

**INVESTIGATING THE INCIDENTS OF CRIMINAL AND ANTI-SOCIAL  
BEHAVIOUR BY YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE STRAND**

**DR GLENN DAWES**  
**SCHOOL ANTHROPOLOGY ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIOLOGY**  
**JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY**

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# **INVESTIGATING THE INCIDENCE OF CRIMINAL AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR BY YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE STRAND IN TOWNSVILLE**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Townsville Strand was redeveloped in 1999 and has attracted significant local, national and international praise for its aesthetic appeal and numerous recreational facilities. The popularity of the Strand and its close proximity to a number of hotels and restaurants has also attracted individuals who have engaged in forms of criminal and anti-social behaviours. In particular young people have been identified as the perpetrators of anti-social or criminal behaviour such as driving modified cars and congregating along the Strand as well as skateboarding along the promenade and participating in acts of vandalism such as the production of illegal graffiti.

The perception that young people were the perpetrators of a significant amount of crime on the Strand was accentuated by a concerted media campaign that resulted in calls for police and security personnel to enforce existing laws such as the move on law as well as the recent introduction of the Police Powers and Responsibilities Amendment Bill that allows police to confiscate the cars of people who consistently commit infringements relating to the Traffic Act.

This qualitative research gained the perceptions of young people who were identified as the perpetrators of anti-social or criminal behaviours on the Strand. The researchers interviewed young people who drove modified cars, belonged to the skateboarding subculture and who had been involved in the production of graffiti.

The outcomes of this research identify a number of key issues which challenge popular and often inaccurate public perceptions linking youth to anti-social or criminal behaviour. First the majority of youth who utilise the Strand perceive that they are unfairly labelled as engaging in deviant behaviour because of their age, that they are easily identifiable by virtue of their alliance to specific subcultures and they congregate in public spaces. Second, there is a shared perception that a minority of youth engage in anti-social behaviour resulting in a concerted campaign to discourage youth from using the Strand. Third, young people have responded by resolving to resist attempts to marginalise their presence on the Strand which highlights the contested nature of public spaces by

various stakeholders and questions the effectiveness of increased forms of policing and security aimed at regulating young people.

The study highlights the need for alternative strategies to the perceived problem of youth and forms of anti-social or criminal behaviour on the Strand. The suggested strategies include adopting a range of communication strategies between various stakeholders who use the Strand, that a process is established for both formal and informal means for including young people in decision making, the development of a protocol that includes clear guidelines for the codes of conduct for young people (as well as other individuals who use the Strand), that the Townsville City Council employs youth advocates on the Strand and the provision of a public education programme as to why young people congregate in public spaces.

Other recommendations include an increase in media coverage that reports on the positive aspects of youth culture, an increase in flexible facilities that are accessible to all young people, the provision of more opportunities for young people to display aerosol art on the Strand and that the current legal art programme be expanded to include greater numbers of youth. Finally it is recommended that an evaluation is conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of the proposed strategies to ascertain if there is a reduction of anti-social or criminal behaviour on the Strand and that further research be conducted to focus on other marginalised cohorts of youth such as Indigenous and homeless young people.

## **THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH**

*The Strand, where Townsville meets the Sea*, is a 2.2 kilometre inner city beachfront which, since its redevelopment during 1999, has become a nucleus of recreational and social activities for the community of Townsville and visitors to the region. The Strand is described as "a wide boulevard by the sea with a tremendous heritage and history. It is a landscaped delight where 16,000 trees have been planted and it's even a showcase for public art...It's a great place for swimming and water sports and boasts the latest in youth recreation facilities and children's playgrounds" (Townsville City Council, 2000).

Accordingly, the Strand has attracted significant praise for its aesthetic appeal and numerous recreational facilities. As a result increasing numbers of local residents and tourists frequent this site to participate in activities such as walking, running skateboarding or more sedentary activities such as meeting with friends in a pleasant environment.

In a survey on the uses of the Strand (Townsville City Council Report, 2000:3) it was estimated that in that year 47 631 people moved through the Strand, which was a 17% increase on the 2001 count. This not only indicated that the Strand maintained its high level of usage but also achieved a significant increase in usage on the 2001 count.

However the report stressed that the total number of people visiting the Strand was extremely difficult to estimate with a high degree of accuracy. Many activities involved traversing parts and often the length of the Strand. For example, walking, jogging, scooting, cycling and in-line skating are examples of these types of activities. Many of these activities are very popular, especially walking, where the number of

people participating in this activity is very high. It is therefore possible that the same person could be counted at each of the selected sites as they moved along the Strand

Additionally the survey observed that the Strand has added to Townsville's 'social capital', meaning the processes between people, which establish networks, social trust and facilitates cooperation for the mutual benefit of all citizens. Over 69% of respondents said the Strand had added value to Townsville by being good for family get togethers; good for meeting friends and socialising; a good place to bring visitors; great for families and children and provides enjoyment without a cost.

In terms of the kinds of activities that people undertake on the Strand the survey revealed a wide range of activities by individuals across variables such as age, race, gender and socio-economic status. The table below indicates that people visit the Strand for a range of activities:

**Table 1. Main Reasons for Visiting Townsville's Strand**

<b>Reason for visit</b>	<b>Number of responses (No.)</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (%)</b>
Relaxing	114	57
Children's activities	105	52
Picnic/BBQ	98	49
Visiting the Water Park	86	43
Walking	79	39
Meeting friends/socialising	74	37
Swimming	66	33
Visiting eating places	58	29
Sightseeing	49	24
Special events	37	18
Push bike riding	31	15
Riding scooters	21	10
Fishing	20	10

Exercise	18	9
Walking with pram	16	8
Skating/rollerblading	15	7
Walking the dog	14	7
Work related	12	6
Sporting activities	12	6
Skateboarding	7	3
Jogging	5	2
Other	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>na</b>

Please note that more than one response may have been given.

The combination of variables such as the high numbers of users on the Strand, the diversity of activities and its close proximity to a number of hotels and restaurants has also resulted in forms of criminal and anti-social behaviour at various locations along the promenade. The dominant forms of anti-social or criminal behaviour relate to property damage and vandalism, sexual assault and indecent acts, assault, offences against good order/disturbance and a variety of car-related offences such as undue noise, speeding and car defects.

While it is difficult to ascertain the age of the perpetrators of some of these kinds of offences several forms of anti-social and criminal behaviour appear to be committed predominantly by young people (13-25 years of age). For example during 2001 and 2002 the local media presented a number of stories highlighting the concerns voiced by local residents and community groups about young people who park their cars, congregate on the Strand, play music loudly and participate in drag racing along the promenade during the evenings or during the early hours of the morning.

This problem resulted in a flurry of newspaper reports that specifically targeted young people who drove modified cars with headlines such as “Seize Their Cars”

(Townsville Bulletin, August 6, 2001), “Strand Hoons Flaunt Tickets” (August, 14, 2001) and “Hoon Showdown May Prompt Truce With City” (August 16, 2001). The resultant reportage labelled young people who drove modified cars and who congregated on the Strand as “hoons”.

In addition the incidence of graffiti and the use of the Strand promenade by Skateboarders and Rollerbladers have been identified as the other two major areas of public concern with regards to young people’s use of this popular public space.

### **THE RESEARCH FOCUS**

Despite the extent of media coverage and public concern about the problem of young people and their presence in public spaces on the Strand there have been no attempts to provide alternative explanations as to why youth congregate in this area and participate in forms of behaviour which are labelled as criminal or anti-social.

This research attempted to strike some balance into the arguments about youth, their presence in public spaces and the types of activities in which they engage while frequenting the Strand domain. Accordingly this project presented the perceptions of young people who “hang out” at the Strand in order to provide increased understandings of this culture with the view of producing recommendations to inform the Townsville City Council’s proposed strand protocol. The major aims and parameters of the project are:

1. To gain the perceptions of young people (17-26) in terms of their motivations for frequenting this location on the Strand.
  
2. To gain a profile of the cohort in terms of factors such as age, gender, socio-economic background, educational status.

3. To gain an understanding of the culture of this cohort with a focus on the types of criminal or anti-social activities in which they participate and their relationships with the police and other forms of surveillance on the strand area.

The expected outcomes and benefits of this project are:

- a. To provide an account, grounded in qualitative data of young people who frequent the Strand area in order understand the culture and activities of this group outside of the images portrayed in the local media.
- b. To inform stakeholders about possible alternative activities or sites which could form the basis for negotiation with the young people within this cohort.
- c. To assist the Townsville City Council in its formulation of the Strand protocol.
- d. To assist the Townsville City Council to develop alternative strategies for negotiating with young people about their inclusion on the Strand.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this project was predominantly qualitative in nature resulting in a critical ethnographic account of the culture of young people who frequent the Strand.

In the initial stages of the project the researchers spent considerable time observing groups of young people certain the times they meet and locations where they congregate such as the area referred to as the “D”, the Rockpool and the Waterpark. During this phase, time was spent developing rapport with the principal research subjects who acted as gatekeepers in identifying the members of the various subcultural formations.

The respondents who displayed an interest in the project were informed about the aims of the research, how confidentiality would be maintained and how the data would be used. The data was then collected by conducting semi-structured interviews and several focus groups with the subjects. Interviews ranged from 40- 80 minutes with a total of forty young people who self-identified as being frequent users of the Strand. A sample of the types of questions included:

Tell me about the reasons why you frequent the strand area.

How many times per week do you congregate here?

What types of activities do you participate in while you are here?

Are you aware of how other community members perceive your group?

What would you like the council to do in terms of providing you with other kinds of activities on the strand?

The interview data was transcribed in order to identify dominant themes and perspectives. Transcripts from the interviews were analysed to identify major themes and patterns. The final phase of the research process consisted of writing an ethnographic narrative that described the culture while directly addressing the aims of the project.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW : PUBLIC SPACES YOUNG PEOPLE AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

In the first section of this report it was argued that the Strand is a popular public space which represents the interests of a large cross-section of Townsville's community. In order to gain insights as to why young people are involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour it is therefore important that the Strand is perceived as a public space which is contested by various interest groups within the community. This section will initially discuss the concepts of private and public spaces before reviewing some of the major research literature which focuses on young people's presence in public spaces.

The term public space has had many interpretations applied to it. Previously, it merely referred to an area that was council owned (Crane & Dee, 2001). The term "public" means; "of or concerning the community as a whole, not private" (Gilmore, 1999:443). This concept of space, which conjures images of a closely networked neighbourhood, has become central to the public space debate. Crane and Dee (2001)

argue that the concept of public space has been displaced by a broader concept - that of 'community' space. This displacement has occurred as a result of the relocation of many of the goods and services that were traditionally spread throughout towns but are now contained in one enclosed place. Shopping centres have, in fact, become a defacto public space, fulfilling the role previously held by the city centre while offering an open public space in which to congregate and socialise while doing the weekly shopping. With this in mind, it is possible to distinguish between community space, which is consistent with privately owned, enclosed spaces like shopping complexes; and public space, which includes open venues like parks and Malls (Crane & Dee, 2001).

The idea of centralised complexes allows individuals to do the bulk of their shopping in one location often near their place of residence. These complexes are often privately owned yet are open to the public. It is for this reason that Crane and Dee (2001:11) have offered a new definition of public space as that of a community space, whereby a space; "regardless of ownership regime allows mass public access". By this definition, any space that allows mass public access is considered to be a community space. For example, shopping centres, parks, streets, beaches and Malls are all spaces owned either publicly or privately. It is argued here that a venue that is owned privately and allows mass public access is considered as a community space, while all open outdoor venues are public spaces.

In contrast the privately owned, community utilised facilities, open public spaces are different. An open public space, like a park, a Mall, or a beach esplanade, is held in trust by the local government or council. While it is also utilised by the community, it is a 'public' space, where the rules relating to who can use it and how, are more ambiguous. The form and meaning of public space is fluid and changeable, because the spaces are not only physically constructed but are also socially constructed (Crane

& Dee, 2001). As social attitudes change, so too do the concepts and uses of public space. For example, the street was once a prominent space used for recreation by working-class youth (White, 2001). Over time however, what was once a multi-functional space has been redeveloped to curb recreational use. The disappearance of footpaths and the narrowing of streets has helped to prevent the use of street space for socialising or recreation (O'Neil, 2002). The design of small public parks, especially in new housing estates, has determined how public spaces can be utilised. Parks are, therefore, considered the correct and designated environment in which to enjoy leisure activities compared to street scapes.

The relationships between youth and public spaces have been articulated in recent literature as symbolizing space as a contested domain (Crane & Dee, 2001). The rationale for this observation stems from the exclusion of young people from certain public spaces such as Central Business Districts and other designated "adult" areas. While there are some options available to young people within these areas such as amusement arcades and cinemas, many youth are restricted due to the costs of accessing these forms of entertainment.

The interactions between youth and their presence in public spaces first gained academic attention in England in the 1960's and 1970's by scholars from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (CCCS). This body of literature focused on all male "spectacular" street centred subcultures such as Bikers, Mods, and Skinheads (Cohen, 1973, Hall & Jefferson, 1976, Hebdige, 1979). More recent qualitative research has examined the relationships between young people, the street and their interactions with institutions such as schools and the family in order to gain insights into how young people forge their identities (Dawes, 1999).

For many youth “hanging out” in public spaces is a way of meeting friends in order to catch up with news or to make plans for social occasions. In his study of working class youth in Britain Corrigan (1979) stated that by “doing nothing” young people are taking the opportunity to communicate with friends. Unlike older people, many youth often do not have access to clubs or private residences and perceive the street as a place where they can exert some control over their lives outside of the restrictions placed on them by their families or schools. White (1993) observed that youth congregate in malls or outside shops as a response to a lack of power in other spheres so they can; “take over as their own by the forceful presence of their numbers, their looks, their music, their spray-can graffiti and sometimes their petty crime and violence” (p. 142). Forrester (1993) observes that the development of such street cultures serves to win space by marking out physical territory and allowing young people to develop some form of autonomy.

On a more global context it has been theorised that the high visibility of youth in public spaces is the result of increasing numbers of young people becoming disaffected with education and finding it difficult to find full time employment (Hil, 1998). As a result there is a growing trend to “purify” (White, 1993) public spaces through the deployment of increased surveillance techniques such as video cameras, security staff and an evolvment of increased police powers such as “move on” and “stop and search” laws.

However it must be stressed that interactions between young people and various forms of authority may differ depending on situational variables such as appearance, activities, attitudes and behaviours of youth. For example homeless or male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are more likely to draw attention from police than young people from higher socio-economic backgrounds. For as Norris and Armstrong (1999:154) observe; “The gaze of the cameras does not fall

equally on all users of the street but on those who are stereotypically predefined as potentially deviant, or through appearances and demeanour singled out by operators and unrespectable’.

Relatedly, specific groups of youth use public spaces for quite different reasons. The use of the street by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth for example, is often a result of these young people having no space of their own. White (1993) posits that this situation can be attributable to the historic legacy of dispossession as a result of colonisation. The use of young people’s uses of public spaces also needs to be considered with relation to the gender of participants. In a study of young females and public space in Townsville Dyer (2002:3) observed that:

The invisibility of females in this type of research literature has been reflected in a large proportion of the research on youth activities up to the present. Not only has the academic literature on young people and public space been concentrated on males, government and local council initiatives mainly focused narrowly on male centred needs and viewpoints.

Previously, any structures or venues that were built to offer young people a place to congregate were male oriented. Skateparks, basketball courts and video arcades were traditionally activities dominated by young males. By comparison, there were few venues designed for female participation. Other possible reasons for the lack of research on female participation in public spaces could include the previous dominance of male researchers, the relatively low visibility of females in more ‘spectacular’ (Cohen, 1973) sub-cultural groups, and the relative absence of groups of females in the public domain. Previous literature on females has focused instead, on their participation in crime (Bessant, 1994; Marks, 1998; Baines, 1997: and Adler, 1998), or the regulation of their sexual activities (Brumberg, 2002). There appears to be little work of significance related to women and public space crimes like graffiti or vandalism. It is therefore not surprising to find even less research on young females

and their leisure activities in open public spaces. What little research has been conducted on young females presence in public spaces the majority of research has focused on their socialisation activities in the bedroom (McRobbie, 1993).

The presence of young people in public spaces has attracted considerable media attention which has led to the production of moral panics (Cohen, 1973) within society. However it was Hall's (1978) subsequent work *Policing the Crisis* that was significant in expanding Cohen's analysis by linking moral panics to broader social issues such as the lack of employment opportunities for young people. Hall's analysis placed moral panics in a more general perspective rather than concentrating on specific panics created by subcultures such as Mods or Bikers as in Cohen's initial use of the term. The content of Hall's analysis focused on how the term "mugging" emerged in England in a media report about the fatal stabbing of an elderly widower by three young males in 1972. Hall argued that the importation of the term from the United States replaced the commonly used term of "street robbery" that had the effect of connoting that law and order in the UK mirrored the levels of violence in the urban areas of the USA. Hall posited that; "mugging does not simply imply the crime but a whole series of images about the kind of society we are living in, imported from America but applied to the British context" (p. 28).

The media was instrumental in concluding that mugging had reached epidemic proportions producing heightened levels of public alarm and calls by politicians and regulatory agencies to increase both the levels of policing and sanctions for offenders. The strength of the media reportage in heightening public concerns about the "youth problem" was perceived as a societal reaction to the permissiveness of the counter - culture of the 1960's as argued by Hall:

The factor which seems of greatest importance in shaping the “judicial attitude” in this period is anxiety about growing social permissiveness...would in the end precipitate a weakening in the authority of the Law itself (p.34).

The moral panic focusing on the mugging incident also emphasised how specific groups of youth such as black males are more often portrayed as folk devils compared to other cohorts of young people. This leads to the construction of a racialised discourse whereby links are drawn between a perceived “problem” and those racial groups who are perceived as responsible for its occurrence. References to racial categories such as “coloured” or “black” signifies a supposed association with certain types of behaviour. In a study of youth and crime in one city in Australia, Hil and Dawes (2000) argued that Indigenous youth are often stereotyped as the instigators of criminal or anti-social behaviour:

The racialised sub-text for explanations of a crime problem may be linked to particular understandings or ways of knowing how “they” contrast to “us”. For instance the category of “black youth” may resonate with particular racialised images and representations of Aboriginality as a problem category.... Thus Indigenous youth are homogenised as a sub-population of a wider group that is regarded as inherently criminogenic or prone to certain antisocial forms of behaviour (p.321).

Brown (1998) summarises that current concerns about young people have evolved from specific issues to a totalising moral panic that has expanded to include **all** youth including younger age groups. Brown argues that the “demonization” of young people can be linked to the relative affluence of Western society and the emergence of the youth consumer market. For example the medias coverage of Raves and the use of the drug ecstasy have heightened public awareness and concerns to the extent where there have been calls for bans of such events. By the start of the 1990’s the

tabloid press started a campaign to generate negative images of Raves which led to police raids and harassment resulting in the criminalisation of raves. The increased publicity amid reports about the effects of ecstasy resulted in raves being labelled as a deviant activity. In the summer of 1990, British MP Graham Blight introduced the Entertainment (Increased Penalties Bill) into parliament that resulted in the banning of Raves. The organisers of Raves responded by staging these events in alternative sites and revealing the location of the Rave just hours before the event to deter law enforcement surveillance.

However social analysts have observed that youthful consumerism is interpreted as “mindless hedonism... portrayed as the new culture of a lost youth” (Brown, 1998:47). The image of a decentred youth culture lacking a central narrative or identity has been widely portrayed in a plethora of movies, music lyrics and novels. Douglas Couplands (1993) novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* exemplified the mood and values of young people described later by the media as Generation X or Slacker Culture. In addition Quentin Tarrantino’s (1994) movie *Pulp Fiction* characterised a generation of youth who had been bought up on a diet of media images and were literate in this genre on their own terms. In an analysis of the movie Hopkins (1997:46) states; “ These young people have spent countless hours absorbing the TV view of the world where irrelevant and ephemeral images combine and co-exist in a loose chaotic mix. These images may be owned-appropriated, accommodated or overturned – as a means of self-definition.” Within *Pulp Fiction* discourse the social self may be consist of a transitory combination of media consumption choices. For example, one of movies central characters, the vampish Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman), introduces her personal philosophy by stating; “ Somewhere you have to make a choice. And that choice tells me who you are ... first question, Brady Bunch or the Partridge Family?.. Are you a Bewitched man or a Jeannie man?” (Tarantino, 1994: 46-47).

Images of a “lost generation” of youth have resulted in calls by the media, social agencies and politicians of various political stripe to call for increased forms of regulation and control to “guide” young people. As a result a host of agencies such as juvenile courts, juvenile police, psychologists, teachers and youth advocates now exist in order to ensure that the fabric of society is not torn asunder by the perceived threat of unruly groups of young “folk devils”. This effect according to Brown (1998) has resulted in the shift of reportage on discrete panics about specific groups of youth to what she terms a “total panic” (p.51) encompassing all young people and children. However there are numerous examples of specific groups of youth who become the subjects of intense media and societal scrutiny due to the perception that they pose a threat to the safety of other citizens especially when they congregate in public spaces. One recent example comprises of the escalation of public concern about young people who drive modified cars, participate in skateboarding or the production of illegal graffiti. What follows is an analysis of how young people perceive the reported “problem” about their presence on the Townsville Strand.

## **THE RESEARCH NARRATIVE**

The following section consists of the qualitative data for this research. The focus on the data was to present young people's perceptions about their membership in three identifiable youth subcultures who frequent the Strand on a regular basis. The perceptions of youth who belong to the modified car culture, skateboarders and graffiti artists are presented in the following narrative.

### **YOUNG PEOPLE AND MODIFIED CAR CULTURES**

Analysis of the interview data reveals a number of themes that provide insights into the subculture of youth who congregate on the Strand. Initially background factors such as the socio-economic and educational experiences of the subjects are examined in conjunction with factors or influences that led to their involvement with what has commonly become known as the "culture of the car". Following this other factors such as peer influence, the reasons for the desire to congregate in public spaces such as the strand and how young people interact and respond to authority figures such as the police are explored.

#### **Perceptions and Representations of "Hoons"**

Members of the research cohort agreed that media representations portraying them as "hoons" were inaccurate and served to create an impression that all young people who visited the Strand were involved in forms of deviant or anti-social behaviour. In order to gain an understanding of what constitutes a "hoon" the respondents were asked to contribute their perceptions of "hoon" behaviour:

A hoon is a fella who try to get attention form other people by pulling burnouts, creating undue noise, they turn up the stereos flat chat so they have to stick their heads out the windows because they can't listen to it. They put neons in front or under their car to make them glow, which is illegal when the cars in motion.

However other subjects were quick to point out that the "hoon" label was equally applied to all people who were under 25 years of age; "virtually anyone who comes driving down here they reckon is a hoon, Blokes chicks young people the lot. A hoon is anyone who comes down to the beach with a car."

The youth who were interviewed stated that a minority of people practised illegal driving behaviours such as drag racing, doing burnouts or playing their car stereos loudly along the promenade. By comparison, the prime motivation for frequenting the Strand for the majority of young people was to display their cars to other people in the precinct:

The papers like to make out that all of us drive around here at stupid hours of the morning with our stereos turned up full bore which is stupid because there are people down here who are trying to sleep. There are people who are doing skids down here with their stereos turned up and that, But the majority of people are just pokin' along showing their cars off which I think is ok.

The general perception among those interviewed was that the media not only portrayed young people in a negative light but also presented reports that were inaccurate and/or exaggerated. For example a report in the Townsville Bulletin (August 14, 2001) "Strand Hoons Flaunt Tickets" was cited as relating to only a single incident where one owner displayed an infringement notice for excessive noise on his car window. This mis-perception was put into a different context by one youth who stated:

In the paper a few months ago one councillor says one fella came by and stuck a fine notice onto his back windscreen. But he got it wrong it was not actually happening down the strand, that was at the auto spectacular and this guy had this hugh stereo and they weren't all his fines he just put them in the back window. Then the councillor came out and said we were all proud of it like a badge of honour. You know \$240 is not actually a good badge of honour.

Relatedly, there was a feeling of frustration about not only being labelled as potential troublemakers by authority figures and the media but also having limited opportunities to communicate and respond to the images portrayed in the media:

I read it in the papers and I'm not a hoon they don't know us from a bar of soap. They've never come down to talk to us, the council the police or the newspapers to find out who we are and they label us as dole bludgers but I can't be cause I just got a job. I tried writing to the bulletin and asked them if you want to hear our point of view and see what we've got to say, blab on about us but give us a fair go. But we haven't heard nothing so far, they haven't published it. They just don't want to look bad if you ask me by letting us have our say.

To sum up, the youth who were interviewed observed that popular presentations of "hoons" in the local media are inaccurate which result in the labelling of all young people who frequent the Strand as participating in forms of anti-social behaviour. It was however acknowledged that a minority of people do participate in illegal forms of car-related behaviours. Finally there was general agreement that young people would like the opportunity to respond to complaints about their behaviour on the Strand.

### ***Social and Cultural Backgrounds of Youth***

In gaining insights about young people who frequent the Strand background data was collected to construct a profile of the cohort in terms of their social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The majority of youth interviewed came from lower middle-class Anglo-Saxon backgrounds and had lived in Townsville for more than ten years. Most of the male youth had attended state primary and secondary schools with over 70% stating they had completed year 12. Over 40% observed however that they had

found some difficulty obtaining employment after leaving school with one youth stating that he had relied on part-time employment for the last 4 years:

It's hard to find decent work in Townsville. I've just scraped through over the last year or so on part-time jobs working in bars and cleaning.

All of the young people who owned cars however were employed on a full time basis either in trades such as motor mechanics or professional painting. Obtaining a fixed and continuous wage was seen as a pre-requisite for maintaining a vehicle that was worthy of the status of a "dream car":

All my spare money goes on my car. I'm saving up to buy a stereo-system and to replace four new tyres. If I didn't work there's no way I'd be able to afford to keep running my car.

### ***The Cult of the Car***

While the cohort of youth who hang around the Strand are heterogeneous in terms of age and educational status they all share a common interest in cars. It is apparent in this study that the cult of the car is a powerful signifier in terms of identity formation and status with peers who congregate on the Strand. The link between the male preoccupation with cars is apparent in the sociological literature which examines public spaces, masculinity and identity formation (Dawes, 2002, Forrester, 1993, Reser, 1980), In almost all cases (89%) the respondents expressed an interest in cars from an early age. For many of the youth interviewed it would appear that their passion for cars stemmed from an initial practical experience with older brothers or fathers. One youth recalled how he was involved with helping his father restore older cars:

My father started me off. I've always loved old Holdens cars, I've got a 63 H at the moment. I'm always spending money on it. Try to get the car back to its original standard looking smick. Through my dad as well he had a 253 holden panel van. My uncle has got a big 440 I loved cars all my life. I always had souped up cars because my dad and his friends were always involved. My uncle is a mechanic; he restored Chevies – just loved cars. I helped him put his Chevy together, a '67 model.

In addition the car has more practical applications in terms of providing youth with a form of transport thus allowing them to obtain a degree of autonomy to meet friends at venues outside of the constraints of work and family. For example, a large number of the youth on a typical Thursday evening would meet at either Stockland Plaza or McDonalds and then follow each other to the Strand later in the evening. The focus of this kind of activity means that the car is an integral component to young people's status within the peer group. This is evident in the establishment of several identifiable car clubs that use the Strand as a place where young people can publicly display their cars in front of other enthusiasts:

There's a big group called Focus which is little modified four cylinders. I was one of the starting members of it and when I got a commodore I pulled myself out of it. They got people from Ayr and contacts in Sydney. You can see them because they have this big notice across their windscreen that says focus. A lot of them are little late model cars or four cylinder buzz boxes.

In addition, parading a car on the Strand was a conduit to attracting young females for possible sexual conquests. However it was observed that often young females were more likely to be attracted to the car than to the owner:

If a guy's single and they've fixed up a car and want to show off and pick up some girls. But there not the types of girls you want. They're what you call car dogs or tyre biters or rubber munchers or gunnies. These girls are just chasing guys for their cars. they don't want to get to know

the type of person you are they just want to show off to their friends and say look at me I'm driving out in this flash car ...

### *Young People and Contested Public Spaces*

While cars are important symbols of masculine identity, the Strand is the location which is most suitable location for publicly displaying “dream machines” to a wide range of other car enthusiasts. However there were a range of other factors cited as to why large numbers of youth are attracted to the Strand. First, the Strand was perceived as being a pleasant place to visit due to its close proximity to the beach and its central location. This is much in keeping with other studies that have been conducted on Australian surfing subcultures in the late 1950's and 1960's (Henderson, 1994) which examines our connection to the beach and the surf. As one young male observed:

They did a good job on the strand with the beautification of the area. People go there because it's a central area and it's a really nice place the beach and that. Not like heading out to Pallaranda which is outside town. It's just a central place to meet. A good atmosphere Thursday Friday and Saturday nights.

Additionally the Strand was seen as a place where young people could just “hang out” (Cohen, 1970) and do nothing due to the perception that there was little to do in Townsville if you were young. When asked about other forms of entertainment the young people in this study argued that they could not afford to go to nightclubs and that other forms of recreation involved additional expense. By comparison, congregating on the Strand was an inexpensive option despite the observation that there were few free facilities on the Strand for young people in this age bracket:

The Strand is really cool, you get a cool breeze and it's a really nice place to hang out and meet friends down here. Try and stay out of trouble but it's pretty hard. I think the council should put in more things to do down here like a skate bowl or hand ball courts where younger people could play sports down here...

In addition, there is an historical dimension which tells us that that before its redevelopment, the Strand has traditionally been the place where young people have gathered. A number of the interviewees pointed out that the Strand was the location where young Townsville men traditionally made the rites-of-passage from adolescence to adulthood. For example several of the young people justified their presence on the Strand because their parents had participated in similar activities during their youth. The generational link was cited as being a powerful argument for having a stake and a sense of ownership in the Strand as a public space:

Cops are trying to push us off the strand but they won't. My father he's fifty - one and he used to come down here even when he was a kid. He used to pull these burnouts and that means young people have been coming down here for 30 years or more, so they're not going to get rid of us. One cop who pulled me over one night told me that he used to drag race down here when he was young so what right have they got to tell us not to be here?

It is undeniable that the Strand has become a contested space (White, 1990) due to the volume and range of people who use the precinct for multiple purposes as well as the local residents who have a claim in protecting their privacy. Hence, there has been an increase in the policing and surveillance of the area in order to reduce the incidence of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. The young people surveyed in this study state that they have become the subjects of the most intense forms of policing and surveillance on the Strand compared to any other identifiable group. However, there is acknowledgement that some youth are the perpetrators of driving offences consume alcohol and play music well above acceptable noise levels:

There are some young blokes who do burnouts and wheelies and stuff and they should be booked by the cops. I know some of the locals get shitty about the music near Mitchell Street but it isn't everyone. Most of us don't do anything we just want to go down there and meet or mates, play football and have something to eat.

However there was a perception from the cohort that a campaign existed designed to discourage young people from congregating on the Strand despite not being involved in anti-social forms of behaviour. Each of the youth were asked to identify specific incidents that supported their claims about the increased use of surveillance measures:

They put the medium strip here to slow people down, Cops down here every night. Cameras are here, everyone knows where they are. There's an old fella up there on the third story who has a video camera set up filming us. He's come down here told us to piss off and rung the cops.

Of all of the forms of regulation the most contentious issue among the youth was the issue of how the Strand was policed. There was a marked difference in attitude between the interactions with the private security guards, who patrolled the Strand on bicycles or on foot to enforce local by-laws, compared to the police who patrolled the Strand promenade:

The worst things are the cops and security. But the security lot don't harass you if you're not doing anything wrong. But they'll hit down on the alcohol if they find it they'll tip it out. But they'll have a chat and they've got a job to do. They don't abuse their power. Some of the younger ones might clash with them cause they drink alcohol. They're absolutely off their face sayin' I ain't got no drinks, but security know how to handle them without having an argument.

Interactions between the police and youth were not as productive due to a perceived lack of communication between both groups. For example, one youth recalled attempting to ask for clarification about a traffic infringement. He stated; " We can't talk to cops. They say we're right and that's it. They say if you've got a problem with us talk to someone else. There's a lot of stereotyping about us at the moment." In

addition there was a perception that younger drivers were more prone to attracting police attention than their older counterparts:

One night we saw 8 older people doin' illegal u-turns and the cops were sitting there and let them get away with it. One young guy did the same thing and he got fined. It's just that they're after young people. Like another time if you had a blown light bulb, the cops could just say look mate you need to change it or take the car straight home, like the older generation. But not if you are young. They get you for a bulb its one point and seventy bucks.

There was also a great deal of concern about a perceived "blacklist" that targeted people who had multiple offences. There were consistent reports about how well known offenders were targeted closely once their cars were visible on the Strand. One youth told of one occasion when he was stopped by the police and endured a twenty-minute examination of his vehicle for purported defects:

They don't give a reason for pulling you over on the strand they just want to find a defect. They just pull you over for a license check and if you get the real arseholes, they tell you to get out the car pop your hood, check the tyres, pop the boot. If you've got a tiny crack in the window it's a defect notice. It doesn't really matter where you are they'll follow you, down Pallaranda, the swimming enclosure.

### ***Youth and the Culture of Resistance***

Increased forms of surveillance and policing have hardened the resolve of young people to maintain a presence on the Strand. In response to being the targets of scrutiny along the Strand area many of the young people have resorted to parking their vehicles in other locations and walking to the beachfront:

We usually park near Mitchell Street cause if we park on the Strand they see our cars straight up and hassle us, but its dark in the back streets and they can't really see them there.

Another response is to travel to other locations on the outskirts of the city to participate in illegal drag meetings and to do burnouts and other car related activities outside of the gaze of authorities. However as one youth commented there is the added danger of young people becoming involved in accidents or more serious injuries due to a driving at high speeds:

We've got a spot where they don't know about, it's out of town with no houses around where we can do burnouts and race. But some of these guys go mad and it's only a matter of time before someone gets killed out there.

Overwhelmingly there is a resolve among all youth to continue to have a presence on the Strand; " It doesn't matter how hard they come down on us, we're not going to be chased out. The Strands for everyone they said, so they are not going to chase us out."

## **SKATEBOARDERS AND PUBLIC SPACES**

The second identifiable subculture of youth that were perceived as perpetrating anti-social behaviours on the Strand was skateboarders. Initially the demographic features of skateboarders will be examined followed by an analysis of the different ways these youth use public spaces compared to non-skaters.

### **Demographics of Skateboarding Subcultures**

During 2001 and 2002 twenty youth were interviewed who had a strong allegiance to the skateboarding subculture. The ages of the skateboarders in this research ranged from 12- 18 years of age. Of those youth who were interviewed fifteen youth were male while only five subjects were female. All of the respondents still lived with their parents and attended local schools in Townsville. Initially the researchers were interested in ascertaining the motivations as to why these young people chose this form of leisure pursuit. For the majority of the male participants skateboarding was perceived as a form of risk-taking behaviour associated with popular media images designed to sell products such as Coca-Cola or specific dress styles as described by Tim an experienced 16 year old skater:

I really enjoy the adrenalin rush of boarding in new places that I haven't tried before. When I was younger I'd collect skateboarding magazines all the time and save up for the kinds of boards that some of the dudes had in the Coke ads. I wanted to be cool and skate all the time, its' the rush that keeps me in here.

While skateboarding is predominantly a male pursuit, there appears to be a growing interest in the sport by females due to the increased publicity such as the coverage of the Extreme Sports Games as well as the desire to learn new skills that are not normally associated with traditional female sports. Wendy had only been

skateboarding for a year after watching her two older brothers at one of Townsville's skate-bowls:

I used to play netball all the time which is pretty much a girl's only sport but I started to get sick of it and gave it up. When I was younger I used to watch my older brothers boarding down at the skate bowl. They asked me to go and watch and when they were having a rest I used to have a little go going up and down the dish. Then I got really sucked in and they taught me these new ways of boarding. Now I'm away and really enjoying the thrills of boarding. It's the best fun!

In addition to the variance in age and gender the greatest marker within the subculture was based on the ability and experience of boarders which was linked to how often individuals skated.

### **WAYS OF USING PUBLIC SPACES**

The skateboarders who were interviewed shared the view that they used public spaces like the Strand in different ways to non-skaters. The primary consideration for using the footpaths along the Strand as opposed to the Skate-bowls was the skill levels of individual skaters. Over ninety percent of the youth stated that they had learnt to skate initially at the Skate-bowls which constitute a defined public space. After learning the skills associated with skating the youths had the confidence and the ability to skate in larger undefined public spaces such as the Strand. The transition from the relative safety of the Skate-bowl to the street spaces however was not as smooth for some of the youth. For example a common problem for a number of youth was that they had difficulty in navigating the flow of human traffic that used the footpaths for the variety of other activities on the Strand. Joel an experienced sixteen year old skateboarder recalled his first foray on the Strand, which resulted in a collision with an elderly man, who was walking his dog:

I came around the corner leading up to the Strand Park and I had to turn sharply to the left because there was a guy on a bike coming the other way.

But when I did that I flipped and ran straight into this old guy who was walking this little Terrier. At first I thought that I killed the dog but I was lucky and I clipped the old man on the ankle and we both fell over each other.

The element of danger and the desire to take risks by skating across unfamiliar surfaces were the primary reasons as to why youth preferred to skate on the streets compared to skatebowls. When asked why he preferred the Strand as a venue for skating Nancy a fifteen-year-old stated that the abundance of publicly accessible places that were not deigned for skating were the greatest attraction for skateboarders:

The Strand is a cool place to skate because it doesn't just have paths its got steps, hills, benches walls and drains that you can use to skate. That way there is always something new to challenge you down there. Plus it's a place where you can meet your friends and skate together without feeling that you might get knocked over by a car.

An additional factor for choosing public spaces to Skateboard is the way that the media normalises the street as *the* place for skilled boarders to skate. The publication and promotion of street skating magazines and advertisements that use images of skateboarders to sell specific kinds of clothing or other products frame the street as the domain of "cool" skaters compared to their less talented counterparts who inhabit the confined spaces of skateparks and skatebowls as observed by Beau a fourteen old boarder during a focus group discussion:

I buy all my skating clothes from the local skateshop in town. I also get the Boards mags which show you some new ways to skate and I take my board out and try to do the same things. You get to meet other boarders down here and you can get tips from the cool skaters who have been doing this for longer than me.

## **POTENTIAL SPACES ON THE STRAND**

Perhaps the greatest attraction for skateboarders on the Strand is its potential for skating on a variety of surfaces that present challenges not available at other sites. It

appears that skateboarders interpret street spaces differently to other people who use the Strand. For example during a focus group discussion a number of the participants stated that surfaces such as picnic tables or the steps that lead down to the beach had uses that went beyond what they were originally designed for, as stated by Allan:

Most people might use this table to eat off for a Sunday bar-b-que... but for boarders the table is a new opportunity to skate on and to try new skills. I guess that's why the council and the security blokes are pissed off about – but the Strand is still a great place to skate on.

The Strand also provides skaters with the potential to find new areas for boarding even when they are not skating. Several of the young people observed that they were constantly searching for new sites or re-discovering old sites when they visited the Strand with their families or friends. Darlene stated that she enjoyed going to the Strand with her dog which also provided her with opportunities to stake out potential sites for skateboarding:

I take my dog for long walks on the Strand on weekends and I'm constantly making little mental notes about cool places to skate. The other day I was down at the rock-pool and I saw two guys skating up this smooth wall. I thought wow I've been down here stacks of times and I never thought of skating that wall. I'll be down here when I get my board though.

## **SKATEBOARDING AS A DEVIANT ACTIVITY**

In the introduction to this report it was stated that the Strand is used for a variety of purposes by a large cross section of the local community. The network of paths that traverse the various sites across the Strand are designed for two lanes of human traffic. However while there is a relative flow of traffic during the early morning or late in the evening the paths become congested at peak times such as weekends or late afternoons. As a result there has been concern about the potential for a serious accident involving skateboarders and other members of the public particularly during

the most popular times of the day. For example there have been numerous complaints from members of the community about boarders who do not stay on the correct sides of the pathways or who dart across the main paths from side alleyways without notice. Syd a retired real estate agent express his concerns about the unpredictability of young skateboarders:

I live on the Strand and I walk down here at five –o’clock every afternoon with my wife. We start at the Rockpool and go down to the Waterpark and then go back. But its like you’ve got to have eyes in the back of your head with these young kids on skateboards zooming up and down the paths along the sides of walls like bloody maniacs. The other day a kid almost wiped me out from behind. I didn’t hear him but he tried to squeeze into a space between me and a woman with a stroller and nearly knocked my legs from under me. He just kept going zig-zagging along the path on two wheels. It’s starting to get out of control down here.

Another criticism levelled at skateboarders came from an employee of the Townsville City Council who expressed concerns about the amount of damage that was done to picnic tables and other surfaces as a result of skating. This had forced the council to install devices designed to make some of the surfaces “skate-proof”:

This has become a problem on the Strand which has cost the council a considerable amount of rate-payers money by installing devices such as skate-plates which have been put into some of the walls to prevent skateboarding activities.

The labelling of skateboarding along the Strand as a deviant activity has produced a number of conflicting responses from members of this subculture. The experienced street skaters state that the majority of complaints should be levelled at the younger less skilful skaters who choose to skate at the most inappropriate times in areas where there are likely to be more people. Joel commented that:

There’s a lot of talk about banning skaters from the Strand or having security give us a harder time but when you look at it most of the complaints about vandalism or wreckless skating should be about young kids who can’t really

skate anyway. We don't have much to do with young kids. Their parents drop them down here while they go for a walk or whatever and these kids fuck up because they can't board properly and do it when there are so many people around. If you've got half a brain you skate late at night when there aren't many people around.

While there is no official code of conduct for skaters who use the Strand the increased security and the presence of surveillance cameras have resulted in a number of youth engaging in forms of self-regulation in order to avoid the possibility of sanctions such as being told to move on by police. In addition to choosing specific times as well as places to skate the more experienced members of this subculture chose to communicate with other individuals about the location of authority figures by the use of mobile phones in order to avoid detection. This form of subcultural solidarity resulted in a collective resistance to the impending threat of marginalising skaters from the Strand to acceptable venues such as skatebowls located in the outlying suburbs of Townsville. Richard a sixteen year old who had five years of street skating experience voiced his opposition to the threat of banning skaters from the Strand:

I heard through some of my mates who skate that the council and the cops are trying to get rid of us from the Strand. But why should we go? A lot of kids don't have anywhere else to skate because the parks are miles away from here. It's really only a small number of younger kids who skate in big groups that give all skaters a bad name. You won't see really skilful boarders getting caught out with this kind of shit.

## **GRAFFITI CULTURE**

The Strand's popularity has also resulted in an increase in vandalism to the area. For the first six months of 2003 the Townsville City Council spent \$ 15 931.00 on vandalistic behaviour. By comparison to other sectors the Strand recorded 14 % of the total amount of vandalism in the city. The most predominant types of vandalism on the Strand consisted of damage to sprinklers and irrigation systems, destruction of bollards, plants, lighting systems, general equipment and graffiti. It was difficult to ascertain the degree of involvement of young people in each type of vandalism due to the comparatively low rates of apprehension. Informal conversations with members of the community who used the Strand on a regular basis revealed that much of the vandalism such as the destruction of sprinklers and irrigation systems appeared to take place late at night and was opportunistic in nature:

I think a lot a people stroll through the park after the pubs have shut on their way home. If they're pissed its likely they'd take a kick at one of the pop up sprinklers because it's there not because they really want to destroy them

However there is consensus that the incidence of graffiti across various sites on the Strand is more likely to be the work of young males due to the links with elements of Hip-Hop Culture and Skateboarding. This became evident during the interviews and focus discussions with some members of the Skateboarding subculture who admitted to knowing individuals who skated and did graffiti. While none of the research subjects stated that they were personally responsible for graffiti on the Strand they

were able to provide insights as to why crews of youth continued to “get up” at various sites despite a Graffiti Action Plan adopted by the council to remove graffiti after identification.

### **Graffiti and Claiming Space**

There is a considerable literature that attempts to explain why young people persist with graffiti despite well publicised attempts by authorities to label this as a deviant activity which attracts a range of sanctions such as fines or imprisonment. The increase in public anxiety about graffiti was evident when Townsville became the first city in Australia to imprison a young graffitiist for a number of offences throughout the city. Despite attempts to impose harsher sanctions forms of graffiti persist on the Strand. In a Vandalism Report (2003) there was evidence of graffiti within the toilet blocks and in particular on park tables and benches. The types of instruments used included marker pens, sharp edged instruments as well as paint from spray cans.

From the interviews and focus group discussions it is evident that young people participate in graffiti for a number of reasons which is at odds with the public view of graffiti as a form of vandalism. A common view of Skateboarders who use the Strand is that young people place their “tags” in public spaces as a way of leaving their marks on the landscape in the same way that Skaters leave tracks on the pathways or “hoons” leave skid marks along the Strand promenade. In this way graffiti can be perceived as young people’s attempts at claiming space and asserting some control over their lives, as observed by Damien:

A lot of my friends just do tags anywhere they can so that people notice them and they get a name. One guy I know just keeps coming back to the Strand to tag because he sees this as a kind of competition with the police or whatever. As quick as they paint over his tag his plan is to get it up again as quick as possible.

Placing tags on public buildings or equipment can be seen as the first stage in graffiti where young people's identities are recorded. Additionally it is relatively easy and quick to administer at any time of the day. Increased forms of surveillance on the Strand such as video cameras, lighting systems and private security guards do not appear to deter the assertive behaviour of graffitiists as observed by Ricardo who regards himself as a talented aerosol artist:

Most of the kids who do tags down here are toys and not serious artists like me. They do this shit because they like the rush of doing something illegal and trying to outsmart the security dudes and the council. It's like a game that keeps going – they don't worry about security guys or cameras because they already know where the cameras can't see or where the security guards are going to be. It's just for the rush and getting your tag up.

The graffiti artists share common views with modified car users and Skateboarders in feeling marginalised in terms of their presence on the Strand. A number of the youth felt there was a push to exclude them from the Strand by the increase in surveillance by the police and security and calls for harsher penalties for illegal graffiti. These sentiments are echoed by Bandaranaike (2000) in an audit of graffiti in the Townsville region:

The emergence of postmodern thinking has provided an important stimulus for reconsidering the role of space in the construction of everyday life. Space becomes a rare commodity for those who cannot afford it. Typically in a built up environment space is the privilege of those who cannot afford to pay for it, and who in turn sets rules to control it. Under these conditions the graffitiists who have no ownership on space pounce on opportunities to encroach on such space causing conflict (p.9).

The Townsville City Council responded to the problem of illegal graffiti by introducing the Graffiti Action Plan (1999) which has two major aims:

- a. To reduce the opportunities for graffiti vandalism to be committed

- b. To alter motivating factors so that young people are diverted from continuing or entering into this type of criminality.

The “zero-tolerance” to graffiti appears to have been successful in minimising this form of vandalism. However the assertiveness of graffitiists means that they pursue other sites that are outside of the panoptic view of authorities. The response of some youth to the regulation of graffiti can be viewed as a form of counter aggression:

I just move to another place to tag like a drain or even the footpath or someone’s letterbox as I’m skating past. The more they try and cover up my tag the more I’m going to get up just to send them a message that I’m not going away that I’m here to stay for as long as I want to be.

The advent of opportunities provided by the council for legal graffiti has been viewed by some youth as constituting a positive step in promoting graffiti as an accepted art form. A number of sites such as walls and the sides of shops and electricity boxes have been brightened by murals painted by young people. The change in landscape has attracted favourable comment from older members of the community who have changed their views towards young people who practise graffiti. Lora a retired teacher who lives a street behind the Strand stated:

I think the young people have added a great deal of colour to some pretty drab surfaces in Townsville. I’m impressed by their skill and their ability to be so creative. The themes about living in the tropics with murals of reef and rainforest life give a great deal of vibrancy to this area.

However there was some discontent from other graffitiists who felt that their peers had “gone soft” or “caved in” by participating in legal graffiti projects that were sponsored by the council. Several other young people by comparison felt marginalised because they had been overlooked for inclusion in the legal forms of graffiti as argued by Thomas:

I know most of the artists who have got work doing legal pieces for the council. I've got nothing against these guys but look at my folio of work and you see I'm a better artist than most of them and they'll probably tell you that. I'm a bit pissed that I didn't get asked at least- probably would have turned them down anyway.

However a large proportion of young people who participated in graffiti were skeptical of the council's attempts to incorporate aerosol art as a socially acceptable practice. For the majority of writers the legal art programme lacked the adrenalin rush associated with the production of illegal graffiti. Justin a sixteen year old skater who had participated in one legal art project stated that he still preferred to participate in illegal graffiti due to the "fame" associated with producing illegal graffiti. Since most writers like Justin share a desire for widespread renown, fame is considered the ultimate goal in graffiti- writing achievement. Fame can be won in a number of ways. One way to win instant fame is when writers have their work immortalised in the local media. Writers spoke about the time spent in scanning local newspapers and news bulletins in the hope of finding a photograph or film footage of one of their pieces. Justin explained his motivation for finding fame and gaining "respect" from his peers:

Other writers look up to you if they see one of your pieces in the paper. While other people see my work as illegal and want to paint over it or whatever other writers get a real buzz when they see photos of their stuff with the police trying to work out who did it. I've had a few visits from the cops askin' me about tagging and shit. But I tell them I don't tag I'm not a toy ... people know me for my pieces and they know I'm king of this place

## **CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

The final section of this report consists of a summary of major outcomes of the research and the resulting challenges for local governments in providing inclusive policies for young people's participation in public spaces such as the Strand.

The major focus of this research was to gain young people's perceptions about the incidence of anti-social and criminal behaviours that occur on the Strand in Townsville. Although there is a wide range of anti-social behaviours on the Strand three distinct areas of foci were identified which pertain specifically to young people: the issue of youth's participation in modified car culture or "hooning", skateboarding and illegal graffiti.

An overview of the demographics of the research subjects involved in each of these activities indicates that the majority of young people perceived as engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviours are male, live with at least one parent, come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, are engaged in formal education or vocational training and fall within the 13- 26 years age.-bracket. These demographics are at odds with some of the criminological research literature that suggests young offenders share characteristics such as disengaging from formal education do not come from a supportive family environment and come from low socio-economic backgrounds.

This research indicates that a major factor as to why youth congregate on the Strand is due to the aesthetic appeal of the area and its central location as a popular meeting place to "hang out" with friends. Other significant factors contributing to the Strands popularity is its close proximity to the beach and shops as well as the varied landscape of the promenade for engaging in skateboarding or the display of modified cars. In

addition the Strand has a tradition in Townsville as being a place where young people have traditionally made their rites-of-passage from adolescence to adult status. For example the presence of older people who still drive modified cars along is testament to the Strand's appeal to cohorts from other generations who admitted to spending time in this area when they were younger.

This project supports previous research that highlights how young people in public spaces are viewed as threats to law in order and therefore require strict surveillance and increased forms of regulation. This research establishes that only a minority of youth who visit the Strand engage in anti-social or criminal behaviour and that the majority of young people are inaccurately labelled as deviant. It can therefore be argued that in this case the magnitude of criminal behaviour is socially constructed and amplified by the media and other specific interest groups who have a stake in ensuring that the presence of young people on the Strand is minimised. The concerted media coverage of the problem of "hoons" created a moral panic in the community with calls for police to "get tough" on the owners of modified cars. The enforcement of the move on powers of police and the introduction of a new law passed by the Queensland Government in 2002 provided authorities with a raft of new powers to confiscate the cars of individuals for drag racing in public spaces.

However the perceptions of the young people gained in this research are at odds with generalised public perceptions that young people require more intense forms of regulation and surveillance when they congregate or utilise public spaces. It was acknowledged that a minority of youth engage in criminal behaviours such as drag racing or graffiti on the Strand. However the majority of youth contest that they are unfairly targeted because of their age, dress styles and their involvement in risk taking activities associated with driving modified cars or riding skateboards. Furthermore

there is consensus among the youth that this form of cultural stereotyping is an attempt by authorities and local residents to discourage youth from using the Strand.

The young people in this research have responded to this situation by resolving to resist attempts to monitor and regulate their behaviour. It is apparent that young people will continue to use the Strand despite the introduction of increased police powers to confiscate the cars of “hoons” or the advent of more security patrols and closed circuit surveillance cameras. What is clear from this study is that coercive measures aimed at regulating and controlling young people in public spaces is a short-term measure which does not attempt to produce increased awareness as to why young people congregate in public spaces like the Strand. Furthermore reactive measures mean an increase in expenditure for resources such as more police patrols and security personnel which may be better utilised in other precincts within the city. The overall effect of current reactive approaches is that young people as one identifiable social cohort are marginalised from decision making processes that affect all individuals who use the Strand.

## **5. OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This outcomes of this research highlights a number of issues that need to be addressed if the perceived problem of young people on the Strand is to be resolved. The following recommendations relate to the major outcomes of this research.

**OUTCOME 1: The Strand is a contested public space that is used for a variety of leisure related purposes by a broad cross section of the local community.**

**RECOMMENDATION :The need to adopt a range of communication strategies between various stakeholders who use the Strand.**

It is recommended that representatives from all of the interested parties have the opportunity to discuss the issues relating to the perceived problem of young people who congregate on the Strand. Interest groups such as representatives of the cohort of young people, local residents, police, security, the city council and members of local youth advocacy groups should be invited to participate in a variety of informal meetings and forums. This realises the possibility of setting up a range of partnerships through shared knowledge and increased understanding between the various interest groups.

**O UTCOME 2: Coercive or punitive measures aimed at regulating young people are inadequate and produce a culture of resistance among young people who resolve to resist attempts to exclude them from public spaces like the Strand.**

**RECOMMENDATION: That a process is established for both formal and informal means for including young people in decision making**

The city council could consider adopting a policy of inclusivity by providing opportunities for representatives from the research cohort to be included on management committees such as the Strand Protocol Committee. This will

ensure youth groups are no longer marginalised and guarantee the engagement and active voices of young people in decision -making processes and promote a sense of ownership of the Strand area. The consultation process should also be informal to allow for continued input from youth from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds at the grassroots level (through forums or surveys).

**OUTCOME 3: Young people require a clear understanding of what constitutes acceptable forms of behaviour when using the Strand.**

**RECOMMENDATION: Development of a protocol that includes clear guidelines for the codes of conduct for young people as well as other individuals who use the Strand.**

The inclusion of young people on management committees should assist in ensuring that they are able to participate in establishing what constitutes acceptable and non-acceptable forms of behaviour on the Strand precinct. The guidelines for forms of behaviour should be clear and unambiguous and should be applied fairly to all people who use the Strand. In addition there should be defined avenues of appeal and a transparent grievance procedure similar to the codes of conduct that apply to other kinds of public spaces.

**OUTCOME 4: Young people often have limited knowledge about their legal rights as well as the existing avenues for accessing information about their concerns.**

**RECOMMENDATION: That the Townsville City Council employs youth advocates on the Strand**

The city council should consider employing young people to act as advocates to represent the diversity of youth who use the Strand area. These people could be located on the Strand and have the capacity to engage youth during the most popular times (such as the evenings). The advocates would have good communication skills

develop a friendly presence on the Strand and assist in making more formal linkages with institutions such as youth services and youth councils.

**OUTCOME 5: Media reportage was responsible for creating an inaccurate perception that all young people on the Strand were the perpetrators of anti-social and criminal behaviour.**

**RECOMMENDATION: Providing a public education programme about why young people congregate in public spaces and the types of leisure activities they pursue. In addition provide media coverage that reports on the positive aspects of youth culture.**

Young people see themselves as part of the community. Hence attempts should be made to promote a public education programme to inform the community that young people have a right to use public spaces and to explain why they congregate in such spaces. This could be achieved by liaising with the local media regarding more positive representations of young people. The city council could also liaise with young people in terms of planning and designing public spaces to ensure it is inclusive and “youth friendly”.

**OUTCOME 6: There are insufficient resources or youth related events for young people on the Strand.**

**RECOMMENDATION: An increase in flexible facilities that are accessible to a wide range of youth**

There was a consistent view from the research subjects that there was insufficient leisure options for young people at the Strand area. Consideration should therefore be given about other options that could be included which would cater for a wide variety of youth. Such options may include additional sporting facilities, activities and events sponsored by local businesses such as the opportunity to display cars and the provision of additional spaces for young people to congregate. In addition the youth who were interviewed recommended that consideration should be given

to providing spaces where burnouts could be performed as well as forms of legal drag racing.

**OUTCOME 7: Young people perceive that graffiti should be viewed as an art form and that they should have the opportunity to display this art in public spaces such as the Strand.**

**RECOMMENDATION: More Opportunities be provided to young people to display aerosol art on the Strand and that the current legal art programme be expanded to include greater numbers of youth.**

The city council's Graffiti Action Plan (1998) provides opportunities for young people to display legal forms of graffiti throughout the city. This has enabled the community to gain an appreciation of graffiti as an art form and assisted some youth to establish a career as professional artists. However there needs to be an expansion of the programme to include more young people who may not have been provided with the opportunity to participate in legal avenues of aerosol art. At the same time it needs to be recognised that illegal forms of graffiti will never be eradicated on the Strand as a minority of youth participate in vandalism for the challenge and adrenalin rush that comes with this kind of activity.

**OUTCOME 8: The strategy of inclusivity for involving youth to reduce the incidence of anti-social and criminal behaviour on the Strand requires evaluation to ascertain the effectiveness of this approach.**

**RECOMMENDATION: An evaluation of new strategies is undertaken to ascertain if there is a reduction of anti-social or criminal behaviour on the Strand.**

If strategies are adopted to promote youth inclusivity and reducing the incidence of criminal or anti-social behaviour in places like the Strand, there is a need for regular evaluation to ascertain if they are achieving the stated goals. Ongoing evaluation provides a benchmark for how the strategy is working and what may need to be done to enhance its success. Some areas that may be considered include the type and degree

of youth participation in the initiative, where accountability for the project finally lies and stating ways in which the original aims (such as reducing forms of anti-social behaviour) can be modified or changed as a result of further research.

**OUTCOME 9: Gaining young people's perceptions is a valuable approach to gaining increased insights into the causes of anti-social or criminal behaviour of young people.**

**RECOMMENDATION: That further research is conducted that focuses on other marginalised cohorts of youth such as Indigenous and homeless young people.**

There is a need for further research into how other cohorts of young people use the Strand in terms of reducing forms of criminal or anti-social behaviour. Obtaining the perceptions of other stakeholders who use the Strand would be the focus of a larger project in the future. A more encompassing study would be required to focus on other diverse groups who also use the Strand such as Indigenous youth, young females and homeless youth.

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