**Australian Multicultural Foundation**

# Ethnic Youth Gangs in Australia
# *Do They Exist?*

Report No. 6

# Anglo Australian Young People

by
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# Acknowledgements

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# Background to the Research

# 1.1  Introduction

The present report is one of six reports which present findings from a study of 'ethnic youth gangs' in the Melbourne metropolitan area over the period 1996-1998. The six reports in this series include:

No.1  Vietnamese Young People
No.2  Turkish Young People
No.3  Pacific Islander Young People
No.4  Somalian Young People
No.5  Latin American Young People
No.6  Anglo Australian Young People

In addition to these reports, which deal with specific groups of ethnic minority and Anglo Australian young people, there is also a broad overview report. The latter report presents the overall findings of the study, and involves comparisons between the different groups as well as highlighting common features. The overview report also discusses further the general issues relating to perceptions of, and responses to, 'youth gangs' in the context of a culturally diverse society.

## i.    *Ethnic Minority Youth*

For present purposes the term *ethnic minority* refers to non-Anglo Australians who are non-indigenous (Zelinka, 1995). Australia is a polyethnic society, with a population comprised of over 100 different countries and speaking over 150 different languages. While ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse, it is nevertheless the case that Australia remains dominated by the majority Anglo-Australian population and that particular non-Anglo groups thereby have 'minority' status (Guerra & White, 1995). This is reflected in a number of different ways, in terms of culture, economic patterns and institutional arrangements (see Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995).

To appreciate fully the situation of ethnic minority young people, analysis also has to be sensitive to the diversity of backgrounds and life circumstances of different young people. It is worth noting in this regard that the migrant experience varies considerably. It depends upon such factors as time period of migration (e.g., job opportunities in the 1950s versus high unemployment in the post-1974 period), place of origin and circumstances of migration (e.g., war refugees, flight from an authoritarian regime), relationship between first and subsequent generations (e.g., conflicting values) and availability of appropriate services (e.g., settlement,  English-language courses). Particular groups of ethnic minority young people, such as unattached refugee children, are more likely to experience disadvantage, for example, than young people with well established family and community networks.

The notion of *ethnic youth gangs* has featured prominently in media reports of youth activities over the last few years. Around the country, tales are told of ethnic-based or multi-racial groups of young people being involved in a wide range of illegal, criminal and anti-social activities (see, for example, Healey, 1996). Allegations of a 'Lebanese youth gang' participating in a drive-by shooting of a police station in Sydney in 1998 is but a recent example of the kind of media coverage and public outcry relating to ethnic minority youth in Australia today.

The police, too, have expressed considerable concern over a perceived rise in ethnic youth involvement in crime, and in particular, serious crimes such as heroin and other drug dealing. This is reflected to some extent in figures relating to the increasing number of Indo-Chinese young people held in detention in New South Wales on drug offences (Cain, 1994).

Concern has also been expressed by the police and others that the relationship between ethnic minority young people and the police at the street level is deteriorating. This was reflected in the first National Summit on Police Ethnic Youth Relations held in Melbourne in 1995, and is a topic raised in several recent academic and community reports on police-youth interaction (Youth Justice Coalition, 1994; White, 1996; Maher, Dixon, Swift & Nguyen, 1997).

While media and police concern over 'ethnic youth gangs' has appeared to be on the rise, there has in fact been very little empirical information regarding the actual activities of ethnic minority young people (but see Guerra & White, 1995; Pe-Pua, 1996). Specifically, little is known about the *demographic characteristics* of the ethnic minority people in question – for example, their ages, gender composition, level of education, employment status, socio-economic background and migration experiences. Nor do we know much about what they do with their time, and where they spend it. This is particularly the case with respect to young women of ethnic minority background.

Even less is known about those ethnic minority young people allegedly involved in drug-related activities and other kinds of offending behaviour. Concern has been raised regarding state responsibilities to collect relevant data on these issues (see Cunneen, 1994), but to date there has been a dearth of systematic statistical material regarding welfare, criminal justice and employment trends in relation to these young people. Within the criminal justice sphere specifically, there has, however, been some movement toward analysis of the nature and extent of ethnic minority youth offending (Easteal, 1997), to examine sentencing disparities in relation to the ethnicity of juvenile offenders (Gallagher & Poletti, 1998) and to consider the special requirements of ethnic minority offenders held in detention (NSW Ombudsman, 1996). However, much more study and conceptual work is needed if we are to appreciate fully the place of ethnic minority youth in the criminal justice system, and the reasons for their involvement with this system.

The limited work which has been undertaken in the area of ethnic minority group experiences has nevertheless indicated that there are strong *social reasons* and *economic forces* which are propelling increasing numbers of these young people into extremely vulnerable circumstances (Lyons, 1994; Guerra & White, 1995). A number of factors are seen to affect their social development and integration into mainstream Australian society – including, for example, conflicts between their parents' expectations and their own behaviour and lifestyle choices; lack of parents; homelessness; unemployment; illiteracy and semi-literacy; poor self-esteem; racism; stress and trauma associated with settling into a new country; trying to adjust to a different cultural environment; language difficulties; and so on (Byrne, 1995; Moss, 1993; Pe-Pua, 1996).

## ii.  *Diverse Assumptions*

The published material on ethnic minority young people tends to be based upon a number of diverse and at times competing assumptions. For instance, on the one hand, they

themselves are seen as *the problem*. This is usually the substance of media stories and sometimes police reports about 'ethnic youth gangs'.

On the other hand, assumptions are also made regarding the *problems experienced by* these young people. In particular, mention is made of their poor economic and social status, their position as refugees or recent migrants, and difficulties associated with family life.

A third area where assumptions are made relates to the *consequences* of allowing such ethnic youth gangs to exist and operate in the wider community. Much attention, for instance, is given to the need for coercive police methods to rein in gang activity. Issues of police resources, special units and police powers are at the centre of these discussions.

Others argue that much more is needed to support the young people before they are forced into a position of committing crime for either economic reasons, or to establish a sense of communal identity with their peers. Discussion here might centre on changes to immigration settlement policy and services, and the concentration of particular ethnic groups in specific geographical areas.

A further issue which is occasionally raised in relation to 'ethnic youth gangs' are the costs associated with their activities and visible presence in some communities. Reference can be made here to things such as the direct costs of crime (e.g., property damage, losses due to theft, social and health costs); the costs of crime control and security (e.g., policing, private security guards and systems); the costs to business (e.g., negative media attention leading to damaged reputation of some commercial districts); and the costs to specific ethnic minority communities (e.g., the fostering of negative stereotypes based on the actions of a few).

The assumptions made about ethnic minority young people have direct consequences for the *development of appropriate strategies* to deal with issues relevant to their livelihood and lifestyles.

Rather than responding to media images and unsubstantiated assumptions regarding youth behaviour and activity, it is essential therefore to frame policy and service-provision on the basis of grounded knowledge. For example, whether a coercive or a developmental strategy is called for, or a mix of the two, really depends upon what is actually happening in the lives of the specific ethnic minority group in question. Fundamentally, this is a matter of research – of talking with the young people directly.

## 1.2   The Study

The specific impetus for the present study arose from media and political concerns over 'ethnic youth gangs' in Melbourne in the early 1990s. An informal meeting of youth and community workers, academics, and government representatives was held in 1994 to discuss the rise in public attention on this issue, and to consider whether or not there was in fact such a problem in this city. What emerged from this meeting was a general acknowledgement that there was a lack of systematic research on 'ethnic youth gangs', and thus the moral panic over so called gangs had largely been untested empirically. Nevertheless, there was a generally shared feeling that many of the young people in ethnic minority communities were experiencing major economic and social difficulties. It was also pointed out that there were periodic conflicts between different groups of young people, and that in some instances

criminal or illegal activity was occurring, although not necessarily within a 'gang' setting or structure. It was decided that more research was needed on these issues.

Initially, the instigation for, and organisation of, research in this area was carried out by the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research. The Bureau began to gather information about ethnic minority involvement in gang-related activity and crime, in Australia and overseas. A research advisory team was put together to contribute and oversee the project. However, with the closing of the Bureau's Melbourne office in 1996, the project was forced to go elsewhere for financial and community support. The Australian Multicultural Foundation, and the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, met with the research team and after careful consideration of the study proposal, provided the resources necessary for the undertaking of the research.

### i. *Aims of Research*

The *aims of the research* were:

- To develop a workable and precise definition of 'gang' in the Australian context, and to distinguish group and gang activity

- To explore the perspectives of young people regarding youth activities, according to:

    i) 'ethnic' versus 'non-ethnic' [i.e., Anglo Australian] background

    ii) gang versus non-gang membership and activities

    iii) diversity of religious and cultural influences within and between various ethnic minority groups, and how this affects gang membership and activity

- To examine the specific place and role of young women in the context of gang membership and activity

- To develop a description of the social background of gang members, including such things as age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, employment status, socio-economic background and migrant experience

- To identify the types of activities engaged in by gangs/groups of ethnic minority young people, and where illegal or criminal activity fits into their overall activities

- To explore possible underlying causes for gang membership, and any common themes regarding background experiences and difficulties

- To obtain information on how welfare, educational and police officials respond to the needs, and activities, of ethnic minority young people, including gang members

- To provide possible strategies and programme directions which will assist ethnic minority young people and the wider communities dealing with gang-related issues.

Importantly, in devising these research questions, the team was highly conscious that a central question would have to be answered: namely, *do ethnic youth gangs exist*? As the discussion in the following section indicates, the existing material on youth gangs in Australia renders this question somewhat contentious. This is so because of the different definitions used in relation to the term 'gang', and the diverse types of group formation among young people, not all of which may signify gang-like behaviour or social relationships.

The research team was also motivated by a desire to deal with issues surrounding the perceptions and activities of ethnic minority youth in a *socially constructive* manner. For example, given anecdotal and existing academic knowledge about the marginalised situation of some ethnic minority young people, an important consideration of the research was to assist in devising ways to promote policies which are socially inclusive.

### ii.    Methods of Research

The *research methodology* adopted for the study consisted of:

- Review of relevant Australian and overseas literature on youth gangs and 'ethnic youth gangs'

- Collection of information and relevant statistical data on ethnic young people in Australia, with a special focus on Melbourne

- Interviews with 20 young people across 5 different areas of Melbourne (for a total of 100 young people) which have reportedly a high incidence of 'ethnic youth gang' activity

- The main sample of young people was comprised of youth aged 15 to 25, with the main focus of attention on the 'dominant' ethnic groups in particular regions

- Interviews with 20 young people with an Anglo Australian background, in order to make comparisons with the ethnic minority young people

- The utilisation of youth and community workers to contact and conduct the interviews, so as to have the best available knowledge and expertise when it comes to street-level group formations and interactions.

While specific local areas were the initial focus for the research, on the assumption that certain ethnic minority groups tended to reside or hang around in these locales (e.g., Vietnamese youth in Footscray), we discovered early on in the research that a more sophisticated and complex pattern of movement often took place. Indeed, it was often the case that there were certain corridors within the metropolitan area within which the young people moved, and that while these were not suburb specific, they did range in specific territorial directions (e.g., fanning out from the city centre toward the Western suburbs for one group; mainly concentrated along the coastal beaches for another group). In addition, many of the young people spoken with did not in fact live in the place within which they spent the most time.

In recruiting interviewers, care was taken to ensure that, where possible, the person spoke the first language of the target group and/or they had prior contact with or were members of the particular ethnic minority community. To ensure consistency in the interview approach and technique, each interviewer was briefed on the project, and was provided with information kits which described the ethics and procedures of undertaking research of this nature. In some cases, the interviewers were de-briefed about their interaction with the young people.

The research was informed by the basic principles of ethical social research. These include an emphasis on 'voluntary consent' to participate, 'anonymity' of information sources, and complete 'confidentiality' of the participant and their contribution to the research project. Due care was taken to protect the privacy and rights of each participant. In addition, a 'plain

language' statement was prepared, as well as a 'consent' form, and each participant was briefed fully on the nature of the project and their role in the research process.

There was considerable variation in how the samples of young people were selected, and in the nature of the interviewer-young person relationship. As much as anything this had to do with the contingencies of social research of this kind: the diverse communities and the sensitivity of the subject matter was bound to complicate sample selection and the interview process in varying ways.

The specific sample groups for each defined ethnic youth population were selected and interviewed according to the social connections and research opportunities of each community-based interviewer. The Anglo-Australian young people, for example, were selected at random, and were drawn from local schools, and from the local shopping centre. The Vietnamese sample was based upon prior contacts established by the interviewer, who had had extensive experience in working with and within the community. The Somalian sample was comprised of individuals chosen at random on the street, and recruitment of primarily female respondents through friendship networks (this form of sample selection was influenced by the nature of gender relations within the community, especially as this relates to street-frequenting activity). The Pacific Islander sample was shaped by the fact that two separate interviewers were involved, each of whom tapped into different groups of young people. In the one case, the young people who were interviewed tended to be involved in church-related networks and activities; in the other, the sample was mainly drawn from young people who were severely disadvantaged economically and who had experienced major family difficulties. Two interviewers were also involved with the Latin American young people. Each interviewer had difficulties in obtaining random samples due to the reluctance of individuals and agencies to participate in the project. Accordingly, the sample was constructed mainly through family members and friends who assisted in the process of making contact with potential subjects. The Turkish sample likewise involved two interviewers, reflecting the cultural mores of having a male interview young men, and a female interview young women. Again, family and friends were used extensively in recruitment of interview subjects.

The composition of the sample, and the dynamics of the interview process, were thus bound to be quite different depending upon the group in question. It is for this reason that direct comparisons between the groups needs to be placed into appropriate methodological as well as social contexts. Methodologically, it is important therefore to acknowledge that the prior research background and ethnic background of each interviewer will inevitably play a role in facilitating or hindering the sample selection and information gathering processes. The presence or absence of guardians, the closeness to or distance from the young person's family on the part of the interviewer, and the basic level of familiarity or trust between interviewer and interviewee, will all affect the research process.

So too will the social experiences and social position of the particular group in question. For example, in cases where the interviewer was not known to a particular migrant family, the young people (and their parents) tended to be suspicious about what was going on: suspecting that perhaps the interviewer was a government employee sent by child protection services to determine the fitness of the family to raise children. In another instance, there was longstanding antagonism between the particular ethnic minority young people and Anglo

Australians. Given that one of the interviewers was Anglo Australian, and given the high degree of intervention into their lives by social welfare agencies of various kinds, some of the young people may have been very suspicious of the questions being asked. There were also instances where young people may have been reluctant to speak about certain matters. This was most apparent in the case of some refugees who were deeply suspicious regarding questions about authority figures such as the police. In a similar vein, the notion of 'gangs' was also culturally bounded for many refugees from war-torn countries. In their experience, 'gang' referred to men brandishing weapons, who roam the streets robbing people, pilfering, raping and engaging in all manner of serious offence, including murder. Such 'gangs' clearly do not exist in Australia.

The research process was very complex and required that we take into account a wide range of methodological and social issues. While there was considerable variation in the sampling and interview contexts, nevertheless the research findings indicate strong lines of *commonality* across the diverse groups. In other words, regardless of specific methodological differences and variations, the information conveyed through the interviews proved to be remarkably similar and consistent across the sample groups. The approach adopted for this study has generated important information about the youth gang issues. We also feel that it provides a useful template for future research of this kind, taking into account the limitations and strengths of the present study.

## 1.3  The Notion of Youth Gangs

The term 'gang' is highly emotive. Yet, rarely does it have a fixed definition in terms of social use or legal meaning. It can be used to cover any group and any kind of activity engaged in by young people, such as 'hanging out' together. Or, in a more specific sense, it may just refer to those young people who combine together on a regular basis for the purposes of criminal activity. It may be associated with groups which act to defend a particular patch or territory from other young people, including the use of violent means. It may simply refer to any type of illegal or criminal activity engaged in by young people acting in groups. The notion of gang can mean different things to different people. Imprecise definitions and perceptions of young people based on stereotypes, however, often feature prominently in media treatments of ethnic minority youth. Drawing upon material presented in a recent major report on young people and public space, the following discussions examine the nature of youth gangs in greater detail (see White, 1999).

### i.      Criminal Youth Gangs

Much of the public consternation over youth gangs seems to be driven by images of 'colour gangs' in the United States. Close examination of the Australian social landscape, however, makes it hard to substantiate the presence of such gangs in this country. Nevertheless, the presence of large groups of young people on the street, or young people dressed in particular ways or with particular group affiliations, appears to have fostered the idea that we, too, have a gang problem.

There certainly is a long tradition of gang research in the United States (see for example, Miller, 1975; Huff, 1996; Sanders, 1994; Klein, Maxson & Miller, 1995). There appears to be good reason for this. A survey of police departments in 1992 across the USA, for example,

found that (Curry, Ball & Fox, 1994: 1):

- gangs are a problem in the overwhelming majority of large and small US cities surveyed

- gang-related crime is above all a violent crime problem, with homicide and other violent crimes accounting for about half of all recorded gang-related crime incidents

- the proportion of females in gangs and committing gang-related crime is relatively small

- although the overwhelming majority of gang members are black or Hispanic, the proportion of white youth involvement is increasing

While discussions and debate continues over the precise definition of a gang, as defined by different police organisations and by sociologists, the key element in the American definitions is that of violent or criminal behaviour as a major activity of group members. From this point onward, however, the definitions vary considerably. Sanders (1994: 20) provides an example of a contemporary attempt to differentiate different types of groups (such as skinhead hate groups) according to the following criteria:

> A youth gang is any transpersonal group of youths that shows a willingness to use deadly violence to claim and defend territory, and attack rival gangs, extort or rob money, or engage in other criminal behavior as an activity associated with its group, and is recognized by itself and its immediate community as a distinct dangerous entity. The basic structure of gangs is one of age and gender differentiation, and leadership is informal and multiple.

Statistically (through recorded incidents of, for example, youth homicide rates), experientially (through visible street presence, such as use of 'colours' as symbolic markers) and in popular knowledge (through media reportage of events and groups, and fictional film accounts), youth gangs have a major presence in the American city. This is regularly confirmed in sociological and criminal justice research. Gangs exist, and they are engaged in violent and criminal activity.

In Australia, while historically there has long been concern with street-present young people, some of whom have been presented as constituting 'gangs' (e.g., the Sydney push larrikins at the turn of the century, the Bodgies and Widgies in the 1950s), the cultural and social environment is quite different to the American case. Unlike the U.S., for example, there is not a strong academic tradition of gang research, in part demonstrating the lack of a need for one in the first place. What research there is, has tended to find that 'gangs' in this country are very unlike their American counterparts.

For instance, a recent New South Wales inquiry received little or no evidence that the overseas style of gangs exist in that State, and commented that a usage of the term, which implies violence and an organised structure, has little relevance to youth activities in Australian communities (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1995). Furthermore, while the police service reported the existence of some 54 street gangs in 1993, there was no other evidence to support either this or related allegations of extensive memberships.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that certain types of youth gangs do exist, albeit not to the extent suggested in media accounts (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1995). Even here, it is noted that most gangs limit their criminal behaviour to petty theft, graffiti and vandalism.

Few gangs have a violent nature. Moreover, when violence such as homicide does involve a gang member, it is usually not gang-related.

## ii.    *'Gang' Characteristics*

By and large, it can be concluded that most bands of young people in Australia are not 'gangs', but groups (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1995; White, 1996). Social analysis of 'youth gangs' in Melbourne, for example, found that while some characteristics of the groups mirror the media images (e.g., the masculine nature of youth gangs, their preferred 'hang outs', and shared identity markers such as shoes or clothes), the overall rationale for the group is simply one of *social connection*, not crime (Aumair & Warren, 1994). This is an important observation and worthy of further comment.

In their study, Aumair and Warren (1994) cited five key characteristics of youth 'gangs'. These included:

- *overwhelming male involvement*, which in turn reinforced certain 'masculine' traits (such as fighting prowess, sexual conquest, substance use, minor criminal acts) in the group setting

- *high public visibility*, given the lack of money and therefore a reliance on free public spaces for recreational purposes

- *an outward display of collective identity*, in the form of the wearing of similar styles of clothing, adopting a common name for the group and so on

- *organisation principally for social reasons, and consequently low rates of criminal activity*, as indicated in the absence of formalised gang rules and a social rationale for gathering together, rather than a criminal objective

- *differences between public perceptions of the 'gang problem' and the real nature of the problem*, as illustrated by the fact that most criminal activity seemed to be inwardly focused, involving one-on-one fights and substance abuse.

Much of the criminality exhibited by 'youth gangs', therefore, is inward looking and linked to self-destructive behaviour such as substance abuse, drinking binges and the like. The popular perception is that gangs seek to violate the personal integrity and private property of the public in general; closer investigation reveals the insular nature of much of their activity (Aumair & Warren, 1994).

Groups of young people may well engage in anti-social or illegal behaviour. But it is a criminological truism that so do most young people at some stage in their lives. The key issue is whether the activity is sporadic, spontaneous and unusual for the group, or whether it is a main focus, thereby requiring a greater degree of criminal commitment and planning. The evidence certainly suggests the former is the case. Likewise, the statistics on youth crime indicate that use of criminal violence by young people in general is relatively rare (Cunneen & White, 1995; Mukherjee, Carcach & Higgins, 1997; Freeman, 1996).

When the available evidence on 'gangs' in Australia is weighed up, the picture presented appears to be something along the following lines (White, 1996). Rather than being fixed groups, with formal gang rules, most 'gangs' are transient groups of young people, which vary in size and which have informal structures of interaction. Rather than being inherently

anti-social, most of these groups involve 'hanging' out in a manner in which crime is incidental to the activities of the group as a whole. Rather than crime, the basis of activity is social activity, peer support, personal identity and self-esteem, and friendship networks. Rather than being exclusively of one ethnic background, many groups have members from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. Rather than seeing themselves as 'dangerous' or 'gangsters', the young people speak about things such as 'loyalty', 'fun' and supporting their 'mates'. Rather than seeing themselves as the source of conflict on the streets, groups complain about constant police harassment and unfair treatment by adults.

In the specific case of 'ethnic youth gangs', the activities and perceptions by and of ethnic minority youth present a special case. The over-riding message of most media reports, for example, is that such 'gangs' are entirely negative, dangerous and threatening. Indeed, in recent years the hype and sensationalised treatment of 'youth gangs' have tended to have an increasingly *racialised* character. That is, the media have emphasised the 'racial' background of alleged gang members, and thereby fostered the perception that, for instance, 'young Lebanese' or 'young Vietnamese' equals 'gang member'. The extra 'visibility' of youth ethnic minority people (relative to the Anglo Australian 'norm') feeds the media moral panic over 'youth gangs', as well as bolstering a racist stereotyping based upon physical appearance (and including such things as language, clothes and skin colour). Whole communities of young people can be affected, regardless of the fact that most young people are not systematic law-breakers or particularly violent individuals. The result is an inordinate level of public and police suspicion and hostility being directed towards people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds.

### iii.   Youth Formations

Confusions over the status of 'youth gangs' in the Australian context stem in part from the lack of adequate conceptual tools to analyse youth group behaviour. Recent work in Canada provides a useful series of benchmarks, especially considering the many similarities in social structure and cultural life between the two countries. Gordon has developed a typology of gangs and groups based on work done in Vancouver (see Gordon, 1995, 1997; Gordon & Foley, 1998). The typology consists of six categories:

- *Youth Movements*, which are social movement characterised by a distinctive mode of dress or other bodily adornments, a leisure time preference, and other distinguishing features (e.g., punk rockers)

- *Youth Groups*, which are comprised of small clusters of young people who hang out together in public places such as shopping centres (e.g., sometimes referred to as 'Mallies')

- *Criminal Groups*, which are small clusters of friends who band together, usually for a short period of time, to commit crime primarily for financial gain (may contain young and not so young adults as well)

- *Wannabe Groups*, which include young people who band together in a loosely structured group primarily to engage in spontaneous social activity and exciting, impulsive, criminal activity including collective violence against other groups of youths (e.g., territorial and use identifying markers of some kind)

- *Street Gangs*, which are groups of young people and young adults who band together to form a semi-structured organisation, the primary purpose of which is to engage in planned

and profitable criminal behaviour or organised violence against rival street gangs (e.g., less visible but more permanent than other groups)

- *Criminal Business Organisations*, which are groups that exhibit a formal structure and a high degree of sophistication, comprised mainly of adults, and which engage in criminal activity primarily for economic reasons and almost invariably maintain a low profile (e.g., may have a name but rarely visible)

An important observation made by Gordon (1997) is that street gangs tend to appear and disappear in waves. This appears to be due to a combination of factors, ranging from effective targeting of key individuals by the police, the maturation of gang members and community development schemes as to why they disappear; and on the other hand, the spawning of new branches from an existing formation, creation of gangs in defensive response to other gangs, and the pressure of youth fashion as to why they may emerge. In a telling comment, Gordon (1995: 318) indicates the importance of social and cultural infrastructures in keeping street gangs as a cyclical, rather than permanent, phenomenon:

> Unlike the situation in many American cities, street gangs have not become an entrenched feature of the Canadian urban landscape, and the chances of them doing so are still fairly slim. Cities like Vancouver tend not to have, and are unlikely to acquire, the decayed and disorganized inner urban areas containing large populations of disenfranchised, dissolute, and desperate youths and young adults. There is relatively strict gun control in Canada and not much opposition to making such control stricter. Canadian cities have an educational and social service apparatus that provides an effective social safety net that is staffed by generally optimistic personnel who are concerned to address the issues of youth disenchantment and prevent the entrenchment of street gangs. Every effort should be made to preserve these critical preventative factors.

These are words which need to be well heeded in Australia. So too, we need to learn from the Canadian experience, where again until recently there has been little research on gangs available, and develop models and appraisals of gangs and gang-related behaviour which are indicative of Australian local, regional and national realities and contexts.

### iv. *Youth in Groups*

Meanwhile, what is known about street gangs in Australia seems to confirm that their actual, rather than presumed, existence is much less than popularly believed, and that their activities are highly circumscribed in terms of violence or criminal activity directed at members of the general public. Nevertheless, the image of 'gangs' is a powerful one, and has engendered varying kinds of social reactions.

For example, the social status and public perception of young people in groups very much influences the regulation of public space. Many groups of young people, some of whom might be labelled 'gangs', for instance, tend to hang out in places like shopping centres. Difficulties in providing a precise, or uniform, definition of what a 'gang' actually refers to, and the diversity of youth dress, language and behaviour associated with specific *subcultural forms* (e.g., gothics, punks), means that more often than not young people are treated as 'outsiders' by commercial managers and authority figures on the basis of appearance, not solely actual behaviour.

The combination of being 'bored' and feeling unwelcome in such public domains can have a negative impact on the young people, and make them resentful of the way in which they are always subject to scrutiny and social exclusion. This, in turn, can lead to various kinds of 'deviant' behaviour, as in the case of young people who play cat-and-mouse with security guards for the fun of it. It is unfortunate that the perception of gang membership may lead to exclusion or negative responses from authority figures, and that this in turn may itself generate gang-like behaviour on the part of the young people so affected.

To a certain extent, much of the concern about gangs is really a misunderstanding of the nature of youth subcultures, of how young people naturally associate with each other in groups, and of the material opportunities open to them to circulate and do things in particular places. The diversity of youth subcultural forms, especially the spectacular youth subcultures, has historically been a source of consternation among certain sections of the adult population (Murray, 1973; Stratton, 1992; White, 1993). It has also been associated with conflicts *between* different groups of young people, and youth fearfulness *of* certain young people, based on certain social and cultural affiliations (e.g., Homies, Surfies, Skinheads, Punks). In most cases, however, the presence of identifiable groups is not the precursor to activity which is going to menace the community as a whole.

Having said this, it is still essential to recognise that the pre-conditions for more serious types of gang formation are beginning to emerge in the Australian context. A recent review article of American gangs points out that turf- and honour-based violence are best understood as arising out of particular political economic contexts, marked by patterns of unemployment, immigration and social marginalisation (Adamson, 1998). It is related to both attempts to engage in alternative productive activity (such as the illegal drug economy), and alternative consumption activity (in the form of dealing with lack of consumer purchasing power by taking the possessions of others). It also relates to attempts to assert masculinity in a period where traditional avenues to 'manhood' have been severely eroded for many young men. Given the trends toward ghettoisation and social polarisations in this country (see Gregory & Hunter, 1995), major questions can be asked regarding the potential for such gang formations in Australian cities.

With respect to these developments, it is significant that the increased frequency of involvement with the criminal justice system on the part of some ethnic minority young people, particularly in relation to drug offences and use of violence, has led to heightened media attention of ethnic young people generally. However, the extent of the shifts in criminal justice involvement do not warrant the intensity and universalising tendencies apparent in much media coverage, which tend to provide negative images of ethnic minority people as a whole. **The concern about the propensity of the media to perpetuate negative images of** ethnic minority young people is not new. For example, the 1995 First National Summit on Police & Ethnic Youth Relations recommended the development of a joint project with **the media industry and unions which would help to foster more positive portrayals of youth (National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, 1995).** The problems associated with police-ethnic minority youth relations have probably contributed to the negativity as well, and forms an important part of the 'image-building' in relation to ethnic youth gangs.

A New South Wales study, for example, found that ethnic minority young people were more likely than other groups of Australian young people (with the exception of indigenous people)

to be stopped by the police, to be questioned, and to be subject to varying forms of mistreatment (Youth Justice Coalition, 1994). Young Vietnamese Australians in Melbourne and Sydney have complained about unfair treatment, and racism, in their dealings with the police (Doan, 1995; Lyons, 1995). This is confirmed in a recent study of encounters between police and young Asian background people in Cabramatta, which found that the young people (who were heroin users) were subject to routine harassment, intimidation, 'ethnic' targeting, racism and offensive treatment (Maher et.al., 1997). Furthermore, there were a number of specific problems relating to cultural issues in that: 'Crucial norms of respect, shame and authority are routinely transgressed by police officers' (Maher et.al., 1997: 3). In the context of police rhetoric about adopting harm minimisation policies in dealing with drug issues, these coercive strategies were viewed by the young people as counter-productive.

More generally, a negative interaction between ethnic minority young people and the police breeds mistrust and disrespect. A minority of people in any community is engaged in particularly anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. The problem in this case is that the prejudicial stereotyping often leads to the *differential policing* of the whole population group (White, 1996). This kind of policing not only violates the ideals of treating all citizens and residents with the same respect and rights, but it can inadvertently lead to further law-breaking behaviour.

For example, as victims of racist violence, ethnic minority young people may be reluctant to approach state authorities for help, when these same figures have done little to entrust confidence or respect. As with similar cases overseas, the lack of police protection can lead some young people to adopt the stance that 'self-defence is no offence' and thus to arm themselves against racist attacks (Edwards, Oakley & Carey, 1987). Concern about the carrying of weapons not only justifies even more intense police intervention, it feeds media distortions about the problem of 'ethnic youth gangs'. Clearly there is a need for concerted efforts to modify existing police practices and to re-think community policing as this applies to ethnic minority young people (see Chan, 1994, 1997). The implementation of the recommendations arising out of the First National Summit on Police & Ethnic Youth Relations would certainly assist in making significant improvements in police-ethnic minority youth relations in Australia (National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, 1995). To this end, the establishment of State/Territory Support Implementation Teams by the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau appears to be a step in the right direction. The teams, which are comprised of a police representative in charge of youth affairs in every jurisdiction and a representative from the youth sector, will be the main vehicles for advocating the implementation of the Summit Recommendations (National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, 1997).

## 1.4  Research Contribution

The contribution of this research project is to expand our empirical knowledge about 'ethnic youth gangs'. As can be seen from this brief review, there has been very little systematic empirical examination of the phenomenon. There have been examples of critical analysis and interpretation of what little material has been collected (by government bodies as well as academic and community researchers), but quite often this has been ignored by the press and by political leaders as selected events, such as drive-by shootings, come to public notice.

Research projects such as this may be able to provide a better and more informed analysis of the concrete basis for the fear of crime in some neighbourhoods, as well as the extent and nature of existing 'gang' crime. It builds upon other recent studies undertaken on street-frequenting youth of non-English speaking background in Sydney (Pe-Pua, 1996), stories collected about the street youth of Cabramatta (Maher, Nguyen & Le, 1999), and the experience of homelessness among young people from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in Melbourne (Frederico, Cooper & Picton, 1996). It further develops our knowledge of more recent immigrant youth (such as Somalian young people), as well as considers the experiences of groups which have been established in this country for some time (such as Turkish young people).

It is our hope that the research will contribute, as well, to closer examination of how street-level activity is related to existing service provision, programme development and policy implementation. How federal, state and local government agencies carry out their work, and the policy context within which this occurs, are important variables in the quality of life for young people, and ultimately for the welfare and safety of all citizens and residents.

Finally, given the Melbourne focus for the current project, we would hope that the research opens the door to further work of a comparative nature, particularly in places such as Sydney and Brisbane which have large immigrant populations and diverse ethnic communities. The issues are of national importance, however, and should be responded to with policies and practices which acknowledge the cultural diversity, and changing nature, of Australian society.

# Part 2:

# Anglo Australian Young People

## 2.1 Social History

The dominant group in Australia – numerically, socially, politically and economically – is the Anglo Australian (see Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995). Anglo Australians comprise some two-thirds of the total population (Jupp, 1995). From the days of the first fleet to today, British settlers have dominated the institutional structures and cultural mainstream of Australian society.

In specific terms, Anglo Australians can be described as comprising people of British or Irish descent, and whose first language is that of English. The largest component of the Australian population is made up of people who have descended from mixtures of the English, Scottish and Irish settlers of the past. The category Anglo Australian also includes first generation migrants from the British Isles and selected English-speaking countries.

In terms of new settlers, the dominant trend has been for the largest category of migrants to come from the United Kingdom. This has been the case over the past two hundred years, and spans the time from the convict era, to the establishment of the 'White Australia' policy at the beginning of this century, through to the post-1975 period when government immigration policy was opened up to include non-Europeans on a non-discriminatory basis.

The major proportion of migrants to Australia has been from English-speaking origins. The main countries of origin, after the United Kingdom, have been New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, the United States, Papua New Guinea and Canada. In the case of Papua New Guinea, it is notable that a majority of settlers from this country are of Australian or European origin (Jupp, 1995). Generally speaking, in most of these cases, the bulk of the migrants have European ancestry (one notable exception being New Zealand, where a sizeable number of Maori and other Polynesian people have immigrated to Australia as well as Europeans). Even where other languages may be used in the country of origin (as in South Africa), the majority of migrants from these countries use English as their home language (Jupp, 1995).

Whether established or newly arrived, Anglo Australians have a privileged position in Australian society relative to other ethnic and migrant groups, and in relation to indigenous people. It has been argued that 'what it is to be Australian is still determined by the British or English connection. To this day immigrants are categorised into those of English-speaking-background (ESBs) and those of non-English-speaking background (NESBs), with different attitudes and different legal conditions applied to each group' (Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995: 40).

The genesis of the present study lies in this distinction between the Anglo Australian majority and the diverse ethnic minority groups which together make up the country's population. Much of the media treatment of youth gangs has emphasised the ethnicity of the targeted young people. One implication of this is that young Anglo Australian people do not engage in gang-related behaviour, form into similar types of youth groups, or participate on the margins of legal activities.

Aside from perhaps the Irish, there has rarely, at least this century, been sustained 'moral panics' concerning Anglo Australian young people which have specifically referred to their ethnicity as the key or prime characteristic of the group. When concern has been expressed about 'youth gangs' comprised of Anglo Australian young people, the tendency has been to focus on subcultural differences (e.g., the Bodgies and Widgies of the 1950s) or particular

activities (e.g., graffiti gangs in the 1980s), rather than ethnicity.

The concern of the present report was to speak with Anglo Australian young people about their perceptions of, and involvements with, youth gangs. This research was undertaken in order to compare the experiences of young people from the dominant social group with their ethnic minority counterparts.

The young people who were interviewed live in or close to the municipality of Knox. This part of Melbourne lies some 25 kilometres east of the Central Business District, and is a primarily residential area with a large number of new housing developments. In 1991, approximately one-quarter of the population in this area was born overseas, of which 14 per cent were from a non-English speaking country (ABS, 1991). The area is relatively affluent when annual household income is compared to the Melbourne statistical division average (ABS, 1986).

Over the years some public concern has been expressed over the use by and congregation of young people at the Knox City District Shopping Centre. The notion of 'youth gangs' being present, and that they are a problem, has occasionally gained media and local political attention.

## 2.2  Profile of Youth Interviewed

Twenty young people were interviewed in relation to the question of youth gangs. All of the young people were born in Australia, and all of them described themselves as being 'Australian'. In terms of ethnic identification, they referred to themselves as 'Anglo Celtic'.

The sample group comprised 9 young women and 11 young men. The ages of the group ranged from 13 to 23. A majority (9) were aged 15-16, there were 5 young people under 15 years, and 6 were 17 years old or over.

Half of the young people had no formal religious affiliation. The other half were Christians, and were comprised of 4 who were Catholics, and 6 who were members of a Protestant denomination.

The young people came from stable family backgrounds. Most (16) lived with two parents. Of the others, 1 lived with their mother, 1 lived with friends, and 2 lived with their partner. The language spoken at home, and with their peers, was English.

Half of the sample had lived in the same place for more than 10 years. Only 3 had lived in their present location for less than 1 year. The majority of the young people lived in a house, while 2 lived in flats. Of those who had moved residence, the main reasons for moving were to go to a better neighbourhood or to a better house.

Some indication of the socio-economic background of the young people was provided by a series of questions on the type of income sources and paid work of their parents. A majority (14) of the young people's mothers were engaged in paid employment. They were mainly concentrated in the service, retail and clerical sectors. Three of the mothers were in receipt of some kind of state benefit (such as unemployment benefit).

19 out of the 20 fathers were currently in paid employment. The occupations included work in the service sector, retail industry, trades and various professional areas (such as computer

programming, musician, artist). The young people thus came from households where one or both parents were in paid employment.

The young people were presently attending school, or had finished high school. Of those who had completed school, several had gone on to further education of some kind, including university and TAFE. The young people saw school as a key place to catch up with friends, and generally enjoyed the educational experience. The main criticism of schooling was 'homework'.

From this profile, it can be seen that by and large the young people came from financially secure backgrounds, and had relatively few problems in either the family or educational spheres.

## 2.3  Sources of Income

The economic situation of the young people was ascertained by asking a number of questions relating to sources of income and employment experiences. At the time of interview, 10 of the young people were in some kind of paid employment. Almost all of these jobs were part-time or casual, with only 1 person holding a full-time job. Given the age profile and educational participation of the sample group, this is not surprising. Most were employed in the service and retail sectors. Notably, 6 out of the 10 young people in paid employment were paid 'cash-in-hand'.

Only 6 of the young people had never had a job. Many of the jobs were temporary in nature, and either the job finished or the young people had to leave the job due to outside pressures, such as schooling. However, 5 of the young people had held jobs for 1 year or more. The majority of young people felt that they had been treated fairly in their jobs.

Most (17) of the young people said that they performed unpaid work at home for their family or friends. This mainly consisted of domestic chores, activities such as gardening or mowing the lawn, and 1 person mentioned childcare.

The income sources identified for young people in the area included parents, work and casual or part-time jobs. This pattern was reflected in the income sources for the young people themselves, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1:
Sources of Income for Young People Interviewed

| Sources of Income | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Austudy | 2 | 10.0 | 7.4 |
| Family | 13 | 65.0 | 48.1 |
| Work | 2 | 10.0 | 7.4 |
| Casual/part time job | 9 | 45.0 | 33.3 |
| Other | 1 | 5.0 | 3.7 |
| Total | 27 | | 100.0 |

N=20

If the young people were experiencing money problems they would invariably go to their parents for assistance. Only a few mentioned going to friends, and that depended upon what they needed the money for.

The young people were also aware of a number of short-term jobs that could be undertaken for 'quick' money. These included babysitting, factory work, fruit picking, cleaning, gardening, doing chores, lawn mowing and office work.

Table 2 presents information on how the young people spent their money. As can be seen, the largest expense was related to entertainment.

Table 2:
Ways in Which Young People Spent their Money

| Ways in which money is spent | Response to each category | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Rent | 3 | 15.0 | 7.1 |
| Food/bills | 6 | 30.0 | 14.3 |
| Entertainment | 15 | 75.0 | 35.7 |
| Travel | 2 | 10.0 | 4.8 |
| Clothes | 7 | 35.0 | 16.7 |
| Family | 1 | 5.0 | 2.4 |
| Save | 3 | 15.0 | 7.1 |
| books/school | 1 | 5.0 | 2.4 |
| Other | 4 | 20.0 | 9.5 |
| Total | 42 | | 100.0 |

N=20

The fact that relatively few responses referred to household related expenses is indicative of the relative affluence of the young people's families. Instead, the main expense is associated with leisure and entertainment, which is in itself not surprising given the commercial nature of most activities of this nature in contemporary society.

The young Anglo Australian people were also asked what kinds of illegal activities they thought young people in their area might engage in if they wished to supplement their income. Their responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3:
Interviewees' Perceptions of the Types of Illegal Activity
In Which Young People Engage for Money

| Types of  illegal activity | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Drug dealing | 15 | 75.0 | 39.5 |
| Burglary/robbery | 3 | 15.0 | 7.9 |
| Shoplifting/sale of stolen goods | 6 | 30.0 | 15.8 |
| Theft (other than shoplifting) | 9 | 45.0 | 23.7 |
| Mugging/jumping | 1 | 5.0 | 2.6 |
| Cheating the DSS | 1 | 5.0 | 2.6 |
| Other | 3 | 15.0 | 7.9 |
| Total | 38 | | 100.0 |

N=20

As can be seen, the key areas of illegal activity identified by the young people are drug dealing, and property crime of some kind (i.e., theft, shopstealing, burglary). The main reason given for such activity was 'need money'.  Another major explanation provided was peer pressure and the 'need to be cool'. The interrelationship of different factors was also recognised in the discussions. For example, one young person commented:  *'Number of reasons... Could be like, the younger kids are probably – they've got nothing else to do. Could be family problems at home or something, so they're out on the street just doing whatever they think that they can do. Or, others get involved in drugs or whatever, so they need the money. I've heard of  a number of cases where people have robbed houses just to get a quick fix or something like that' (AA7).*

The sample group was also asked about illegal activity that was engaged in, but not for the purposes of money. The two major responses here were 'vandalism/graffiti', and 'drug/ alcohol use'. Why young people would engage in such behaviour was explained in terms of showing off, fun and excitement, peer pressure and problems at home.

A link was made between this kind of activity and group behaviour: *'I think just for fun. I think also a lot  is done by groups of people, or gangs, and it can come from just dares or it's just the established behaviour of the gang and if your identity is tied up  with being part of a gang, even though you might not feel comfortable doing it, I think people still do it anyway, because if they don't do it, then the gang won't allow them in, in terms of being part of a gang. And the whole thing about being kicked out of a gang might be a horrible thing if their whole sense of belonging is tied up with the gang' (AA9).*

Different types of motivation for the same sorts of acts were also acknowledged, particularly in regards to graffiti. As one young person observed: *'Graffiti, people do it because they see it as being an art – the ones who actually make it look half decent. The other ones who just scribble are the ones who just get into it because they wanna be like everyone else' (AA17).*

## 2.4 Youth Gangs

A series of questions were put to the young people about the nature and activities of 'youth gangs' in their neighbourhood. We started by asking them where young people hung out in the local area. The major place mentioned was the shopping centre. Other responses included recreation and sporting facilities, amusement centres, train stations and bus stops, and the street outside of shops. All of the young people said that they generally hang around in groups. When asked where they spent most of their time, the young people referred to shopping centres, home and to their friend's places. Most of their time, however, was spent at home or at a friend's house.

The main things which young people's *groups in general* were seen to have in common were the same interests and activities, and similar dress and style preferences. Musical tastes and attendance at the same school were also cited.

The differences between *groups on the street* engendered a different kind of response. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4:
Young People's Perceptions of the Main Differences
Between the Groups Which Hang Out on the Streets

| Group differences | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Ethnicity | 1 | 5.0 | 3.7 |
| Clothes/style | 3 | 15.0 | 11.1 |
| Leisure activities | 8 | 40.0 | 29.6 |
| Fun groups vs troublemakers/criminals | 5 | 15.0 | 18.5 |
| No difference | 8 | 40.0 | 29.6 |
| Other | 2 | 10.0 | 7.4 |
| Total | 27 | | 100.0 |

N=20

While there is once again acknowlegement of differences  based on leisure and dress preferences, there is also a heightened sense of difference based upon 'fun groups' and 'troublemakers'.

There was some recognition as well of ethnic differences. In later discussions the young people were to comment that there were a number of ethnic differences in the activities of young people generally. Theses were seen in terms of religious and cultural activities (such as praying and religious affiliations), recreational choices (such as soccer compared with Aussie rules football), and non-Anglo Australian young people spending more time with their families than Anglo Australian young people.

Alternatively, some young people did not feel that there were any great differences amongst their peers based upon ethnicity. This uniformity was occasionally presented as part of a process of assimilation into the (Anglo) Australian way of life. As one young person put it:

*'Depends how 'Aussified' they are. Aussiefied's a person that maybe comes from another country, but they've assimilated into our society. They've grown up with us sort of thing, so they've adopted our ways. They don't have any cultural identity as such' (AA8).*

It is worth commenting on the fact that a significant proportion of responses also indicated that there were 'no differences' between the groups on the street. This suggests that group activity may be somewhat fluid – for example, the troublemaker of today, could be the funmaker of tomorrow. It could also imply that the differences between the groups on the street were perceived mainly in terms of friendship networks, rather than more fundamental social differences.

An interesting observation was also made concerning the gendered nature of group formation: *'I don't see too many boys with girls on a friendly basis. I went shopping yesterday, mainly I saw girls with girls, mainly just two of them usually, sometimes three. And I see guys with guys and then I see boyfriends and girlfriends walking around. I didn't see too many groups, as in mixed groups – boys and girls' (AA8).* In fact, most of the young people thought there were significant gender differences in the activities of young men and young women. These would also impact upon who hung around with whom, and why. For instance, the young women were seen to be more interested in shopping and clothes, the young men in 'sporty stuff' and more active pursuits in the public domain.

The Anglo Australian young people were asked about how they defined 'gangs', and what the differences between gangs and groups were. Their descriptions of the basic features of gangs are shown in Table 5.

Table 5:
The Characteristics by Which the Young People Defined Gangs

| Attributes | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Organised/rules | 2 | 10.0 | 6.9 |
| Dress/style | 1 | 5.0 | 3.4 |
| Carry weapons | 1 | 5.0 | 3.4 |
| Violent | 9 | 45.0 | 31.0 |
| Drug users | 2 | 10.0 | 6.9 |
| Do illegal activities | 7 | 35.0 | 24.1 |
| Just a group of friends | 4 | 20.0 | 13.8 |
| Other | 3 | 15.0 | 10.3 |
| Total | 29 | | 100.0 |

N=20

There was some ambiguity regarding how best to distinguish 'gangs' and 'groups'. In the discussions, **18** of the young people said there were gangs in the area. However, what constituted a 'gang' was not always clear. This is indicated in Table 6.

Table 6:
Young People's Perceptions of Types of Gangs in the Area

| Types of Gangs | Response to each category | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Troublemakers | 8 | 44.4 | 36.4 |
| Drug dealers | 2 | 11.1 | 9.1 |
| Just group of friends | 5 | 27.8 | 22.7 |
| Ethnic group | 4 | 22.2 | 18.2 |
| Don't know | 2 | 11.1 | 9.1 |
| Other | 1 | 5.6 | 4.5 |
| Total | 22 | | 100.0 |

N= 18
Not Applicable = 2 (10%)

Sometimes a 'gang' was defined mainly in terms of simply hanging around together, and the nature of the bonding between different members of the group.

> AA12: 'A group of people that are all after the one thing. Perhaps they've got the same role model, that sort of hang around together and they're all in together for, you know, – you know, the musketeers idea.'

> AA7: 'I think a gang are a different sort of group, because they probably move around all together and do things all together. They'd be a closer knit group. A group of young people, like you're in that group, but you'd have other friends elsewhere and stuff. But the gangs is more like these are your friends and these are your only sort of friends as well that you can really trust.'

> AA9: 'I think a group of young people, the identity is not so much tied up with the culture of the gang, or the group they're with. They hang around more so because they've got the [same interests] and there's no strong behavioural identity of that group of friends. I suppose smaller groups, they have like, a strict you know, who's in it, who's out kind of thing, whereas in larger groups, there's no definite who's in, who's out. Whereas gangs, it's a more definite you're in, you're out kind of thing; a stricter kind of code of behaviour, or just the culture of the group.'

According to other interviewees, the main characteristics of gangs are that they engage in violent, criminal and illegal behaviour. The focus here is on what particular groups actually do, rather than with the composition of the group itself.

> AA8: 'A gang hangs out only with each other, maybe for support. Some do drugs and drink alcohol.'

> AA2: 'A gang probably – they go and do illegal stuff or something and they'd be tough, beat up people.'

> AA6: 'I think gangs are groups that are generally fairly violent. They like to pick fights and be tough, steal a lot and that sort of stuff. A group just hang around for some fun with their mates, instead of being on their own.'

> AA3: 'I think a gang's more violent compared to just a group.'

> *AA12: 'Depending on what they're doing. If it's just a group of young people just hanging around type of thing, it's different than, like, a gang of people on the prowl to do something. But, depending on what they're doing I suppose.'*

Another defining characteristic of gangs was ethnicity, including Anglo Australian. Distinctions here are generally based not so much on what people do, but their physical appearance and cultural identification.

> *AA4: '…I think gangs are mixed up with different nationalities – Asians, Italians, Australians – and they go around. They do cause a bit of trouble now and then. They have big fights with other gangs that are in the area.'*

> *AA16: '(The) Knox gang. They're usually Asian people and they all carry knives and they've got their girls that hang around them. Do something to one of them, like the whole gang just goes after you. All the guys are Asians and all the girls are Australians.'*

When asked what members of gangs had in common, however, most responses alluded to the sharing of similar interests. Ethnicity, use of drugs, engagement in fighting and so on did not feature prominently. The main emphasis was on subcultural style and leisure preferences, rather than crime or violent behaviour. As one young person commented: *'I suppose music; the sort of style of their music. Probably the genre of music. It may be their mode of transport, like if they're skaters, they all have a skateboard. I suppose also maybe just their type of dress, the type of things they like to do, like common interests, or things that are defined by the group that the group does. I suppose all the things would tie up into defining who the group is and depending on how strict the gang is, the identity its members want' (AA9).* The idea of gangs, in this sense, is basically wrapped around certain types of identity formation linked to pop music culture and street culture.

The specific reasons why some young people might join gangs included family problems, lack of support and guidance, a dislike of school and being easily influenced. Young women were seen to be a part of gangs mainly due to relationships they have with young male members of gangs.

The general reasons put forward as to why young people join gangs are shown in Table 7.

Table 7:
Interviewees' Perceptions of Why Young People Join Gangs

| Common attributes Of gang members | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Problems at home | 5 | 25.0 | 17.9 |
| Protection | 6 | 30.0 | 21.4 |
| Support/replacing family | 7 | 35.0 | 25.0 |
| Respect/power | 4 | 20.0 | 14.3 |
| Rebellion/showing off | 2 | 10.0 | 7.1 |
| Other | 4 | 20.0 | 14.3 |
| Total | 28 | | 100.0 |

N= 20

The idea that gang membership provides a sense of community and social belonging was a strong theme in the discussions. So too, was the idea of gaining a measure of security and safety.

> *AA7: 'They're looking for something; need that security and to be trusted by other people. Just to be in that sort of group and feel that you belong to something.'*

> *AA9: 'To find a sense of belonging. I think a lot of people who join gangs wouldn't have a real family structure. Whereas traditionally, a sense of belonging would start from the family base, this identity would be created within the family. And sadly, these days, it's no longer the case. I think young people crave a sense of belonging – to be part of something, to be accepted for who they are, and from that, who are they, where they fit, where they're going, who are they. I think a gang can provide that, but with choosing attention to do it.'*

> *AA12: 'I think probably it's a sort of, not a self-esteem thing, but it's you're safe, you're in a group, you're not on our own, you've got friends. You can say "I've got heaps of mates now I'm in this gang, blah, blah, blah." Maybe it's a security thing.'*

> *AA15: 'I don't know really, just probably social status, just so they can say "Yeah, I'm in a gang", or to be part of a group. Maybe if they have low self esteem or something like that.'*

The young Anglo Australian people were asked whether racism was a reason for gang membership and formation. Interestingly, racism was never seen in terms of the victimisation or group identity of the Anglo Australians themselves. They are the dominant social group, and it was generally assumed that their culture and language are the standard by which other groups are to be judged. There was an implied homogeneity amongst the Anglo Australian population, especially in contrast to the Other (in this case, young people from minority backgrounds).

Racism was perceived solely as something which pertains to the ethnic minorities. Where Anglo Australian young people are implicated in racist reasons for gang formation, it is as instigators, rather than as victims. Simultaneously, the ethnic basis for group membership was also seen as evidence of 'racism' (in a sense) insofar as young people from similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds were seen to be consciously excluding themselves from the dominant Anglo Australian society.

In explaining gang formation, then, racism was considered important in relation to specific groups of young people. There were two categories of young people who were singled out for particular attention. The first was 'Asians':

> *AA3: 'If society's horrible to these Asian people, they may all want to sort of stick together and then they can stop being hurt as much as if they're surrounded by other people who bring them problems.'*

> *AA9: 'I think it can work both ways, like the whole thing with Asian gangs – not so much a racist thing, but just because they're all the same race. I think a lot of people join gangs because they are racist against other cultures.'*

> *AA17: 'For some – some Asian gangs, 'cos they feel that they're hard done by. I reckon white people often do give them a hard time for no reason at all. But the white people themselves are only concerned about, I suppose, the way they act towards us. We say that we were here first and they don't come and speak our language, and hang around in their clans and all the rest of it.'*

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The other group mentioned was 'blacks':

> *AA11: 'Sometimes blacks gang up on other people because they say white people used to be really bad to them.'*

> *AA20: 'Because I know that (racism is a reason). I know...that a lot of blacks get teased around here and they just fight to have back up by other people, so you know, they're all together.'*

There was a feeling that 'Asians' and 'Africans' hung around together for mutual support, and because they wanted to be part of a group that shared similar backgrounds and interests.

The nature of gang activities, as perceived by the Anglo Australian young people, is indicated in Table 8.

Table 8:
Young People's Perceptions of the Kinds of Activities
in Which Gangs get Involved

| Kinds of Activities | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Fighting | 7 | 35.0 | 14.9 |
| Having fun | 2 | 10.0 | 4.3 |
| Drug dealing | 6 | 30.0 | 12.8 |
| Stealing/mugging/robbery | 12 | 60.0 | 25.5 |
| Vandalism/graffiti | 4 | 20.0 | 8.5 |
| Drinking/drug use | 12 | 60.0 | 25.5 |
| Sport | 2 | 10.0 | 4.3 |
| Other | 2 | 10.0 | 4.3 |
| Total | 47 | | 100.0 |

N=20

These perceptions of gang-related behaviour are consistent with earlier discussions which saw youth gangs as being identified with illegal social activity (such as use of drugs and alcohol), criminal activity (such as drug dealing and shopstealing) and anti-social activity (such as fighting).

Gangs were associated with street fighting. In this context, there was a perception that gang members used weapons, such as knives, but they would only do so during gang fights and only for self defence. The perceptions of the respondents regarding which groups get involved in fights with which other groups is shown in Table 9.

Table 9:
Young People's Perceptions of the Different Groups
that get Involved in Gang Fights

| Types of groups | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Anglo against other Ethnic | 7 | 35.0 | 33.3 |
| One ethnic against 'different' Ethnic | 1 | 5.0 | 4.8 |
| No particular/many different combinations | 4 | 20.0 | 19.0 |
| Another specific combination | 1 | 5.0 | 4.8 |
| Not based on Ethnicity | 5 | 25.0 | 23.8 |
| Don't know | 3 | 15.0 | 14.3 |
| Total | 21 | | 100.0 |

N=20

As seen in this table, the main groups involved in street level conflict tend to be perceived as the 'Anglos' against ethnic minority groups such as the 'Asians'. The main reasons for these fights were struggles over territory, acting or talking smart, and racism.

When asked whether or not gangs were a problem in school, most of the respondents said that this was not the case at their school. A key reason which was mentioned by several young people was that their particular school was not especially 'multicultural'. As one young person expressed it: *'Not in this school I don't think. In some other schools, where there's more racism (it's a problem). There's not that many Asian people, or Italians, or Greeks actually in this school. In bigger schools, where there's plenty of people who have bad attitudes towards these racial groups, they'd be more of a problem' (AA3).* Other young people attended private schools and saw this as a key factor in why gangs were not a problem.

While 'gangs' as such were not seen as a problem, several of the young people did refer to the problem of bullying. However, this was generally seen as a matter of one-on-one type of interaction, sometimes involving a group of young people who target particular individuals, rather than as antagonism between groups. Intimidating behaviour consisted of teasing, and in some instances, physical aggression.

In general, the Anglo Australian young people we interviewed did not view gangs as a major problem or issue for them personally. They could see why and how conflict might occur between different groups of young people. They could understand why some young people might engage in criminal activity and illegal behaviour. But for the most part, they themselves were fairly insulated from the economic and social factors which might propel others to join street gangs and school-based gangs. The advantages of a relatively privileged background were recognised by the young Anglo Australian people, and were reflected to some extent in their prescriptions regarding what could be done to address the youth gang issue.

## 2.5  Problems & Solutions

The young people were somewhat critical of media portrayals of youth gangs. Most felt that such portrayals were biased and exaggerated. Several commented on how the media tend to pick on 'Asians' in their coverage of youth activities.

The general impression, however, is that the media was not really discussing the Anglo Australian young people at all. Their criticisms were more in the vein of how the media portrayed the activity of *other* groups of young people, and that there were problems with this. The media image of gangs was not seen as particularly relevant to them, as Anglo Australian young people.

The dominant social position of the young Anglo Australian people was reflected not only in the lack of identification with the negative media portrayals, but, as well, in the somewhat patronising comments made about those young people who were caught in the media gaze. For example, one young person was to comment: *'I think they can be a bit unfair sometimes. Just 'cos they're of an ethnic background, doesn't mean that everyone's the same. They might say "Asian gangs" – well, not all Asians are bad. They give Asians a bad name. But some of them are fine' (AA6)*. The idea that 'some of them are fine' implicitly makes a distinction between the dominant 'US' group and the subordinate 'THEM' group, while indirectly reinforcing the notion that deviancy is closer to the norm for the latter group, although exceptions are possible.

The relatively privileged status and position of these particular Anglo Australian young people was evident in other ways as well. For example, most felt that there were sufficient activities available for young people in their area. Some expressed a desire for more recreation and sporting facilities, and a youth centre, and one commented that they wished some of the activities would be cheaper and not cost as much money.

Most of the young people spent their time at home or at a friend's place. Going to movies and attending amusement centres were important forms of 'going out'. A number also liked to simply hang out with their friends in places such as shopping centres. When they got bored, they tended to watch television, go to the movies, listen to music or talk with their friends. None referred to engaging in drug use or illegal activities when they were bored or looking for excitement.

The young people felt that their family was crucial in terms of giving support and providing strength and help. Nevertheless, 14 of the young people said that they were experiencing family problems. However, the main type of 'problem' identified was arguments. When experiencing problems of this nature, the young people tended to rely on parents or friends to sort things out, rather than to go to outside agencies. A majority of the young people knew where to receive advice and information, from school counsellors and welfare services such as phone helplines, if they need to do so.

The young people felt restricted in what they could do and where they could go. This was seen as mainly due to safety concerns, parental decisions, income and availability of transport. The perceptions held by parents regarding safety and street activity (such as fighting) influenced what the young people were allowed to do or not.

When asked about the trouble that groups might experience on the street, the young people

referred to things such as trouble with shopkeepers, police harassment and security harassment. This was linked to wider community perceptions regarding gangs, and the fact that groups of young people were generally seen as disruptive. As one young person commented: *'Any group that tend to hang out where they're not wanted, like I know one time we went to Knox City and we were – there's been a lot of problems with gangs hanging around there – and there was a group of about 20 of us, but we were jut all sitting around in the food court area, but they told us to leave, like, 'cos they didn't want large numbers of the community'.*

Yet, when asked specific questions about their contact with authority figures in public places, there did not appear to be a particularly negative relationship between these young people and these figures. For instance, 12 of the young people had had contact with the police, mainly on the street. According to the Anglo Australian young people, this contact was generally good. They said that they were treated well when stopped, and were helped when a victim crime. Only 1 young person felt that they had been treated generally badly.

Similar responses were given in relation to contact with security guards. This mainly occurred in shopping centres. Here the young people said they were treated OK by the security guards when stopped, they were helped and protected by the security guards, and they were friends with them. They negative experiences related to being hassled and told to move on. But overall, there was a generally positive relationship between the young people and private security guards.

In general, the response of the Anglo Australian young people to the gang issue was to offer the gang members greater support, help and direction. As one young person put it: '*I think young people (should be given) a sense of identity and belonging, so these groups (youth groups) can be good ways of, sort of a circuit breaker for young people feeling they have to belong to a gang to find a sense of identity and belonging – it can be a circuit breaker as opposed to violence*' *(AA9)*. Some mentioned leaving them alone, others the taking of active steps to disband such formations.

Most of the young people also referred to passive and active methods of policing as one means to prevent gang-related behaviour and activity. This is indicated in Table 10.

Table 10:
Young People's Perceptions of What Police Can Do about Gangs

| Type of Action | Response to each category | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Get more information/accurate facts | 1 | 5.0 | 3.6 |
| Get to know them/talk to them | 3 | 15.0 | 10.7 |
| Maintain a presence | 11 | 55.0 | 39.3 |
| Stop hassling them | 1 | 5.0 | 3.6 |
| Contain/stop them | 2 | 10.0 | 7.1 |
| Prosecute/put them in gaol | 4 | 20.0 | 14.3 |
| Can't do much | 4 | 20.0 | 14.3 |
| Don't know | 2 | 10.0 | 7.1 |
| Total | 28 | | 100.0 |

N=20

In discussion, the young people placed emphasis on surveillance ('just keep an eye on them') and active intervention ('move them on') as measures to prevent youth gangs from engaging in violence and other anti-social activity.

In a more constructive or positive vein, other young people spoke about the need for police to establish better communication with the young gang members:

> AA5: *'Give them the time of day. Trust what they're saying. Don't always judge them.'*

> AA12: *'I don't know. Have a better sort of rapport with them, not so much that, you know, the gangs are the baddies, the police are the goodies. To respect them for what they do and all that sort of stuff, because then they'll get respect back obviously.'*

Given the apparent lack of gang activity in their schools, the young people felt that not much was needed on the part of schools beyond that of teaching young people the consequences and alternatives to gang life.

Social services were seen as possible avenues for helping gang members through provision of support and guidance, and help with work and education and money. Interestingly, 10 of the young people felt that migrant services could be beneficial by providing support groups for ethnic minority youth. The specific content of such services was oriented toward easing the adjustment of recent migrants into the Australian social setting.

> AA2: *'Just teach them that there's people here, there's you, there's your people, and they just have to come together.'*

> AA3: *'Teach more racial tolerance, so that people aren't being racist to start with.'*

> AA5: *'They should probably introduce them to people, like to their own sort, and Australians, so that they're not left hanging around with just their own sort of people.'*

> AA6: *'Maybe, if the people are in it because of being part of racism and stuff, maybe they'd be able to try and give them confidence in themselves. But once they've made up their mind, there's not a great deal you can do to change it.'*

> AA7: *'I think that might be, like, 'cos they haven't fully adjusted to living in Australia.'*

> AA8: *'Maybe the ethnic people that join gangs are wanting to cling to their cultural identity and they feel uncomfortable with our country so that's maybe why they turn to gangs, so they can sort out who they are. I think counselling intimidates a lot of people. They think "Oh, I'm going to see a counsellor, there must be something wrong with me", so you've gotta counsel them in a way they think is not counselling.'*

> AA9: *'I suppose especially for new arrivals, it's pretty daunting going to a new country with a totally different culture. If there were Asian groups set up to make the transition easier.'*

As these comments imply, the main focus for 'adjustment' and change lies with the ethnic minority young people, rather than with the Anglo Australian young people. There is little recognition that positive social change is associated with modifying their behaviour, their attitudes, and their relationships, as part of the process.

Broadly speaking, however, there is nevertheless an acknowledgement of the difficulties of transition for young people who have migrated to Australia from another country and culture. This was also reflected in comments that what government can do about gangs is to provide more jobs for young people, and more funding and services for young people.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This study has been based upon interviews with 20 young people from an Anglo Australian background. The young people lived in stable home and residential environments. They lived in households which were financially secure, and in most cases both parents were in paid employment. The young people were members of the dominant ethnic grouping in Australia, and this was reflected in their perceptions of and attitudes towards non-Anglo Australians.

In general, these young people had reasonable access to social and recreational facilities. They had few problems with authority figures, whether in the school or on the streets. They hung around in groups, most of which formed on the basis of shared interests, musical preferences, neighbourhood ties and recreational activities. The main basis for group membership was friendship and social connection.

While few of these young people were in gangs, and few had had contact with gangs in either school or outside school activities, they did make a number of observations regarding gangs and gang-related behaviour which are worthy of note:

- It was acknowledged that most young people take part in groups of some kind, and that in general such groups were formed on the basis of *personal interests and tastes*, which they could share with like-minded young people

- Distinctions were made between *different groups on the street*, according to such criteria as troublesome/fun, ethnicity and gender, although a number of the young people also insisted that essentially there was no fundamental difference between the various group formations

- Gangs constituted a subset of street groups, and were defined primarily in terms of *violence*, engagement in *criminal acts* such as property crime, and *illegal social activity* such as drug use. They were also identified on the basis of *ethnic minority status*.

A strong feature of the discussions was the idea that gang formation was closely tied to both socio-economic background (e.g., financial resources and family support), and to ethnic background (e.g., visible minorities). As such, given the relatively privileged economic position and social status of the young people who were interviewed, it is hardly surprising that they did not frame the 'gang issue' in terms of Anglo Australian young people.

There was a clear, and complex, relationship between gang formation and racism. Racism was seen as a reason for the establishment of certain types of gangs, mainly so that people from ethnic minority backgrounds could protect themselves from verbal and physical assaults of a racist nature. Rather than simply combining for fun and to share similar interests, then, the rationale behind some types of group membership was protection.

Racism was also construed to mean the close group identification of young people from similar ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds, in ways which affirmed the young person's membership of one section of society (but, in the eyes of the respondents, not another). Ethnic identification was thus conflated with the idea of 'racism'. That is, group formation based upon mutual understanding and shared experiences was seen to actively exclude and include people on the basis of 'race' or 'ethnicity'. From the perspective of the dominant group – the Anglo Australian young people – this was seen as a problem, even though the

processes of exclusion, and emphases on 'difference', from the dominant group constitute major reasons for this social phenomenon.

Racism was also seen to be a vital ingredient in why conflicts occurred between different groups of young people on the street. Social differences are manifest in particular physical and cultural traits and characteristics. Street conflicts between particular 'ethnic' groups (such as 'Asians', and 'Anglo Australians') are thus perhaps more visible and defined (in the sense of recognisable group affiliation) than otherwise may be the case in intra-group conflicts.

The young people in this study were relatively unaffected by the phenomenon of youth gangs. However, they were conscious of their existence. In their view, dealing with gangs requires a multi-faceted approach. It should, for example, incorporate allocation of greater societal resources to 'disadvantaged' young people, as well as involve various styles of passive and active policing of street-present young people. A crucial omission in the discussions was the relationship to, and responsibilities of, the wider Anglo Australian community with regard to these questions.

## 2.7 Recommendations

### i. *Canadian Gangs and Ethnicity*

In the study of youth gangs in Vancouver, Gordon and Foley (1998: 127) make the observation that:

> while the number of individuals involved in organizations, gangs and groups is small (tiny might be a better adjective) immigrants who are from visible ethnic minorities are significantly over-represented. This may be a function of ethnic and economic marginality. The lack of language, and a lack of both money and the means to obtain money and material goods legitimately may result in individuals clustering in supportive groups where they are understood and can make money, albeit illegally.

The report goes on to note that it appears that settlement services are not reaching some individuals and families, and that there is a need for more social workers who understand the structures, customs, values and norms of particular immigrant cultures and who can speak the languages of newly arrived individuals and families.

The report recommends that the ethnic minority families and young people would benefit from some or all of the following (Gordon & Foley, 1998: 127-128):

- Education about Canada and the Canadian way of life prior to leaving the country of origin

- Opportunities to discuss Canada and the Canadian way of life, and the probable impact on the family unit, before leaving the country of origin

- Access to adequate settlement services immediately upon arrival, and for an extended period thereafter

- ESL [English as Second Language] classes for adults that are free and available during the day, in the evenings and at weekends

- ESL classes for children that are free and available outside regular classroom time

- Access to community kitchens and similar programmes that address the problem of family isolation

- Programmes specifically designed for immigrants from war zones to help reduce the long term effects of exposure to violence

- Access to 'buddy' systems whereby support can be provided for individuals and families during their first few years of life in Canada

It is further recommended that there by additional programming for immigrants aimed at assisting individuals to find rewarding employment, especially young adult males who are at risk of drifting into criminal activity.

### ii.     Public Spaces and Ethnicity in Australia

The most sustained analysis of how young ethnic minority people actually use public space – which has obvious implications regarding gang-related perceptions and activities – has been a study undertaken in four local government areas in Sydney (Pe-Pua, 1996). A wide range of issues relating to the lives of 100 street-frequenting non-English speaking background young people were investigated. The discussions and interviews covered topics such as family issues, housing and accommodation issues, social and recreational needs, financial needs, employment issues, educational and training issues, physical and mental health, legal issues and youth services.

With respect to the specific issue of public space use, the study found that (Pe-Pua, 1996: 115):

> The activities associated with street-frequenting ranged from illegal activities to fun activities, socialising, fighting or stirring up trouble, smoking and others. The reasons for street-frequenting were boredom, family-related, for economic or moral support, because of the freedom it provides, and others. The perceived benefits were: widening one's social network; having fun; learning experience; freedom and a sense of power; escape from problems; economic gains, and others. The perceived disadvantages were related to problems with the police; a negative image or bad treatment received from others, especially adults; getting into trouble or being involved in fights; health or drug and alcohol problems; lack of adequate shelter or food; financial worries; emotional burden; and general safety.

On the basis of the study's findings, a number of recommendations were put forward, some of which are relevant to the present study. These include (Pe-Pua, 1996):

- that different strategies for disseminating information on the background and needs of street-frequenting young people be undertaken, to be targeted at different groups

- that the culture or practice of service provision (e.g., police, youth and community, health) be changed to have a more effective ethnic minority youth focus, while maintaining a high level of customer service and professionalism

- that youth services incorporate a mobile outreach and street-based service delivery model to access street-frequenting young people

- that a multi-skilled, multi-purpose type of structure for a youth centre be set up

- that more street workers be hired, or street and outreach work be strongly encouraged as part of youth work, provided adequate funding support and human resources are made available

- that the recreational needs of these young people be addressed by making alternative forms of recreation available

Pe-Pua (1996) concludes that the key to providing for the needs of ethnic minority street-frequenting young people are education and employment opportunities. Changes to existing services would be a step in the right direction, and assist in developing further these opportunities.

### iii.    *Recommendations Arising from the Present Study*

The key issues arising from this study pertain to the nature of inter-ethnic relations involving ethnic minority groups and Anglo Australian young people.

Following from the perceptions of the young people themselves, and the findings of this and other reports, the following recommendations appear warranted:

- It is essential that young people in general be provided with *specific education in cross-cultural issues* in order that the backgrounds, cultures and patterns of life pertaining to specific ethnic groups be better understood by all concerned

- Attention must also be directed at the provision of *anti-racist education*, so that issues of discrimination, prejudice and unequal power relations be analysed and discussed in an enlightened, informative and empathetic manner

- Following the example of the City of Adelaide (see White, 1998: 47), there should be developed at the local, regional and state levels a series of *youth reconciliation projects*, that will promote the diversity of cultures among young people, aim to reduce violence between them, and give young people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds the practical opportunity to get to know each other at a personal and group level

- The media need to be strongly encouraged to review *programme and reporting content*, with a view to providing greater information and more rounded accounts of specific ethnic minority groups, and so that the use of gratuitous images and descriptions based upon stereotypes  be monitored and actively discouraged

- Governments at all levels should adopt pro-active campaigns which convey in a positive and constructive manner the *realities and strengths of cultural diversity* and which show how, collectively, the fabric of Australian society is constituted through and by the contribution of many cultures, religions, nationalities, languages and value systems, rather than being based solely upon a monoculture linked to British inheritance.

If we, as a society, are to tackle the issues surrounding 'youth gangs', then, as a society, we must also recognise our responsibilities in creating the conditions which generate the perceptions of, fear of, and negative responses to such phenomena.

In the case of Anglo Australian young people, the challenge is to engage them in dialogue about the constitution and composition of Australian society, and to foster a 'multicultural' view of what it is to be Australian. Racism is about relationships, social assumptions, personal and institutional actions, and stereotypes. Conciliation is about diminishing the distance between 'them' and 'us'. It is about finding ways to forge new relationships – based upon mutual respect, personal dignity, and social solidarity.

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