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ABSTRACT

By exploring housing transitions and their impact on the leisure practices of 12, white, British economically 'middling' men aged between 20 and 26 whilst utilising the work of British cultural theorist Raymond Williams, this article articulates a cultural studies critique of social generational approaches. Firstly, it shows how this approach to young lives can remedy the 'base' determining 'superstructure' logic underpinning social generational approaches. Secondly, drawing on Williams' concepts can foreground culture as constitutive of contemporary transitional pathways. Finally, this approach can continue the impetus of 'blending' of cultural and transitional approaches found within social generational approaches. Doing so will show how a cultural studies approach can help supplement insights into continuity and change within contemporary young lives whilst still enabling a critical focus on class, gender and race. Taken together, this article looks to enable a productive engagement with social generational approaches to critically interrogate the experiences of young people in ever-changing social, cultural, economic and political contexts.

Introduction

In recent years, socio-economic and cultural change in Western economies tied to 'individualisation', the growth of choice biographies (Beck 1991), de-industrialisation, the expansion of the asset-economy, its impact on housing pathways (Woodman 2022) and the shift toward service-based economies (Roberts 2018) have disrupted conventional pathways from 'youth' to 'adulthood'. These 'conventional' pathways are related to imaginaries of the 'golden age' of school to work (Goodwin and O'Connor 2005). This refers to the pre-Thatcher, post-war social-democratic era in the UK specifically when young people of any social class were understood to be able to leave school, easily find a job, progress quickly onto 'adult' wages before settling into a job for life (Roberts 2020). These transitions were also understood to include moving into

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homeownership and starting a heterosexual nuclear family (McDowell 2017). Importantly this image was and still is an 'ideal' relating to what Berlant (2011, 3) called the 'good life' – a series of affective attachments relating to 'upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy'.

This series of attachments expressed in 'adulthood' can be understood to have been an ideal available only to a *relatively advantaged* few. It is an exclusionary category because it classifies those who get positioned as 'ordinary' and those who are not. Young people during the 'golden age' had worries around unemployment and the stigma attached to it (Goodwin and O'Connor 2005). Black people in the UK during this period were subject to racist discrimination in employment, housing and leisure through the lack of equalities legislation and racism at large (Campbell 2016).[1] Homosexuality was until 1968 criminalised in the UK with homophobia a key basis through which 'hegemonic' and 'complicit' masculinities were defined (Connell 1995). These all point to the inherently exclusionary cultural 'figure' of ideal adulthood in the UK, rendering the notion that it is a 'neutral' category problematic (Nilsen 2021). Instead, 'adulthood' articulates historically located classificatory struggles (Bessant, Pickard, and Watts 2020) which produce and legitimate classed, gendered, racial and sexual inequalities.

The routes, aspirations and experiences relating to adulthood have long been a focus of youth sociologists, making up one of the 'poles' of the sociology of youth – the 'transitions' approach, with the other being defined by 'cultural' research (Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn 2011). Transitions research has been traditionally focussed on the move from school to employment, often being more quantitative in nature (Woodman and Bennett 2015). In recent decades, the focus of these approaches has expanded to include housing transitions (MacDonald et al. 2001). 'Cultural' research has traditionally taken a more qualitative and semiotic approach focussing on leisure-based identity practices (Hall and Jefferson 1975; Bennett 1999; Sharp and Threadgold 2020).

However, these two traditions – one emerging from the cultural studies and sociological work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and the other emerging out of concern about rising youth unemployment in the 1980s in the UK rarely 'talk' to one another (MacDonald, Banks, and Hollands 1993). For Dan Woodman and Andy Bennett, as well as others (2015; also see Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn 2011) this binary prevents a 'holistic' means for understanding young lives. Woodman, Shildrick, and MacDonald (2020, 5) explicate this further, arguing that it is not 'possible to study youth cultural forms, and the relationships between young people, in isolation from the need for paid employment in a shifting youth labour market'. We can expand this further to say that we cannot isolate these from housing and family transitions either. This is not to negate work which has 'blended' the two approaches broadly and in relation to housing specifically (see Willis 1977; Fuster, Arundel, and Susino 2019; Batchelor et al. 2020; Kubala and Samec-Hoření 2021, Hoff, 2022). Whilst the 'divide' between the two poles is often exaggerated (Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn 2011) this 'categorising' highlights how the dynamic relations between time, culture and economy and how it shapes the *lived* experiences of young people negotiating leisure and 'becoming' adult are rarely researched as shaping one another explicitly.

Social generational approaches (Woodman and Wyn 2015; Wyn et al. 2020) are argued to enable a reconciling of this issue. Andy Furlong et al. write (2011, 361) 'the focus on the

impact of changing material conditions on young people's subjectivities integrates core foci of the "cultural" and "transitions" approaches'. Fundamentally, understanding how material conditions *of a given time and place* enable and constrain how young people understand their lives, their aspirations, the pathways open to them and the forms of expression used to articulate a given set of identities erase the boundary between the 'transitional' and the 'cultural'. Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn (2011, 361) write that 'a social generational approach requires the systematic analysis of the economic, political and social conditions impacting young people'. They then say, 'because this concept rests on the notion that new and distinctive forms of consciousness are produced by changing social conditions, a generational approach takes account of the role of culture and subjectivities as forces for social change'. Culture and transitions are seen as interlocked, but I will argue this 'blending' works to reproduce a 'base' determining 'superstructure' logic seen within Marxist cultural theory. I argue that turning to the over-looked, but resurgently popular work of Raymond Williams (Kay 2021) – particularly his understandings of the dominant, emergent and residual, and culture as 'material' – can counter this tendency.

Raymond Williams and culture

Building on social anthropological understandings of culture as a 'particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or group' (Williams 1976, 80), Williams (1958[1989]: 3) famously wrote that 'culture is ordinary'. This was a direct counterpoint to more elitist, universalist and normative understandings of culture based on Eurocentric, white and masculinised 'civilisation' (Bennett 2005 in Bennett 2005) as emblematic of the 'best that has been thought and said' (Arnold 1869). Instead, for Williams culture (1958 [1989]: 3) is where:

> Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land.

Culture is how meaning is made and given, can allow for common understanding, is changeable over time and symbolically expresses something about the material position it emerges from (Williams 1981). Whilst all have and practice culture, not *all* culture is valued equally, being used to explain and justify a range of social inequalities (Hall 1981; Bourdieu 1984; Skeggs 2003).

Williams also challenged aspects of classical Marxist theory, particularly regarding the relations between culture and economy (McGuigan 2019). For Williams (1973), a key issue is that changes in the 'base' are mirrored in the 'superstructure'. Classical Marxist approaches understood the 'base' as the material relations of production, often taken to mean economic relations. 'Superstructural' elements such as culture are seen to be *less material* and as such less *productive* rendering them secondary to economic conditions (Eagleton 1989). In turn, given the *secondary* nature accorded to the superstructural, changes in material 'base' are framed as determining the form the superstructure takes. This is because determination is often framed as 'an external cause which totally

predicts or prefigures, or indeed totally controls a subsequent activity' (Williams 1977, 32). Instead, Williams (1973) advocates for a different approach to understanding determination, arguing that we should be thinking through how action is limited or *bounded* by given historical conditions.

McGuigan (2019) notes this difference in understanding what is meant by determination immediately changes how the relations between 'base' and 'superstructure' are framed. This is grounded in Williams' assertion that 'culture is material' (Moran 2021, 1023). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theorising of hegemony, he writes that it 'saturates the society to such an extent' that it 'constitutes the limit of common sense of most people under its sway' (Williams 1973, 8). In this sense, culture as a key facet of hegemony sets limits on human action. As such, it is one of the 'productive forces' because it enables and constrains practice *materially* through the constitution of everyday forms of 'common-sense' that guide action in the world. For Williams 'ideas and meanings do not arrive "from above", […] but are produced in and through the practices and lived experiences of everyday life' (Moran 2021, 1023). More simply, culture being material shows how ideas are 'made manifest in everyday practice' (McGuigan and Moran 2014, 177). These insights form the basis of the cultural-materialist approach and enable an insight into the productive dynamic between culture and economy as a *relation* rather than a crude *economistic* or *culturalist* understanding where one *totally* determines the other.

Whilst Williams saw culture as a whole way of life (1958[1989]), he did not see it as a homogenised mass expressing *one* set of meanings. Rather, he saw culture as made up of complimentary and contradictory trends that circulate concurrently, constituted by internal differentiations that dynamically interact within a given historical juncture, rather than seeing it as a static 'whole' that expresses distinctive stages of history (Williams 1977, 121). Culture is both internally differentiated and historically specific, with the interactions between these 'differences' driving continuity and change. Discussions of the dominant, emergent and residual capture this because each are distinctive, yet interlocking elements of cultural processes that are enabled and constrained by the material conditions of a given historical moment. The 'residual' and 'emergent' also allow us to see the shape of 'dominant' cultural forms of a given moment as well as their own specific 'qualities' within socio-cultural processes because of the relationality of these elements (Williams 1977). Each gain meaning from one another. Williams writes that the 'dominant' and the 'effective' are 'hegemonic' which in the context of youth transitions is the 'adulthood' expressive of the social-democratic 'good life'. The residual is something which 'has been effectively formed in the past, but is still an active part of the cultural process, not only and not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present' (ibid, p. 121). Finally, he defines the emergent as 'new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships […] continually being created' (ibid, p. 123) which could be framed as specific generational dispositions that are distinctive from either the 'dominant' or 'residual' which express 'new' adulthood in social generational terms.

'Generational' habitus: a proxy for 'base' determining 'superstructure'?

Whilst social generational approaches are not a form of Marxist cultural analysis, a similar logic emerges whereby material social conditions are understood to implicitly 'prefigure'

young people's responses to that moment. Fundamentally, the material economic changes that have defined Western economies since the 1980s are implicitly framed as *totally* pre-figuring the development of a 'new' set of dispositions and outlooks (Woodman and Wyn 2015; Wyn et al. 2020).

Woodman and Wyn (2015) draw on Pierre Bourdieu with the concept of 'generational habitus' to historicise the outlooks and practices of young people. They use this concept to describe and analyse how young people respond to and shape the social conditions they face whilst acknowledging 'that [...] revision is never a radical escape because it must work on the premises established by previous experience' (Woodman and Wyn 2015, 70). The ongoing revision of dispositions is a response to social change, which also contributes to the formation and sustaining of those conditions. These dispositions draw upon past experiences as a 'map' to guide practice in the present. In short, generational habitus can be seen as a way for young people to articulate a sensibility that enables the navigation of a given set of conditions 'successfully' or 'not' (Moreno and Urraco 2018, 2).

Using this concept to contextualise practice has been critiqued given habitus is an *already* historicised concept (Roberts and France 2021). However, I argue that the notion of a 'generational' habitus can implicitly become a 'proxy' of 'base' determining 'superstructure'. This is because its status as a *historicised* structured and structuring series of generative principles for practice (Bourdieu 1977) is implicitly framed as determined by the specific material social conditions that facilitate the emergence of a generation. Whilst Bourdieu was not a theorist of 'order' or 'reproduction' (Bessant, Pickard, and Watts 2020) the utilisation of habitus like this implicitly reproduces this 'reading' of his work, which articulates the logic of 'base' determining 'superstructure'.

Historicising by 'generation' produces this situation because it 'contains' the habitus solely within that moment. As a socio-temporal structure (Woodman and Wyn 2015) a generation and the subjectivities that articulate its *existence* can become so temporally bounded to the *shared conditions* that form it, it can be framed as *totally prefigured* by the material conditions that enable it. Following this, 'adulthood' of the 'good life' could be positioned as 'outside' current generational dispositions given the material conditions that enabled it are gone, despite its continuing influence on young people's understandings of adulthood (Kubala and Samec-Hoření 2021). So, a generations' relation to historically immediate material conditions can be seen as *totally prefiguring* of young people's outlooks. Young people's aspirations for 'adulthood', and what they do to 'attain' it become 'superstructural'. Given that it is the material socio-economic conditions and a shared experience of these that produce a 'generational habitus', these can be seen to determine the 'shape' of 'adult' imaginaries which in turn reproduces the 'existence' of a given generation. Whilst Woodman and Wyn (2015) emphasise that people within a generation are positioned differently because of the 'unit' they belong in – a change in overall dispositions is emphasised via the notion of a 'new' adulthood and its relation to 'old' adulthood.

'Old' and 'new' adulthoods and 'cleft' habitus in contemporary times

Given the societal changes outlined earlier, social generational thinkers argue there is now a 'new' adulthood defined by a 'break with assumptions about youth and adulthood

that derived from an earlier era' (Wyn et al. 2020, 156). Numerous youth researchers point to trends that symbolise this 'new' adulthood. These include the extended time spent in non-compulsory education, coupled with expansion of Higher Education (in the UK and Australia) (Hoff, 2022) and the increasingly 'typical' experiences of precarious work within employment before settling into more 'secure' permanent work (Furlong et al. 2017, Hoff, 2022). They also point to the expansion of young people privately renting their homes despite a large number aspiring to be homeowners (particularly in the UK) (Fuster, Arundel, and Susino 2019; Manzo, Druta, and Ronald 2019, Hoff, 2022) and con-tinuing participation in 'youth' subcultures into middle and old age (Bennett 2006; Hod-kinson 2016). Young people's awareness of these trends, their expectations that their 'adult' lives will be different to their parents, as well as the new articulations of longstand-ing inequalities of class, gender and race (Adkins, Cooper, and Konings 2019; Woodman 2022) further speak to the 'new' adulthood.

Despite these changes, young people are often measured against 'golden age' tran-sitions (Goodwin and O'Connor 2005), which express an exclusionary 'old' adulthood given its expression of a particular kind of social-democratic good-life in the West (Berlant 2011; Kubala and Samec-Hoření 2021). This was defined by a stable full-time job, homeownership and a heterosexual family with children (McDowell 2017). Despite being 'old', young people are often measured against this standard. In sections of the UK press, young people's consumption practices are 'blamed' for them for not gaining these markers (Gair 2022). Given that young people are often measured against this 'golden age' ideal, even if social conditions combined with social and cultural change mean this is either less attainable or desirable its circulation within contemporary culture speaks to its continuing influence. 'Old' adulthood as a cultural formation still plays an 'effective' role in *shaping the present*. In this sense, 'old' adulthood as a marker which young people are measured against could arguably be a symbolic expression of material conditions that *no longer exist***.**

Woodman and Wyn (2015) propose the notion of 'cleft' habitus to capture how the 'old' is made 'present'. This can show how imaginaries of the 'old' adulthood exist and structure action in a contemporary context where this is much harder to achieve. They write that 'in times of rearrangement of social structures, such as we have claimed as shaping the current generation of young people, a non-unitary habitus can form' defined by 'tensions' and 'contraries' (Woodman and Wyn 2015, 66). Dispositions and out-looks existing within a 'cleft' habitus do not fully align with the conditions it exists in because it was formed in a social, economic and cultural context that no longer exists. Here, we can see how aspirations toward 'old' adulthood can still exist in the present, and how room is given for the 'residual' to exist and constitute the present within social generational thinking.

However, the notion of 'cleft' still implies a definitive break or at the very least a coming apart. This opposed to seeing the 'old' as materially constitutive of the 'dominant' as 'an effective element of the present' (Williams 1977, 122), because it is about a 'lack' of feel regarding how attachments to 'old' adulthood are materially constitutive of the pathways young people navigate. To aspire to and articulate dispositions that express an 'old' adult-hood is framed as something that is from 'then'. 'Generational habitus' as enabling an alignment to the 'new' expresses 'now'. This can work to undermine a stated ambition of social–generational approaches of thinking through continuity and change as

expressed in young people's experiences (Woodman and Wyn 2015). This is because of the implicit 'starkness' that is expressed by 'new' adulthood as an outcome of current conditions, and how a 'feel' for the moment is articulated or not through a generational or cleft habitus. This can render 'adulthood' as a 'prefigured' outcome of the conditions that form it rather than an ambivalent and materially constitutive cultural form which enables and constrains the pathways young people navigate and aspired to endpoints.

Methods

The rest of this paper draws on my (2022) ethnographic research with 12 white, heterosexual men from the city of Leicester and its surrounding areas. The research was concerned with how men from relatively advantaged classed, gendered and racial backgrounds actively negotiated the relationship between leisure and transitional pathways during austerity in the UK. The ethnography took place between February 2019 and early January 2020 across the sites of a weekly five-a-side football game, monthly house parties, a stag do,[2] a wedding reception and three online Facebook messenger group chats. The football games, the stag do and the group chats that organised these were all-male.[3] The house parties and the group chats that organised these were mixed gender, with the women present partners of the men or relatives. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 11 of the men between May and September 2019, whilst informal conversations across the sites of observation were turned into field notes. The project received ethical approval in January 2019 and all names are pseudonyms.

The men were from the 'missing middle' of youth studies, which Roberts (2011, 22) defines as those who followed 'neither NEET (not in education, employment or training) routes, nor "tidy" government preferred pathways through post-compulsory education'. However, given the increasing numbers of young men staying in non-compulsory education in the UK, here it has been expanded to include those who 'stay on' in education too (Author, 2022). Consequently, there can be a more critical understanding of the experiences of 'ordinary' young people (see Clarke 1982; Roberts 2011, Hoff, 2022). The men came from upper working-class and middle-class backgrounds, with classifications made based on the main household earner when they were growing up, based on NS-SEC classifications (Savage et al. 2013). Whilst this mode of classification has been critiqued for its inability to grasp social and cultural identities, the circulation of values tied to class and its homogenisation of occupational classes into discrete groupings (Savage et al. 2013; Campbell 2020) it can still act as a useful 'short-hand' definition for social class in the UK.

An inductive approach to data collection and analysis was taken allowing for a form of grounded theorising. This approach was driven by the cultural studies emphasis of researching 'culture "from below"; that is, the cultural practices and rituals of everyday life associated with ordinary people' (McRobbie 2020: NP). This impetus drove the choice of the sites of participant observation. This also allowed for concepts to be constructed alongside data collection meaning that analysis and writing up were not treated as distinctive phases (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). To give the data coherence, thematic analysis was used (Nowell et al. 2017). The codes developed were related to analytical themes of whiteness, masculinities, transitions to adulthood, leisure-based cultural life and austerity. These themes also structured the initial interview schedules, which were worked out over the course of 6 'informal' one-to-one talks with the participants.

Whilst all the participants were white, a central concern of the research is not to reproduce 'methodological whiteness' (Bhambra 2017) nor to understate the intersecting levels of relative advantage that are available to the men in relation to engaging forms of leisure and seeing certain 'adult' endpoints as 'realistic' despite changing material conditions making this harder to do so. Consequently, it is important to note that the insights from this research relate to a very particular class, racial and gendered set of experiences of transitional and cultural life during austerity in the UK. Given Williams' work has been critiqued for the lack of attention to race (Kay 2021) and gender (Kay, 2020) and the focus of my research on the relatively advantaged, it could be argued that these approaches might not be able to give an insight into the lives of those at the margins. However, the intention here is to show how we can use Williams' ideas around culture and the dominant, emergent and residual to show they can critically complement social–generational understandings of young lives rather than to present a *theory of all youth transitions*.

Housing aspirations, 'knowing' contemporary conditions and adulthood

All the men interviewed aspired to own their own homes. Three were homeowners, two privately rented off family members and six lived in the parental home. Two followed 'typical' student housing pathways where they left the parental home, lived independently during their university years before returning to their parents or guardians (Ford, Rugg, and Burrows 2002). The four who did not follow 'student' pathways had never lived outside of the parental home. For all of them, renting was seen as a waste of money, whilst homeownership was framed as having an explicit economic benefit. This was best expressed by Luke in his interview who said:

> Just found with a person who's renting, you're renting you're kinda wasting your money because you don't really get anything back at the end of it. Obviously people in different situations, I understand why they do it. Erm, I've not got anything anyone who does it, just personally if we could afford to buy a house would rather have bought one. (Luke, working-class)

However, there was a broad awareness that long existing and intensifying economic trends tied to neo-liberalism in the UK[4] had made the prospect of homeownership harder to attain for them compared to their parents. This awareness of material conditions shifting expectations around housing tenure corroborates Nayla Fuster et al. (2019) research with young Spanish adults, who in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis see the once expected 'endpoint' of homeownership as further out of reach.

Geoff, one of the middle-class participants said:

> *I watched a video the other day on Facebook which sums it up. From, erm however many years ago, thirty years ago now, wages have gone up seventy percent whereas houses have gone up two-hundred and seven percent. So, whereas our parents are trying to instil you need to get a house, you need to do things the way we were told to do* (Geoff, middle-class).

Chris, a participant on the border of a working/middle-class background told me:

> *But it's hard obviously to be on the property ladder, it was a bit easier back then. Like you know now, you ask how many people are renting, especially young'uns. Well we're renting. Like, yeah my sister has got on the mortgage ladder but it's a very rare number now to get on that mortgage ladder. It's very rare. It's a shame as well* (Chris, 'mixed').

Both quotes speak to how longstanding trends regarding wages and rising house prices show the contrasting housing and labour markets young people face in contrast to their parents. These insights echo Fuster et al. (2023) research into how 'dominant' understandings of the relation between homeownership and 'adulthood' have shifted. In the UK specifically, selling-off council housing through the 'right-to-buy' policy since the 1980s, the expansion of the 'buy-to-let' market, the bigger financial demands placed on potential homebuyers by banks since the 2008 financial crisis have contributed to a decline in homeownership rates amongst young people (aged 18–34). 27% of middle-earning 25–34-year-olds owned in 2015/16, compared to 65% in 1995/96 (IFS 2018). House prices have risen 152% in the same period whilst median wages have risen by 22% (ibid, 2018). Median wages have not recovered to 2008 levels (Devine-Frances 2020) and the growing role of familial support in supporting pathways into ownership – either through direct wealth transfers or minimising the cost of living in the parental home (Manzo, Druta, and Ronald 2019) supported by differing levels of asset ownership (Woodman 2022)[5] exemplify this contrast.

The continuing aspiration to own amongst the men broadly aligns with many young people across the UK. All the participants had at least one parent as a homeowner, which is a key predictor of future ownership (McKee and Soaita 2018; Fiori, Graham, and Feng 2020). Coming from backgrounds where homeownership is an *immediate* part of their family histories is illustrative of a relative *classed* and *racial* advantage, given the key role of asset ownership in configuring contemporary class relations (Adkins, Cooper, and Konings 2019) and the broader histories of those from working-class ethnic minority backgrounds in the UK living in private-rented, substandard housing conditions (White 2020). Yet, they still 'struggle' to get onto the housing ladder without some form of family support where in the past, for men like them, a stable wage and access to credit would have been enough (Manzo, Druta, and Ronald 2019).

The ongoing valorisation of homeownership in the UK (Crawford 2010) exemplified by Chris' assertion that it is a 'shame' many young people cannot get a mortgage speaks to it as being highly *valued* (Skeggs 2003) as one of the *dominant* elements of contemporary adulthood. The moral value assigned to homeownership expressed by its remaining a broader aspiration amongst young people shows how it forms a part of the common sense of their imaginaries. These men are explicitly *aware* of the shared conditions that make homeownership more difficult to attain in contrast to their parents. Yet, none of them articulated any other form of tenure as desirable or mentioned any other ways of independent living. More precisely then, the aspiration to homeownership can be framed as a constituent element of the *dominant* cultural imaginary tied to adulthood. It symbolically expresses the material conditions of the post-war Social-Democratic 'good life', whilst still shaping the present in 'effective' ways (see Kubala and Samec-Hořeni 2021). If the conditions experienced by a generational unit, or a generation broadly (Woodman and Wyn 2015) totally pre-figured young people's outlooks it might be the case that aspirations to ownership amongst the relatively advantaged might cease to be discussed in these terms. Instead, other forms of tenure might form an 'emergent' common sense that constitutes transitions to adulthood. Even with a knowledge of historically specific conditions that make ownership harder to attain, an outlook that might be described as expressive of a 'new adulthood' (Wyn et al. 2020) in relation to homeownership might not necessarily be the case.

'Saving mode', leisure and pathways to 'adult' futures

One of the main social occasions within this group was monthly house parties. People would bring their own drinks (both alcoholic and soft), food was often ordered in, and conversation would revolve around popular culture – more specifically what they had been watching on Netflix and TV. The men would often discuss football too. There was an underlying financial logic that led to house parties becoming a 'regular' form of leisure. This was expressed by the phrase 'saving mode' which was used by Peter in a conversation about the leisure lives of the participants and how this had changed over time. The full field note is below:

> *I ask what the group do together. He says they normally go round someone's house, take some beers and chat. Something he likes, saying that in pubs and clubs you don't talk as much. Peter also says this is much cheaper than a night out. Buy a crate, chill at someone's, go home. Because everyone is in 'saving mode', the appeal is apparent. (…). The saving thing has also fed into the stag do organisation. Peter tells me Steve and Luke want to keep it as cheap as possible, whilst being fun and a bit different. Do people go town or the pub? Not really, rarely. The journey from the suburbs into town seems off-putting enough, as well as the cost.* (Field note, 09 March 2019, Peter, middle-class).

Going to someone's house, buying a crate of beer and talking is more desirable to this group as concerns around the cost of engaging with the public Night-time Economy (NTE) drive transitions in leisure from being publicly to domestically oriented. In the past the domestic was seen as a site of feminine leisure, with the 'public' being the place of 'lads' hanging around (McRobbie 1980). This points to how 'saving mode' engenders a spatial shift to allow for leisure-based cultural life to 'happen' regularly, particularly in relation to mixed-gendered occasions like house parties. It also still allows for 'adult' futures to be taken explicitly into account whilst simultaneously being aligned to, given that some of the men were already living independently. The things being 'saved' for are referenced by Frank and Tim, who are working-class and middle-class respectively.

> I mean none of us really enjoy it anymore to be honest with you. We see each other to talk to each other now. Nightclubbing ain't so much that scene. It's just a boogie innit really and it's a singles boogie. I used to go out for one reason and one reason only and that's that. So, I'm not interested in it anymore at all. I like daytime drinking in pubs but that's when you can listen and hear each other. Plus, it's cheaper. We've all got houses and stuff these days. We've got bills to pay. Tenner on a crate compared to sixty quid it's a no brainer. (Frank, working-class)

Tim drew upon both temporal and financial as explanations for leisure becoming restricted due to facets of 'adult' life.

> *I think as you get older you start getting responsibilities. So, people start getting the responsibility of, I've moved out now I've got to pay for a house, I've got pay for a car, I've got to pay for insurance pay to run it [...]. And I think money becomes an issue. Money is definitely an issue with some of my friends. They're working, but they don't get paid fantastically you do your forty hours a week you might be getting minimum wage, you may be getting slightly above it but unless you're earning thirty forty grand a year you're not thriving are you?* (Tim, middle-class)

For Frank, people in his peer-group have houses and other bills to pay whilst the NTE is also associated with trying to attract the opposite sex. 'Settling down' and the costs of a night-out means a house party is more appealing for him and his friends. This transition in

leisure, driven by 'markers' of adult life in the UK also have an explicitly gendered dimension. This being a 'dominant' form of 'adult' masculinity where heterosexual prowess is 'proven' through attracting other women and then 'holding down' a long-term heterosexual relationship (Connell 1995; McDowell 2017; O'Neill 2018).

Tim pointed to living costs tied to adulthood, whilst also saying that employment does not necessarily provide enough to enable for both leisure and transitions to happen without some sort of financial strain. The invocation of 'thriving' can be said to reflect his middle-class background, where 'distance from necessity' is a marker of class distinction (Bourdieu 1984). It also illustrates how awareness of labour market conditions impact young people's outlooks and narratives of what it means to become 'adult', particularly regarding housing (Hoolachan and McKee 2019; Fuster, Linares-Palomares, and Susino 2023). The shift toward domestically oriented leisure was also discussed by Paul, one of the participants from an upper working-class/lower middle-class background. He contextualised this historically, saying what they were doing now was something his parents and their friends did during their transitions.

> So, like when dad always said when their group of friends got houses it wasn't going to the pub anymore. It was, someone would buy the crate of beer and they'd choose to go round someone's house and that's where they'd spend their night. Sort of similar to what we're doing now. Whereas instead of going out to the pub which again, what is it four pound for a pint now? Something like that. You can buy a crate of say what 12 beers 18 beers for a tenner. (Paul, 'mixed')

Here, we see how 'saving mode' was something that his parents did. This drawing upon family histories speaks to the degrees of relative material advantage embedded in his immediate history, whilst further emphasising how adulthood as a cultural form is materially constitutive of available pathways and their navigation. Current material conditions have not constituted 'new' dispositions that are 'emergent' cultural practices to facilitate homeownership or indeed other forms of tenure. Rather, there is a reproduction of parental practices to achieve a constituent element of the 'good life' further emphasising homeownership as a 'dominant' and enduring 'endpoint'.

The other regular leisure occasion was a weekly five-a-side football match. A warmup would happen outside of the court, involving 'keepy ups', passing to one another, discussions of people's weekends and bantering. The cost for pitch hire was £10 per person monthly which was not a financial burden for them. It offered them a chance for regular contact with friends in the face of other life responsibilities tied to 'adulthood'. This was exemplified by Richard from the working/middle-class boundary.

> It's a way of just keeping in contact with people, because if I didn't play Tuesday night football I might not see people for a few months at a time so (Richard, 'mixed').

Occasionally, the group did spend extravagantly. However, these were justified by the rarity of such occasions, often marking birthdays or attaining a marker of adulthood. The stag do is an example of this given that it marks the shift from being a 'bachelor' to being married, but also because it is an occasion where it is *expected* for men to engage in gendered practices which are 'excessive' (Read-Thurnell 2011). The stag weekend for the men in this research was made up of 'typical' activities for such an occasion – heavy drinking, banter, group activities, going out for dinners as well as moments of homosocial care and

affection (ibid, 2011). However, as seen in Peter's excerpt, even an 'excessive' occasion was organised with 'saving mode' being considered. Here, we can see an active *considering* of others, within a context of 'chosen' financial restriction to enable attainment of other markers of adulthood. As such, adulthood of the good life as a cultural form is not only productive of future aspirations but also materially constitutive of leisure in the present, showing how 'old' adulthood as a cultural form is made manifest through every-day practices.

We do not see a 'lack' of feel, something 'new', nor a restating of the 'old' in a set of radically differing contexts to the past. 'Saving mode' speaks to how conventional markers of 'old' adulthood, as one of the 'dominant' cultural formations in the UK is materially constitutive of these men's aspirations, and how this is navigated through leisure. However, given their relative classed, gender and racial advantage – the need for 'saving mode' to have adulthood remain *realistically imaginable* speaks to how contemporary conditions have made the impacts of broader economic stagnation more 'felt' in the lives of those who in the past might not have been impacted by this. Adulthood, as tied to a particularly Social-Democratic imaginary is not swept away nor replaced by a 'new' adulthood. It is instead actively sought after, with its potential possibility enabled by discourses and practices defined by 'saving mode'.

Conclusion

By drawing on empirical insights from my research with 12 white, economically 'mid-dling' young men from the UK and placing these into conversation with Raymond Williams' (1973; 1977) understandings of culture, I have shown how we can holistically and critically understand young people's lives in ways that critically complement and supplement social generational approaches. To do this, I have explained Williams conceptualisations of culture and placed these into conversation with social generational approaches to unpack how these implicitly reproduce a base determining superstructure logic expressed via the 'new' adulthood, generational and cleft habitus (Woodman and Wyn 2015; Wyn et al. 2020). I then discussed the housing aspirations of the men in my research and how these enabled and constrained forms of leisure in the present.

The continuing aspiration to homeownership to realise the 'good life' and align to 'adulthood', the men's acknowledgment of economic changes that make it harder to attain and leisure being patterned by 'saving mode' express the complex relationship between culture and economy. Their knowledge of contemporary conditions does not constitute 'new' adulthoods, or 'emergent' practices that entail a rejection of homeownership as a *constituent* element of adulthood. Rather, homeownership remains a 'dominant' cultural form that constitutes everyday practices. This is despite the economic, political and social conditions that enabled the 'good life' being gone. The men's practices and discourses around 'saving mode' to enable the attainment of 'old' adulthood speak to how culture is how ideas are 'made manifest in everyday cultural practice' (McGuigan and Moran 2014, 188). Their aspirations to homeownership, acknowledgement of contemporary conditions, their incorporation of this into their practices and reproduction of leisure choices of their parents make the *dominant* material in the everyday. There is not a 'break' in the way social generational ideas imply with the notion of 'cleft'

habitus or 'new' adulthood. This is not to disclose the possibilities of this existing, but for the relatively advantaged men here this is not the case.

For youth studies more broadly, Williams' concepts enable a focus on continuity and change, whilst bringing together the 'two traditions'. Here, there is an alignment to social generational approaches. However, what I believe Williams' conceptualisations of culture can better enable is a critical appreciation of how the cultural and structural are always *mutually implicated* in and by one another. Instead of seeing economic change as prefiguring the cultural – where material conditions produce 'new' adulthoods – there can be a more nuanced insight into the temporal and material life of cultural forms that live beyond the immediate conditions that formed them. In turn, this can unpack how these still play a key role in constituting 'dominant' understandings of the endpoints of youth, how these enable and constrain everyday practices whilst still taking contemporary conditions seriously.

Notes

1. Unequal outcomes and discriminations tied to race are still apparent today.
2. The British equivalent of an American bachelor party.
3. Barring one game – Frank's cousin who identifies as a woman played.
4. None of the men used these terms specifically, but what they identified expressed trends tied to these moments.
5. This support was most explicit in this sample with two of the men (Chris and Frank) renting off family members instead of a private or social landlord or owning their home.

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