade of highest quality of life

Decade Response (%)	Row	1990s	1980s	1970s	1960s	1950s	Before 1950s
Total		24	25	23	13	6	2
Males	*a*	25	23	25	14	5	3
Females	*b*	23	27	22	12	7	1
Capital city	*c*	28 *d*	24	22	13	6	2
X-city	*d*	17	28	26	14	7	2
18-24 yrs	*e*	45 *fgh*	33 *h*	6	4	3	0
25-34 yrs	*f*	29 *gh*	36 *gh*	16 *e*	4	2	1
35-49 yrs	*g*	20	24 *h*	32 *ef*	13 *ef*	3	2
50+ yrs	*h*	17	18	27 *ef*	22 *efg*	13 *efg*	4 *ef*
<$30k	*i*	18	21	26	16 *k*	12 *jk*	3 *k*
$30-50k	*j*	23	29 *i*	25	13	4	2
$50k+	*k*	29 *i*	29 *i*	22	10	3	1

The income figures in the table are for combined household income from all sources before tax.
NB: A letter beside a figure indicates it is significantly larger than corresponding figure (ie, in the same column) in the row designated by the letter (95% confidence level).

3.3 Improving personal quality of life

A higher standard of living is not the most important factor in improving personal quality of life, according to most Australians. Three-quarters (75%) rate more time with family and friends as very important and 66% rate having less stress as very important, compared to only 38% who rate more money and 36% doing more for the community as very important. Conversely, 23% rate having more money as not important, compared to 19% for doing more for their community, 16% having less stress, and 9% spending more time with family and friends.

By and large, differences across demographic groups are not large or surprising, although some are statistically significant – see Table 8. Women, those aged 25-34, and those with children are more likely to say more time with family and friends is very important. Those over 50 are less likely to rate having less stress in their lives as very important, as are those without children and those not in paid work. Those under 35 are more likely than those over 50 to rate having more money as very important, as are those on lower incomes. Women, those not in paid work and those on lower incomes are more likely to say feeling they are contributing more to their community is very important. The gender differences in responses to this question may help to explain why fewer women than men believe life is getting better.

Table 8 Factors in improving personal quality of life: demographic differences

Factor (% very important) Group	Row	More time with family and friends	Less stress and pressure	More money to buy things	Doing more for community
Total		75	66	38	36
Males	*a*	70	64	36	31
Females	*b*	80 *a*	68	40	41 *a*
Children	*c*	82 *d*	73 *d*	41	36
No children	*d*	72	62	36	36
18-24 yrs	*e*	79	69 *h*	46 *h*	34
25-34 yrs	*f*	82 *gh*	73 *h*	43 *h*	37
35-49 yrs	*g*	75	71 *h*	38	33
50+ yrs	*h*	70	58	32	40
<$30K	*i*	72	63	45 *k*	40 *k*
$30-49K	*j*	75	70	42 *k*	38
$50K+	*k*	77	64	28	32
Full-time	*l*	78 *n*	70 *n*	36	33
Part-time	*m*	77	72 *n*	38	36
Not working	*n*	70	59	40	41 *l*

The income figures in the table are for combined household income from all sources before tax.
NB: A letter beside a figure indicates it is significantly larger than the corresponding figure (ie, in the same column) in the row designated by the letter (95% confidence level).

3.4 Links between questions

There are significant correlations between responses to the first two questions about trends in quality of life and the decade of highest quality of life. For example, 51% of those who choose the 1990s as the best decade also think life is getting better, while among those who choose the 1980s as the best decade, 47% think quality of life is staying about the same. In contrast, 50% or more of those who think the 1970s or earlier are the best time think quality of life is declining – see Table 9.

There are also some significant links between how people answered the third question about improving personal quality of life and their answers to the first two questions about overall quality of life in Australia. However the differences here are, while sometimes significant, not large. For example, those who rate spending more time with family and friends as very important to improving quality of life are slightly more likely to choose the 1990s as the best decade, while those who rate it as not important are more likely to choose the 1950s to the 1970s. Those who rate having more money as very important are slightly more likely to choose the 1980s and 1990s as the best decade, while those who say more money is not important are more likely to choose the 1970s or earlier as the best time. Factors such as age, financial situation and whether people are working might lie behind these associations.

Table 9 Perceptions of quality of life and best decade

Decade	**1990s**	**1980s**	**1970s**	**1960s**	**1950s**	**Before 1950s**
Response (%)						
Better	51	18	11	14	10	11
Same	40	47	34	33	33	21
Worse	9	34	54	50	55	66

4. Summing up

There is, then, no 'new dawn' of optimism in Australia – at least not yet. Recent claims that we are seeing a new mood of optimism sweeping the nation are partly right, partly flawed analysis and partly wishful thinking. There appears to be a lifting of the national mood, but it may be superficial and short term. There is a sense of personal optimism and belief in Australia that has probably always been there. And there remains an underlying sense of pessimism about Australian society that has been building for at least two decades.

These important considerations notwithstanding, defenders of the current economic and political orthodoxy will want to seize on the signs of a new mood as evidence that economic performance is at last translating into public approval. Max Walsh, editor-in-chief of *The Bulletin* and one of Australia's most experienced and respected political commentators, says that the perception of 'a nation of nail-biters' is not a conspiracy, but a case of 'being behind the curve' (Walsh 1999). 'We are reluctant optimists, which is why it has taken some time to accept the hard evidence that we are on an economic roll, and more importantly that it is not due to luck but our own efforts.'

Given the dominance of political debate by economics, this issue of the relationship between economic performance and public perceptions of quality of life warrants discussion. If the management of society centres on the management of the economy, as it does today, then it certainly helps that the economy is performing well. However, a careful reading of the evidence in this analysis does not support the interpretation that the lift in mood is due wholly or mainly to the economy, however much most politicians, economists and business people might want to believe it.

The problem with a social paradigm, or guiding story, that defines progress in largely economic and material terms – life is getting better because we are getting richer – is that it lacks coherence. Ordinary Australians recognise this better than their leaders; they view their lives as a whole, they weigh up the totality of their circumstances and experiences. Leaders evaluate performance according to a set of highly selective and imperfect measures of national well-being. These indicators are treated in isolation; they only make sense if there is no attempt to link and integrate measures of economic performance with those of personal happiness and well-being, social cohesion and equity, and environmental health and integrity.

Underpinning the prevailing paradigm is a fallacy: the notion that wealth comes first, that economic growth increases our capacity to meet environmental and social objectives. However, if the processes by which we pursue economic growth do more damage to the social fabric and the state of the environment than we can repair with the extra money, then we are still going backwards (even assuming we can fully identify, cost and repair the impacts). 'Efficiency' in generating wealth may well mean 'inefficiency' in improving overall quality of life.

The incoherence that underlies the contemporary 'official story' of life in Australia, and which emerges from the research literature, can be expressed in a series of questions and their answers:

1. Is increased material wealth, measured as growth in GDP, the top priority of government? Yes. This is explicit in statements by political leaders and implicit in the emphasis of government policy.

2. Is increased wealth the top priority of individual Australians? No. Surveys consistently show that prosperity ranks in importance well behind things like family and security.

3. Can the pursuit of economic growth harm civil society? Yes, when it is given priority over other goals. The research shows there is a common perception that too much change, greed and materialism – all associated with the push for growth – are contributing to social problems and the loss of a sense of community.

4. Can increased wealth harm personal health and well-being? Yes, when becoming richer takes precedence over other aspects of life. Both public opinion and scientific research show that wealth is a poor predictor of happiness and the desire for riches can be detrimental to well-being.

5. Are current patterns of economic growth environmentally sustainable? No. The overwhelming weight of evidence and expert opinion is that economic growth, as currently defined and derived, is damaging the earth's natural environment.

The point behind these questions is not simply to abandon growth in a growth-based economy; it is to shift from 'going for growth' to 'going beyond growth'. The reality of today's economy is that if people reject overwork and conspicuous consumption, then the economy will suffer. In considering these issues, it is important to bear in mind that we are not discussing a static situation. The evidence suggests many Australians regard their current way of life as 'excessive'. If the Commonwealth Government achieves its goal of a sustained economic growth rate of more than 4% a year, and if this growth continues to be based largely on increased private consumption, then Australians' lifestyles will become twice as 'excessive' within about 20 years.

Deep down, beneath the satisfaction of everyday life, Australians are looking for a different paradigm, a new story to define who they are and where they want to go. Instead of one narrowly focused on material progress, they want a coherent vision that expresses a better balance between economic welfare, social equity and environmental sustainability, a vision that reflects the reality that these are, ultimately, inextricably linked. They want the option to weigh and trade economic, social and environmental costs and benefits – just as they did earlier this century in trading off higher economic growth for a shorter working week and a shorter working life, in 'buying' more time for things other than work.

Underlying today's cynicism about politics and disengagement from the political process is a recognition that the big issues that dominate political debate – like the GST and the republic – are trivial compared to this far bigger agenda. Australians' desire to have fun, to indulge themselves, does reflect greater 'consumer confidence'. It is also an understandable response to 'issue and risk fatigue', to the constant demand to ingest, digest and decide on a growing multitude of matters. But it also reveals a disappointment that the national stocktake, the whole-of-society evaluation, they feel is needed is nowhere in sight.

The Australia Institute

What polls are measuring, and qualitative surveys are explaining, is a growing tension between Australians' values and their lifestyles. This tension is always present, a part of the human condition. What is significant about the times is that the tension is increasing, and what is different is the extent to which social institutions and Western culture are contributing to the tension by promoting and encouraging – even demanding – a fast-paced, high-pressure, hyper-consumer lifestyle. Modern economies rely on this way of life.

People are torn between a sound common sense and basic decency and the lure of constant distraction and instant gratification. The growing tension between values and lifestyles may well become the defining dynamic of life in Australia and other Western societies in the early decades of the 21st century.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1999. 'Australian Social Trends 1999', ABS catalogue no. 4102.0.

Australian Values Study (AVS) 1983. Data collected by Roy Morgan Research Centre. AVS Steering Committee, Melbourne, (producer), 1984. Social Science Data Archives, the Australian National University, Canberra, (distributor) 1986.

Bagnall, D. 1999. 'Reasons to be cheerful', The Bulletin, 29 June, pp. 36-39.

Center for a New American Dream (CNAD) 1995. 'Yearning for Balance', Report prepared by the Harwood Group, commissioned by the Merck Family Fund, Center for a New American Dream, www.newdream.org

Center for a New American Dream (CNAD) 1997. 'Majority of Americans would trade pay for less stress', poll conducted by EDK Associates, New York, www.newdream.org

Clemenger/BBDO 1997. 'The Silent Majority III - The Everyday Problems of the Average Australian', Clemenger Report, August.

Colmar Brunton Research 1999. 'Monitoring the mood of the new millennium', first wave, February.

Colmar Brunton Research (in press). 'Monitoring the mood of the new millennium', second wave.

Cummins, R. A. & Nistico, H. (in press). 'Maintaining life satisfaction: The role of cognitive illusions', Clinical Psychology Review.

Cummins, R. A. 1998. 'The second approximation to an international standard for life satisfaction', Social Indicators Research, vol. 43, pp, 307-334.

Cummins, R. A. 1999. 'Normative life satisfaction: Measurement issues and a homeostatic model', in Zumbo B. (Ed.) 'Methodological Developments and Issues in Quality of Life Research', Kluwer, Amsterdam.

Eckersley, R. 1997. 'Psychosocial disorders in young people: On the agenda but not on the mend', The Medical Journal of Australia, vol. 166, pp. 423-424.

Eckersley, R. 1998a. 'Perspectives on progress: Economic growth, quality of life and ecological sustainability', in Eckersley, R. (Ed), 'Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?', CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria.

Eckersley, R. 1998b. 'Redefining progress: Shaping the future to human needs', Family Matters, no. 51, Spring/Summer, pp. 6-12.

Eckersley, R. 1999. 'Dreams and expectations: Young people's expected and preferred futures and their significance for education', Futures, vol. 31, pp. 73-90.

Emmons, R.A., Cheung, C. & Tehrani, K. 1998. 'Assessing spirituality through personal goals: Implications for research on religion and subjective well-being', Social Indicators Research, vol. 45, pp. 391-422.

Gallup 1998. 'Haves and Have-Nots: Perceptions of Fairness and Opportunity 1998', Gallup Poll Social Audit, The Gallup Organization, Princeton. Some details of the audit can be obtained from Gallup's website, www.gallup.com

Gallup 1999. 'Satisfaction with the US', Poll trends, Gallup Poll, www.gallup.com

Glover, J. D. & Harris, K. R. (in preparation). 'A Social Atlas of Australia'.

Grey Advertising 1999. 'Eye on Australia, Wave 8', survey conducted by Brian Sweeney & Associates, Grey Advertising Australia, Melbourne and Sydney. Some findings are reported in Grey Matter, edition 19.

Hamilton, C. 1998. 'Measuring changes in economic welfare: The Genuine Progress Indicator for Australia', in Eckersley, R. (Ed), 'Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?', CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria.

Headey, B. & Wearing, A. 1988. 'The sense of relative superiority - central to well-being', Social Indicators Research, vol. 20, pp .497-516.

Headey, B. & Wearing, A. 1992. 'Understanding Happiness: A Theory of Subjective Well-being', Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.

Howard, J. 1998. Address to the World Economic Forum Dinner, Melbourne, 16 March, Press Office of the Prime Minister, Parliament House, Canberra.

Kasser, T. & Ryan, R.M. 1993. 'A dark side of the American Dream: Correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration', Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, vol. 65, no. 2. pp. 410-422.

Kasser, T. & Ryan, R. M. 1996. 'Further examining the American Dream: Differential correlates of intrinsic and extrinsic goals', Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 280-287.

Kasser, T. (in press). 'Two versions of the American Dream: Which goals and values make for a high quality of life?' in Diener, E. & Rahtz D. (Eds), 'Advances in Quality of Life Theory and Research', Kluwer, Dordrecht, Netherlands.

Kelley, J., Bean, C. S., Evans, M. D. R. & Zagorski, K. 1995. 'Australia 1995: International Social Science Survey', Canberra: Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University.

Mackay, H. 1995. 'Society Now', The Mackay Report, June.

Mackay, H. 1997. 'Prophet-less PM sees stocks crash', The Weekend Australian, 1-2 November, p 2.

Mackay, H. 1998a. 'Mind & Mood', The Mackay Report, June.

Mackay, H. 1998b. '1998: The year in review,' a supplement to The Mackay Report.

Mackay, H. 1999. 'Mind & Mood '99', The Mackay Report, June.

Myers, D. & Diener, E. 1996. 'The pursuit of happiness', Scientific American, vol. 274, no. 5, May, pp. 54-56.

Myers, D. G. 1997. 'Does economic growth improve human morale', in Clapp, R. (Ed), 'The Consuming Passion', Intervarsity Press. Excerpt available on the Center for a New American Dream website, www.newdream.org

National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH) 1999. 'The Health Inequalities Research Collaboration: Improving health equality in Australia', NCEPH, the Australian National University, Canberra.

National Campaign Against Violence and Crime (NCAVAC) 1998. 'Fear of Crime, Summary volume and report findings', NCAVAC, Attorney-General's Department, Commonwealth of Australia.

Pusey, M. 1998a. 'Incomes, standards of living and quality of life: Preliminary findings of the Middle Australia Project', in Eckersley, R. (Ed), 'Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?', CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria.

Pusey, M. 1998b. 'The impact of economic restructuring on women and families: Preliminary findings from the Middle Australia Project', Australian Quarterly, July-August , pp. 18-27; personal communication.

Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) 1999. 'For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health…', RACP Health Policy Unit, Sydney.

Saulwick Poll, 1989, December, (D710). Data obtained from the Social Sciences Data Archives, the Australian National University, http://ssda.anu.edu.au

Seligman, M.E.P., 1990. 'Why is there so much depression today? The waxing of the individual and the waning of the commons', in Ingram, R.E. (Ed), 'Contemporary Psychological Approaches to Depression – Theory, Research and Treatment', Plenum Press, New York.

The Bulletin, 1996, 1997, 1999, 'The Bulletin Morgan poll', 30 April 1996, p. 38; 10 June 1997, p. 17; 29 June 1999, p. 35.

The Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard Survey Project, 1998. 'American values: 1998 survey of Americans on values', Kaiser Family Foundation, www.kff.org

Tuchman, B. 1989. 'A Distant Mirror – the Calamitous 14th Century', Papermac, London (first published 1978 by Alfred A. Knopf).

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) 1997. 'Global Environment Outlook 1997: Executive Summary, global overview', www.unep.ch/earthw/assess.htm

Uslaner, E. M. 1998. 'Social capital, television, and the "mean world": Trust, optimism, and civic participation', Political Psychology, vol. 19, pp. 441-467.

Walsh, M. 1999. 'The bottom line: Australia beware the unholy trinity', The Bulletin, 29 June, p 40.

Wearing, A. & Headey, B. 1998. 'Who enjoys life and why: Measuring subjective well-being', in Eckersley, R. (Ed), 'Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?', CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria.

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) 1998. 'Living Planet Report 1998', WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

Zika S. & Chamberlain, K. 1992. 'On the relation between meaning in life and psychological well-being', British Journal of Psychology, vol. 83, pp. 133-145.

Discussion papers available from the Australia Institute

1. Kirby, M., *Trash Fights Back*, with Max Neutze, Chair's address. Speeches at the public launch of The Australia Institute, 4 May 1994
2. Quiggin, J., *Does Privatisation Pay?* September 1994
3. Wilkenfeld, G., Hamilton, C. and Saddler, H., *Australia's Greenhouse Strategy: Can the future be rescued?* February 1995
4. Hamilton, C. and Quiggin, J., *The Privatisation of CSL*, June 1995
5. Dargavel, J., O'Shaughnessy, P. and Hamilton, C., *Logging and Water: A study of the effects of logging regimes on water catchment hydrology and soil stability on the eastern seaboard of Australia*, November 1995
6. The Australia Institute, *Citizens in the Marketplace: The implications of competition policy for citizenship*, Papers from a conference held at the Australian National University, 4 December 1995, March 1996
7. Jamieson House Employment Group, *Redistributing Work: Solutions to the paradox of overwork and unemployment in Australia*, June 1996
8. The Australia Institute, *What Should Government Do? Auditing the Audit Report*, Papers from a conference held at the Australian National University, July 1996
9. Hamilton, C., *Mining in Kakadu: Lessons from Coronation Hill* July 1996
10. Hamilton, C., Hundloe, T. and Quiggin, J., *Ecological Tax Reform in Australia: Using taxes and public spending to protect the environment without hurting the economy* April 1997
11. Wensing, E. and Sheehan, J., *Native Title: Implications for land management* April 1997
12. Hamilton, C. and Saddler, H., *The Genuine Progress Indicator for Australia* (summary version) July 1997
13. Hundloe, T. and Hamilton, C., *Koalas and Tourism: An economic evaluation* July 1997
14. Hamilton, C. and Saddler, H., *The Genuine Progress Indicator: A new index of changes in well-being for Australia* October 1997
15. Hamilton, C. and Quiggin, J., *Economic Analysis of Greenhouse Policy: A layperson's guide to the perils of economic modelling* December 1997
16. Smith, J., *Gambling Taxation in Australia* March 1998
17. Sheehan, J. and Wensing, E., *Indigenous Property Rights: New developments for planning and valuation* March 1998
18. Disney, J., Nevile, J., Quiggin, J. and Smith, J., *Perspectives on the GST Package* September 1998
19. Turton, H. and Hamilton, C., *The GST Package and Air Pollution: The impact of proposed indirect tax changes on atmospheric emissions* September 1998
20. Quiggin, J., Saddler, H., Neutze, M., Hamilton, C., Turton, H., *The Privatisation of ACTEW: The fiscal, efficiency and service quality implications of the proposed sale of ACT Electricity and Water* December 1998
21. Nevile, A., *Competing Interests: Competition policy in the welfare sector* June 1999
22. Hamilton, C. & Turton, H., *Business Tax Reform and the Environment: Emissions trading as a tax reform option* August 1999

THE AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE LTD

FOR A JUST, SUSTAINABLE, PEACEFUL FUTURE

The Australia Institute promotes a more just, sustainable and peaceful society through research, publication and vigorous participation in public debate.

The Australia Institute is an independent non-profit public policy research centre. It carries out research and policy analysis and participates in public debates on economic, social and environmental issues. It undertakes research commissioned and paid for by philanthropic trusts, governments, business, unions and community organisations.

The Institute is wholly independent and not affiliated with any other organisation. As an Approved Research Institute, donations to its Research Fund are tax deductible for the donor.

Philosophy

The Institute was established in 1994 by a number of individuals from various sections of the community. They share a deep concern about the impact on Australian society of the priority given to a narrow definition of economic efficiency over community, environmental and ethical considerations in public and private decision making. A better balance is urgently needed.

The Directors, while sharing a broad set of values, do not have a fixed view of the policies that the Institute should advocate. Unconstrained by ideologies of the past, the purpose of the Institute is to help create a vision of a more just, sustainable and peaceful Australian society and to develop and promote that vision in a pragmatic and effective way.

Membership

Membership is a valuable means of contributing to the objectives of the Institute. The annual fee is $75 (with a discount for low-income earners). Members receive the *Newsletter*, published four times a year, and are entitled to Institute papers free of charge on request. They also receive discounted admission to some Institute functions.

If you would like to purchase our publications or support The Australia Institute through membership or donation please contact:

PO Box 72, Lyneham, ACT 2602

Tel: (02) 6249 6221 Fax: (02) 6249 6448

Email: austinst@dynamite.com.au

Website: www.tai.org.au