

But as a *general tendency I think it is reasonable to conclude* that American monsters tend to be produced by a cultural logic that mixes and exaggerates already existing natural creatures, whereas Japanese mythical beings tend to be altogether more hypothetical and extra-natural (p. 66, emphasis mine).

Ultimately, Bergesen tumbles into the bottomless pit of the over-general analysis of social objects to the point of meaninglessness (where conceptual connections can be made between anything and everything), and grand conclusions that are not supported by the analysis. If the academic study of popular culture is to be taken seriously, it must proceed in a rigorous and scholarly manner. Unfortunately, this book does not help to recover the reputation of this field of inquiry.

St. Francis Xavier University

Patricia Cormack

Patricia Cormack is an associate professor in Sociology at St. Francis Xavier University, where she teaches mass media, consumer society, and theory courses. Her most recent work has examined the place of consumer culture — specifically Tim Horton's — in the negotiation of Canadian identity. Currently she is working on a monograph with Jim Cosgrave (Trent University) on Canadian identity.

Tim Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 239 pp. \$US 20.00 paper, \$US 50.00 hardcover,

Tim Clydesdale's *The First Year Out* is a highly readable, compassionate, and empathetic look at the lives of young people as they leave high school and enter universities, colleges, vocational schools, and employment. With a more rigorous theoretical framework and analysis, it could have been a brilliant book.

Early on, Clydesdale sets himself the goal of describing the unique American moral culture that shapes the lives and attitudes of mainstream American teens. He asks how teens go from highly structured lives as high school students to more autonomous post-high-school activities, and how these transitions are influenced by their parents, their peers, their educational experiences, their faith, and their communities more generally. He answers these questions with rich data from different sources, although at the core of the book are 50 young people he interviewed during their last year of high school and re-interviewed at the end of their first year out.

What makes Clydesdale's book interesting is the way in which he uses his interview data to confirm and reject stereotypes. Yes, teens have sex and get drunk and stoned at parties, but not nearly as much as adults suspect. Many of

the teenagers Clydesdale interviewed showed remarkably mature (and conventional) attitudes about relationships, substance abuse, and sexual activity. They want their relationships to be meaningful, they recognize the dangers of excessive substance abuse, and they quickly realize that greater independence comes with greater (usually financial) responsibilities. These findings, straight from the mouths of young people themselves, provide a very refreshing antidote to recent concerns about young people delaying maturity and becoming stuck in a neverland of perpetual youth.

Here, however, is where it all gets rather depressing. It appears that teens in their first year out quickly and almost exclusively become concerned with the micro-management of their lives, at the expense of personal and intellectual growth and concern for the larger community in which they live. The majority of the teens Clydesdale interviewed left high school politically disinterested, without any substantial intellectual curiosity, unaware of global economic and political conditions, and exclusively concerned with utilitarian pursuits, such as buying stuff and getting a degree (not learning). Almost all remained equally ignorant and utilitarian when Clydesdale re-interviewed them after their first year out.

Clydesdale is obviously concerned about the implications of this disengagement for American civil life. Not even the cataclysmic events of September 11 and the Columbine high school shooting — both of which occurred when these young people made their crucial transitions from high school — shook the teenagers out of their apathy. Although the teens were affected by these events temporarily, he could not find anybody for whom these events altered their outlook on life, made them more aware, or sparked a political interest. Instead, the dangers and confusion posed by these events led the young people to retreat further into their micro-worlds of relationships and shopping. This is a depressing but hardly surprising observation.

Clydesdale locates the reason for this behaviour and attitude in a powerful and hegemonic American moral culture, which, amongst other things, celebrates individual achievement, values loyalty to family, has an unquestioned patriotism, and suggests that happiness and fulfillment are found in personal relationships and consumption. Clearly, despite public discourses of teen rebellion and delayed maturity, teens have always been much more like their parents than different from them. The political disengagement and anti-intellectualism of these teenagers is simply a reflection of the same conditions in the American psyche.

Having been raised in a Christian fundamentalist home and having attended an evangelical college himself, Clydesdale turns to religion and faith as a possible (albeit unlikely) avenue to penetrate this anti-intellectual, hedonistic, consumer-oriented culture. The few participants in his study he identifies as very religious were indeed more interested in the world and their place in it.

Their education in religious-based US colleges seems to have increased their intellectual curiosity and reflexivity, rather than dampened it. But these are a small minority and for the majority of semi or non-religious teens, religious beliefs are also relegated to a private sphere. Although Clydesdale does not acknowledge this issue, the intensely conservative and reactionary reality of most religious groups in the US also makes it unlikely that the progressive-religious worldview of these teens will be sustainable.

Unfortunately, more important and promising avenues for investigation remain unexplored. Youth researchers have looked at class, gender, or race to find evidence for penetrations of hegemonic moral cultures (or, more often, their persistence). Although the teens themselves are not reflecting on these issues, many interview quotes suggest that there are “things going on.” Ethnic minority students acknowledge a shared history of discrimination, although they are quick to suggest that this history is no longer part of their lived reality. Working-class students are more likely to attend local, vocational schools as they cannot afford to move away or don’t have the cultural capital to consider academic post-secondary options elsewhere. They are also more likely to work more hours to support themselves and their parents. Although they strive for the same kind of social mobility and success as their more privileged peers, they scarcely recognize their disadvantage in this respect. If they do, it is articulated as individual failure or as resentment vis-à-vis others’ good fortune. A more rigorous analysis of the social-structural factors would have gone a long way to understand the habituation of teens to their various adult destinations.

Despite his obvious empathy for the young people he studies, Clydesdale cannot help but be frustrated with the micro-level perspectives of these young people who can only see change in the world through individual actions (be a good person), without recognizing how these are connected to larger, macro events and conditions. Yet, his concluding thoughts and recommendations rest exclusively on individual actions of scholars, teachers, parents, clergy, and teens themselves, without tying this back to the larger American moral culture or economic-political structure. Clydesdale recommends that scholars and teachers become public intellectuals who find more ingenious ways to engage their students in the classrooms, parents provide better educational and career guidance, and teens themselves become more involved. How is this going to happen if we live in a hegemonic moral culture that profoundly limits the possibility of such behaviour to occur in the first place? In these recommendations, Clydesdale seems to betray his own roots in the American moral culture, which needs to be deconstructed and critiqued more thoroughly to effect the type of change Clydesdale envisions. Exploring issues of class, race, and gender more rigorously would have gone a long way toward such a critique.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, this is a very engaging and thought-provoking book that should be of interest to life course, youth, and education scholars alike.

University of Western Ontario

Wolfgang Lehmann

Wolfgang Lehmann teaches Sociology of Education and Sociology of Work at the University of Western Ontario. He researches social class inequalities in educational transitions. He is the author of *Choosing to Labour? School-work Transitions and Social Class*, published by McGill-Queen’s University Press in the Fall of 2007.

Clydesdale responds: I am most grateful to Wolfgang Lehmann for his generous review and favorable endorsement of the book, and to the Canadian Journal of Sociology for selecting my book for review. It is a privilege to have one’s work read so closely, and an honor indeed.

I do wish to offer a response to a couple of Lehmann’s points. First, Lehmann’s observation of “intensely conservative and reactionary reality of most religious groups in the US” is clearly an outsider’s view. Yes, there are intensely conservative religious groups in the US, and many can be quite reactionary. But this is not America’s religious majority – not even close. Even the one of its most conservative religious groups, evangelicals, are in the midst of a major generational shift among its younger generation who are considerably concerned with poverty and AIDS, and there is also a growing block of evangelicals who possess a deep concern for environmental issues. Second, while I should have drawn some conclusions about macro-level phenomena needing macro-level responses (e.g., social movements that demand cultural change and economic restructuring), it is not true that my recommendations are individual-level only. For example, I challenge scholars of all sorts to prioritize public intellectualism within their disciplines, and challenge educators to prioritize student interests over educator ideals in their teaching and their institutions. These two mezzo-level recommendations *alone* require action by hundreds of scientific societies and thousands of educational institutions, and their enactment would necessarily involve tens of thousands of their members.

These responses notwithstanding, I remain grateful to the CJS for devoting a significant amount of their valuable journal space to Lehmann’s thoughtful engagement of my book, and remained thrilled to see my book generating this kind of careful reflection.