



Why values matter: The individual and community

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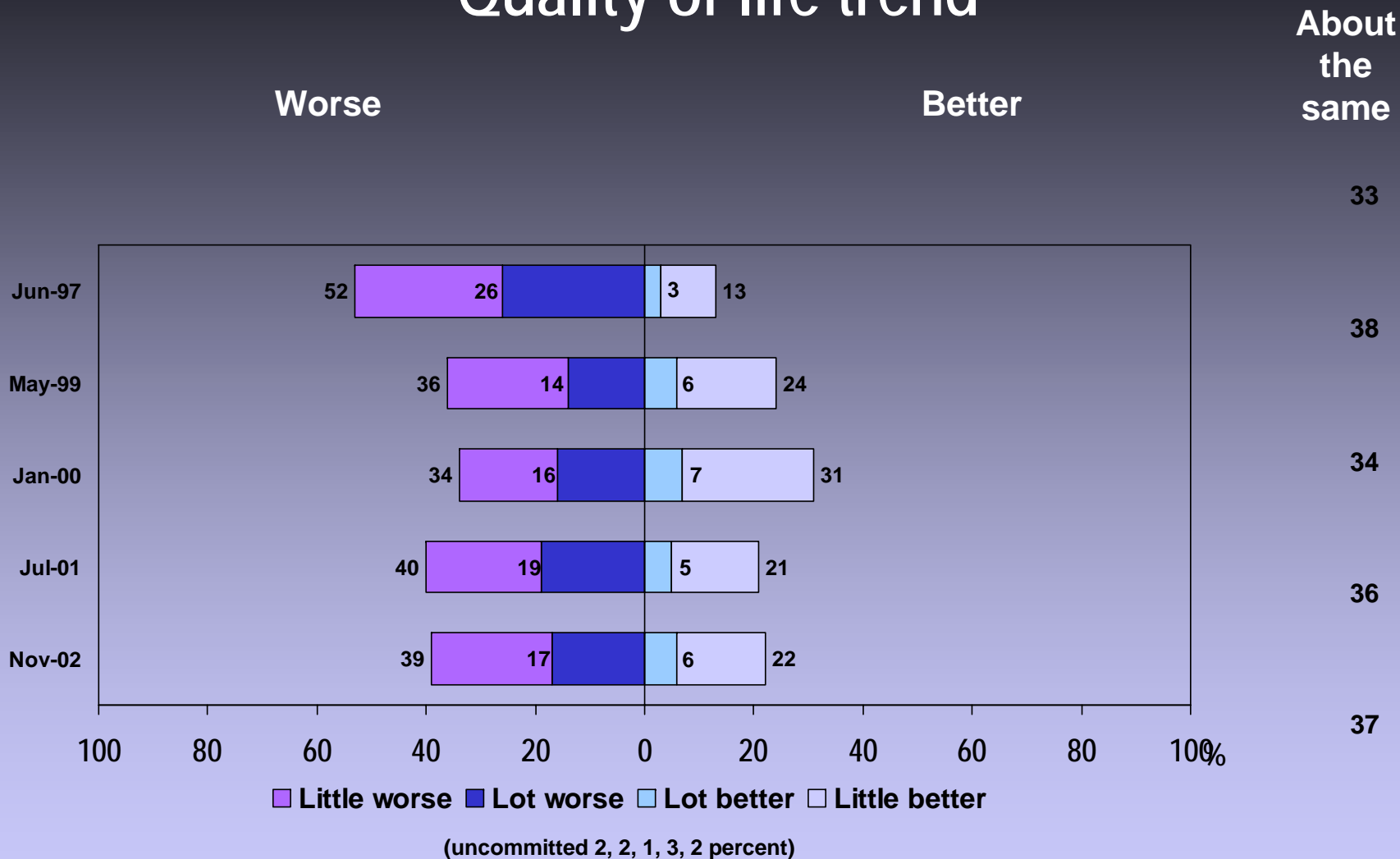
Key points of presentation

- Communities part of complex systems that extend from the individual to the global and comprise many entities that interact in often weak, diffuse, non-linear ways.
- Communities affect everything else, including each other, and are affected by everything else.
- My focus is on 'everything else' - how cultural qualities of pessimism, materialism and individualism interact to weaken communities and diminish wellbeing.

Key points of presentation

- Changing this situation requires a shift :
- from self-centred, competitive individualism to altruistic, cooperative individualism.
- from shallow democracy to deep democracy.
- from material progress to sustainable development.

Quality of life trend



QUESTION: 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?

Figure 3

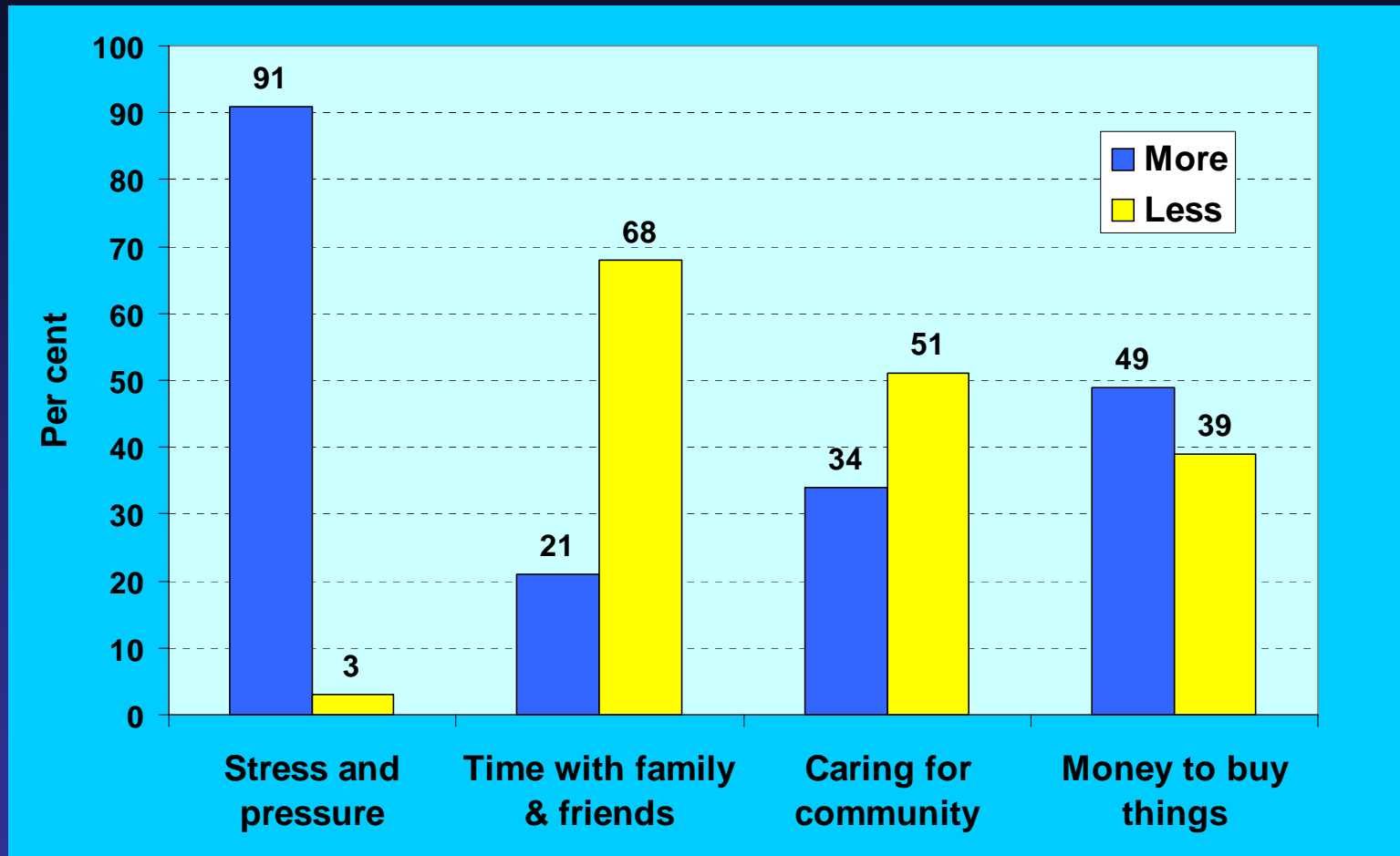
BASE: 1200 ADULTS NATIONAL IN EACH WAVE

Source: Newspoll / Richard Eckersley
Newspoll / The Australian January 2000
Newspoll July 01, Nov 02

Reasons for declining quality of life

- Too much greed and consumerism
- Breakdown in community and social life
- Too much pressure on families, parents and marriages
- Falling living standards
- Employers demanding too much

Trends in quality of life over past ten years



Source: The Weekend Australian, 17-18 June 2000

Perceptions of QoL - 1

‘Against (a) background of general anxiety about ‘the state of the world’ and the relentlessness of ‘bad news’...we are disturbed by the many signs of ‘degeneration’ in the Australian way of life.’

‘...We are “tending our own patch” and becoming absorbed in our own concerns....our focus has narrowed to an extent that allows us to exclude some of the “nasty stuff” which has become too unpalatable to think about.’

Hugh Mackay

Mind & Mood, 1998, 2003

Perceptions of QoL - 2

‘Fed and frightened by the media, people carry more and more on their shoulders, with no buffers. They are exposed to everything. Their spheres of concern have grown, whilst their spheres of influence have not....it seems our concern has been stretched to the limit. The issues are monumental, and there is nothing we can do. The elastic band has snapped and the inevitable result is “concern collapse”.’

*The Silent Majority IV: The Everyday Concerns
of the Average Australian*
Clemenger Communications, 2002

Perceptions of QoL - 3

‘Personal aspirations and aspirations for the nation appeared to be largely unrelated....Few participants believed that Australia would become their ideal society (and) they had distanced themselves from this goal....they manage, or control, their reactions to social issues so they can maintain a comfortable and self-focused life.’

Values and Civic Behaviour in Australia
Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2002.

Materialism and wellbeing

- Materialism:
 - correlated with dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, anger, social alienation and poorer personal relationships.
 - 'extrinsic goals' such as fame, fortune and glamour associated with lower overall wellbeing, compared to 'intrinsic goals' of intimacy, self-acceptance and understanding, contributing to community.
 - The more materialistic our values, the poorer our quality of life.

Individualism, control and support

- Delivers 'double whammy' to wellbeing:
 - Reduces social support and personal control.
- Individualism confuses autonomy with independence or separateness.
 - Decreases connection to others, belonging.
 - Social forces seen as external and alien.
- Individualism demands high self-esteem.
 - Maintain self-esteem by belief that threats to it are beyond our control.

Individualism and wellbeing

- Creation of 'separate self' could be a major dynamic in modern life, impacting on:
 - Meaning in life: Attachment to something larger than the self.
 - Citizenship and social trust and cohesion
 - Intimacy of friendships and quality of family life

The changing self

- Studies of US children and college students over several decades found:
 - Increasing self-esteem, anxiety (neuroticism).
 - Decreasing control, need for social approval.
- Linked to increasing individualism.
- Show social trends are important influences on personality development
 - not just genes and family.

Durkheim on suicide

- Durkheim linked suicide to social integration:
 - Reflecting a failure of key social institutions such as family and religion to bind individuals to society, to keep a 'firmer grip' on them and draw them out of a 'state of moral isolation'.
 - 'Man cannot become attached to higher aims and submit to a rule if he sees nothing above him to which he belongs. To free him from all social pressure is to abandon him to himself and demoralise him'.

Virtues and vices

- Virtues:
 - encourage strong, harmonious personal relationships and social attachments.
 - and the strength to endure adversity.
- Vices:
 - Are about unrestrained satisfaction of individual wants and desires.
 - and the capitulation to human weaknesses.

St Thomas Aquinas 13th century

The Virtues

Faith

Charity

Hope

Prudence

Religion

Fortitude

Temperance

The Capital Sins

The Capital Sins

Pride

Gluttony

Lust

Avarice

Sloth

Envy

Anger

The Virtues

The Consumer Society

20th Century

Source: Funkhouser

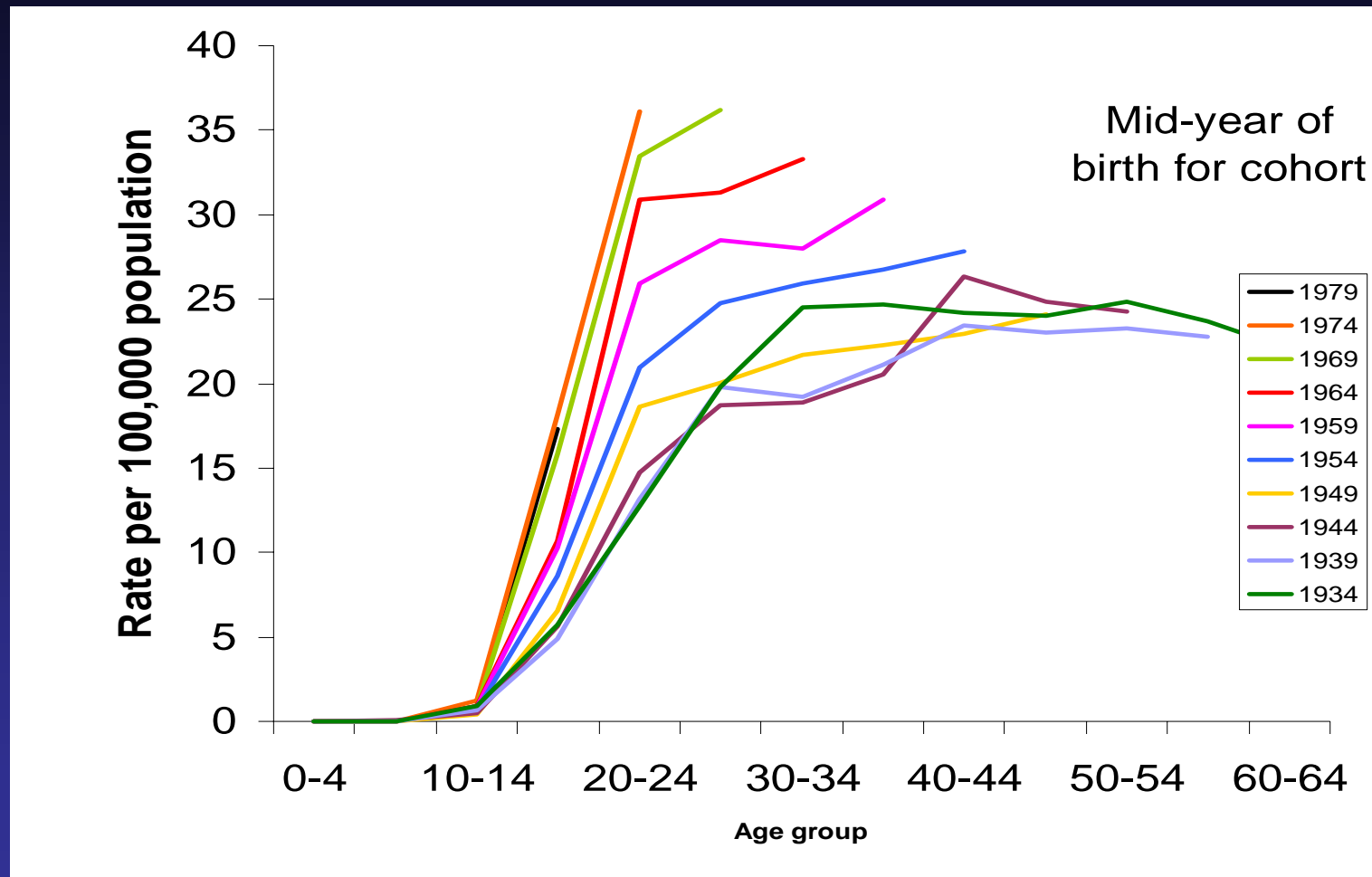
Rules of happiness: sage advice

- Happiness is not a goal but a consequence:
 - it is not to be sought or pursued, but is a result of how we live.
 - it is not found by focusing on the self, but on others.
- Happiness comes from balancing wants and means:
 - from being content with what we have.

Sociocultural change and wellbeing

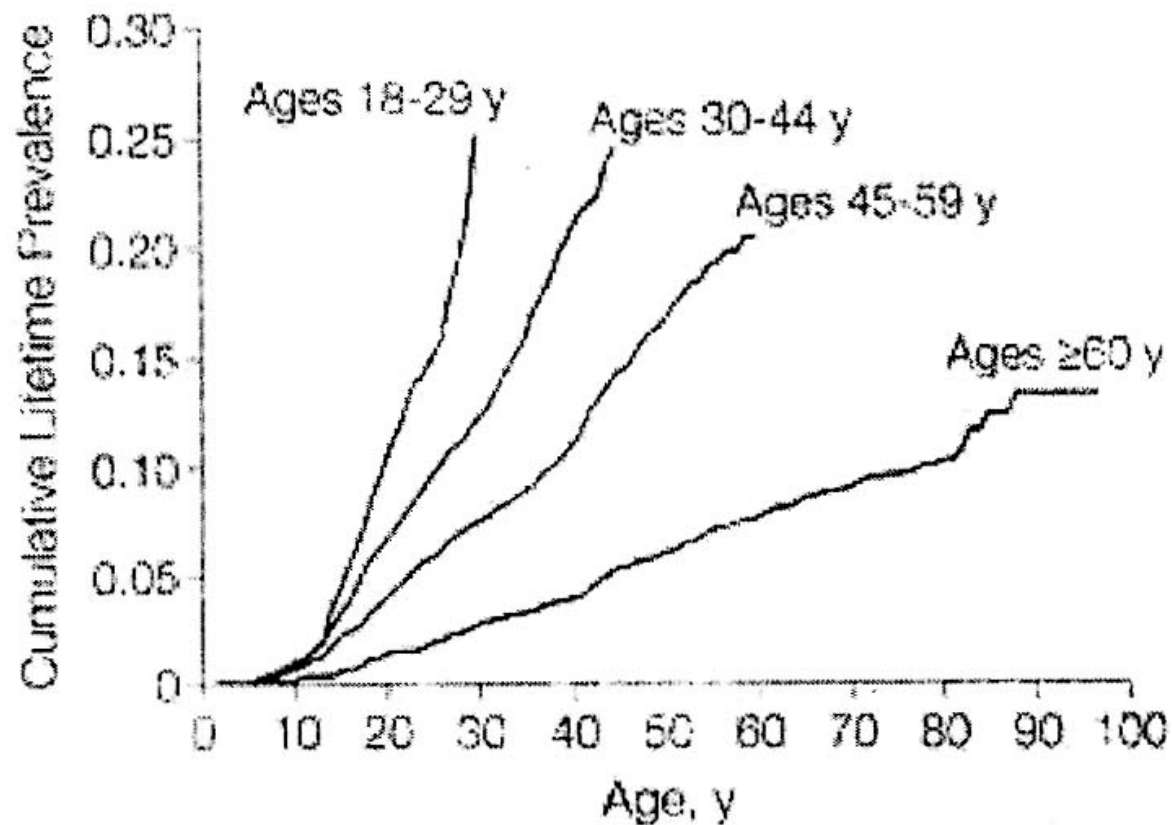
- 'Cultural fraud': promotion of images and ideals at odds with psychological needs and social realities.
- Media-marketing complex creating an 'artificial' or 'alternative' reality that is increasingly influential.
- Several aspects that introduce a powerful (anti)-social dynamic:
 - Fractured, ephemeral images (fads and fashions).
 - A focus on personal, often material, goals.
 - A view of a 'mean world'.

Male suicide rates by age and birth cohort, Australia

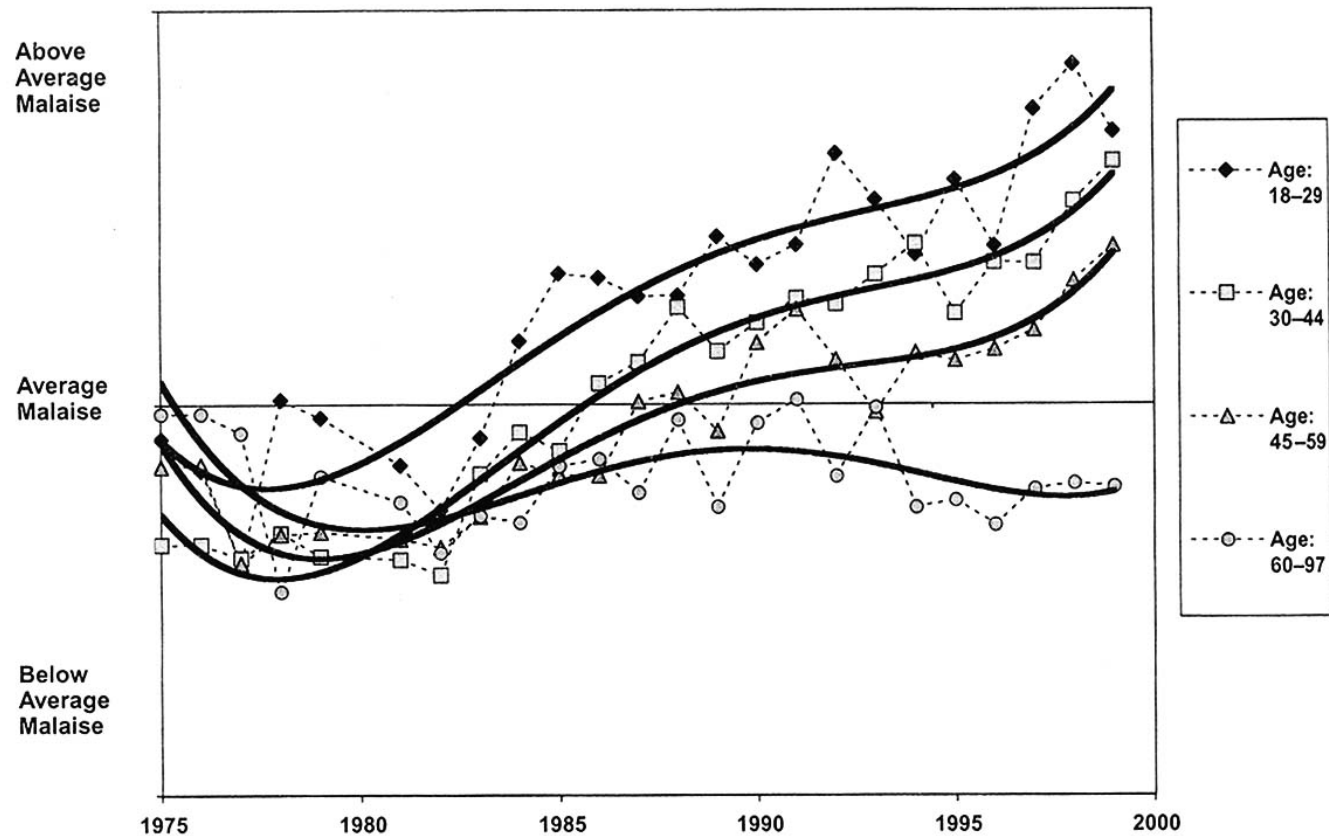


Research Centre for Injury Studies, August 2000

Lifetime prevalence of depression, by birth cohort, USA



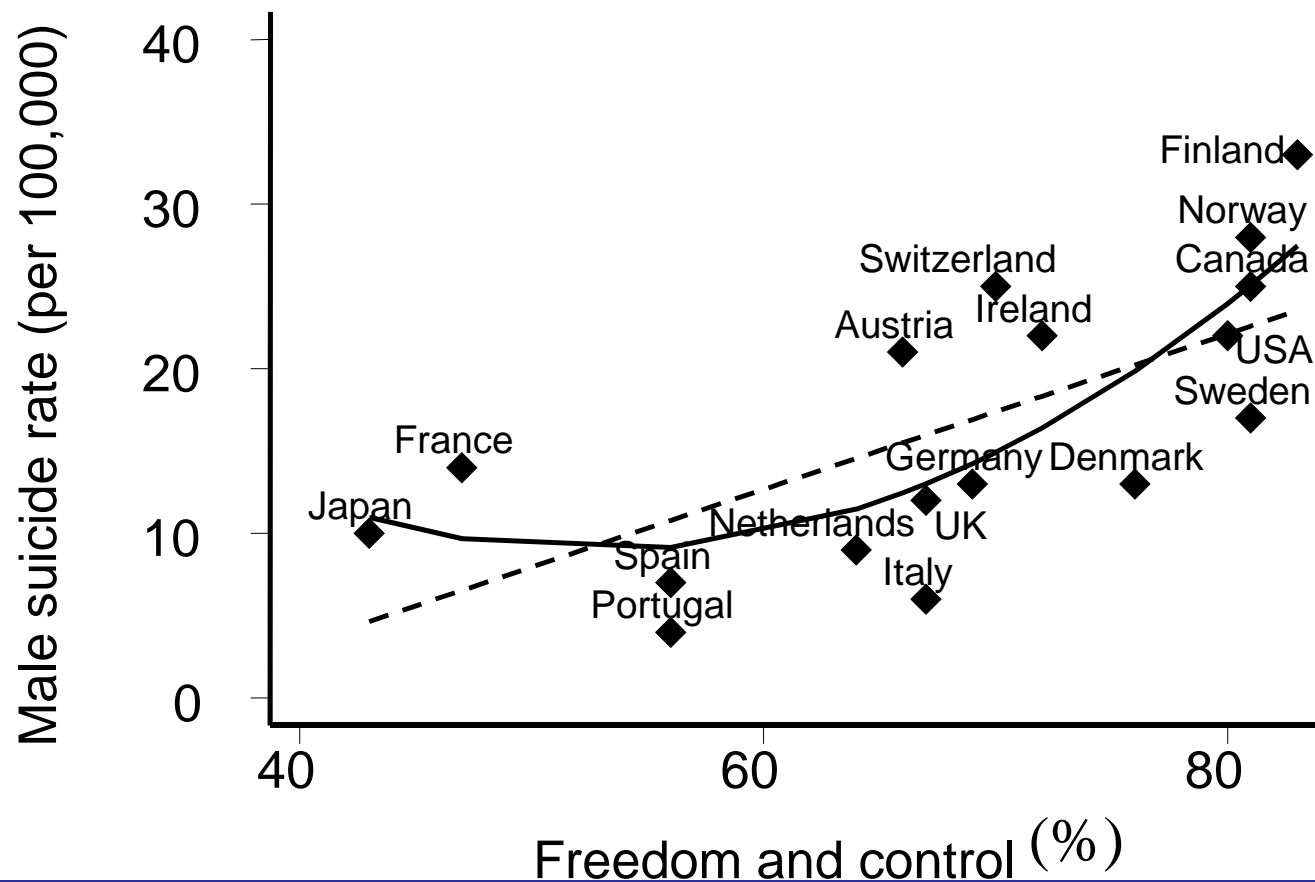
Growing generation gap in malaise USA, 1975-1999



Source: Putnam 2000

Youth suicide and autonomy

An international comparison



Source: Eckersley and Dear, 2002

Five Cosmologies

In the past:

- enchanted: world alive with powers, 'gods'
- sacred: universe of Christianity
- mechanical: Newton's 'clockwork' universe
- organic: universe as 'cosmic dance of energy'

Now:

- creative: universe as self-organising and creative process

Taking control of our future

‘We are all now faced with a radical moral choice. We can step confidently into a new realm of creative freedom and take full, democratic responsibility for that future, or, alternatively, retreat into a blind and irresponsible dependence on moral authorities who...will confidently claim that they have a mandate from God, nature, history or the market to define that future for us.’

Denis Kenny, moral philosopher

Moral autonomy

‘The denizens of the postmodern era are, so to speak, forced to stand face-to-face with their moral autonomy, and so also with their moral responsibility. This is the cause of moral agony. This is also the chance the moral selves never confronted before.’

Zygmunt Bauman
*Life in Fragments: Essays in
postmodern morality, 1995*

Altruistic individualism

‘...these new orientations towards the “we” create something like a *cooperative or altruistic individualism*. Thinking of oneself and living for others at the same time, once considered a contradiction in terms, is revealed as an internal, substantive connection. Living alone means living socially.’

Ulrich & Elizabeth Beck
Individualization, 2002

Two views of progress

- Material progress:
 - Materialism and individualism embedded in this view.
 - Sees progress as pipeline: growth is paramount.
 - Raises standards of living, increases choice, creates resources to meet social and environmental goals.
 - PM: Government's 'over-riding aim' 4 per cent growth rate.

Two views of progress

- Material progress:
 - Progress as pipeline: growth is paramount.
- Sustainable development:
 - Progress as evolving ecosystem.
 - Seeks balance and integration of social, economic and environmental goals.
 - 'improving quality of human life while living within carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems'.
 - Replace goal of maximising wealth with one of optimising health and wellbeing.

Winds of change?

‘The gap between “what I believe in” and “how I live” is uncomfortably wide for many of us and we are looking for ways to narrow it....We want to express our values more clearly and live in ways that make us feel better about ourselves....to feel that our lives express who we are and that we are living in harmony with the values we claim to espouse.’

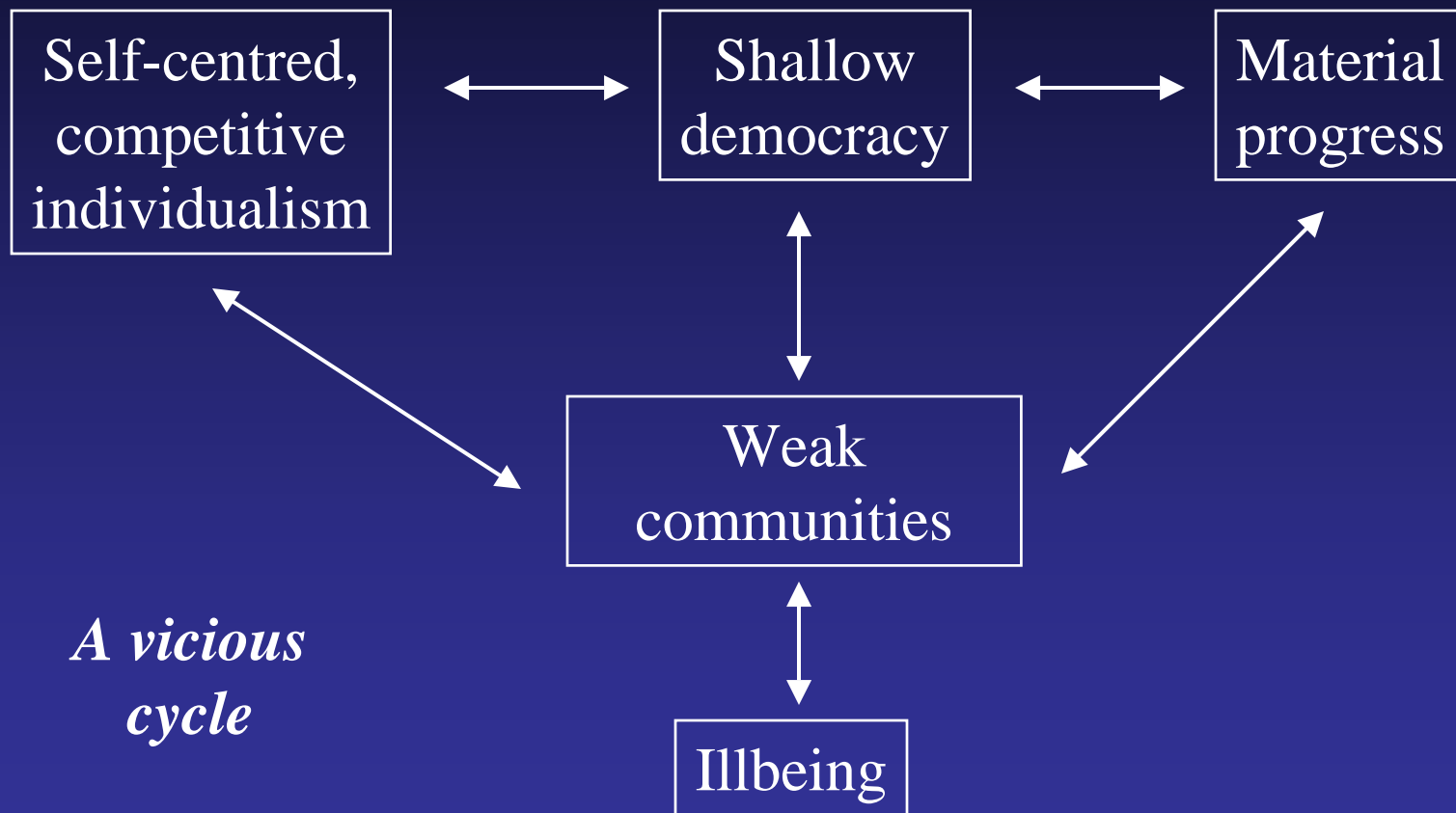
Hugh Mackay

The Wrap: Understanding where we are now and where we've come from, 2003

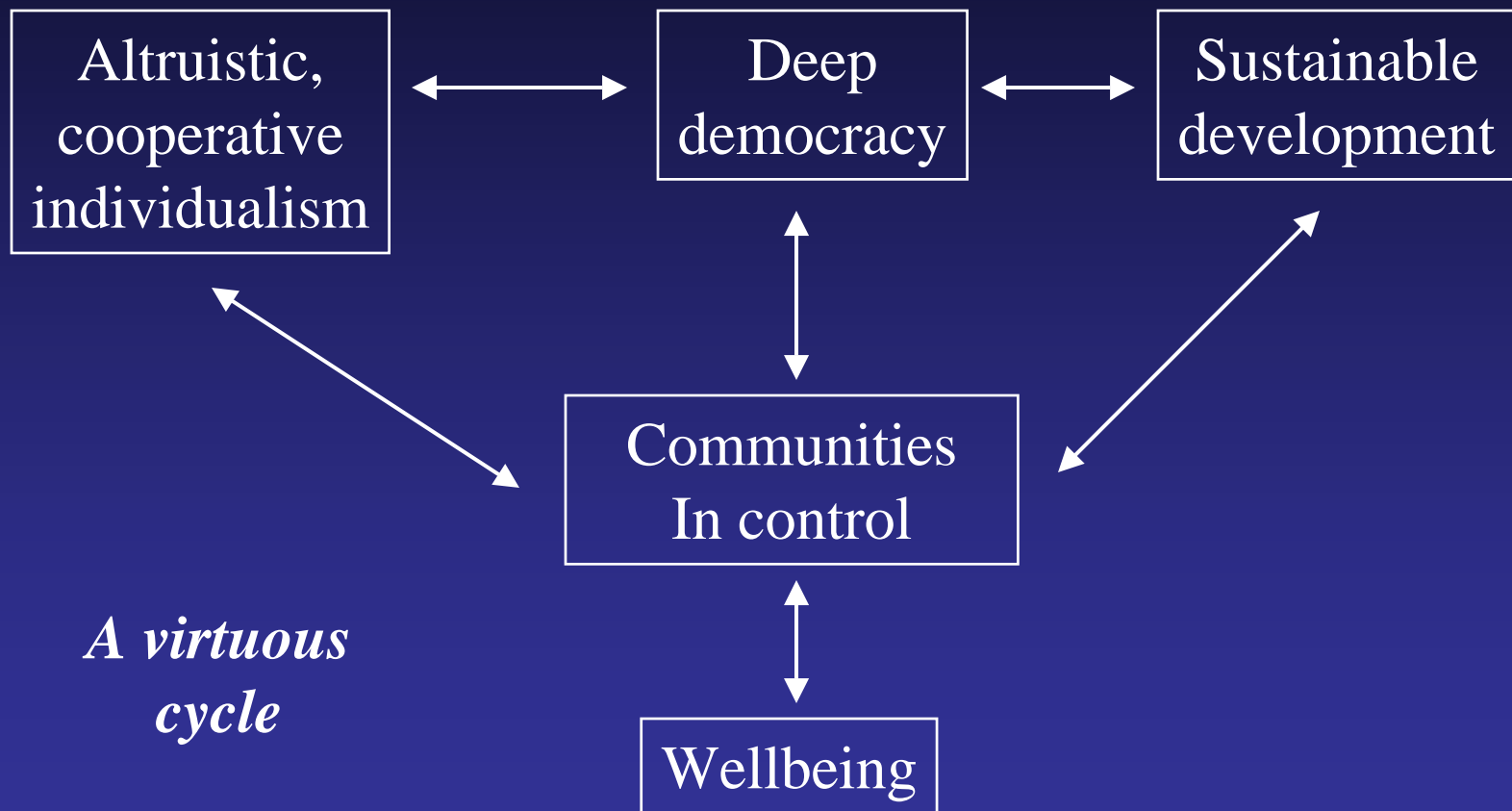
A shift in our worldview?

- At least 25% of Americans and Europeans are 'cultural creatives':
 - up from less than 5% in 1960s.
 - disenchanted with consumerism, status displays, glaring social inequalities, hedonism and cynicism.
 - care about the environment, relationships, peace, social justice, spirituality and self-expression.
 - a coalescence of social movements that are changing how people understand the world .

Redirecting choice to create communities in control – from this:



Redirecting choice to create communities in control – to this:



Beyond being a bystander

- Fairshare's 5.10.5.10 formula for taking actions that matter:
 - Give 5 per cent of gross income to charities, environmental groups etc.
 - Reduce resource use to 10 per cent below national averages.
 - Spend 5 per cent of leisure time in voluntary work.
 - Take democratic action 10 times a year.

Source: www.fairshareinternational.org