

Geographies of Exclusion

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND USE OF PUBLIC SPACE

This article draws on data from a three-year research study currently being conducted in Australia on young people's experiences of growing up in urban environments. The study is a replication and extension of a project conducted by UNESCO in the early 1970s, reported in the book *Growing Up in Cities*, by Kevin Lynch (1977).

Growing Up in Cities (described in the accompanying boxed inset) was an important project in the early 1970s when global discussions on the state of the environment were being played out in international forums; 25 years later it is just as timely as escalating trends of urbanisation, globalisation and migration are changing the micro-environments of urban communities.

At a time when many societies are (re)constructing young people as 'intruders' and a 'threat' in public spaces, there is a need to determine the issues and the impact of aggressive social interventions and exclusionary practices on young people's experiences of urban life.

This article focuses on four issues that young people in the current *Growing Up in Cities* study have indicated marginalise them and, in extreme cases, exclude them from public spaces. Following a brief introduction to the study organisation, methods and neighbourhood site, the four issues will be discussed and then located within current debates on young people and public space.

Methods and Site

The Australian study, which commenced in February 1997, has accumulated a data set which is both rich and diverse in its composition. The diversity of the data is due to its multi-disciplinary project team which includes a participatory researcher and urban environmentalist, a cultural anthropologist, and an urban planner/landscape architect.

Researchers encouraged the participation of those young people who, through their 'invisibility' and 'silence', are not

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At a time when many societies perceive young people to be 'intruders' and a 'threat' in public spaces, there is a need to understand the impact of exclusionary practices on young people's experiences of urban life. This article looks at the factors young people themselves identify as affecting their use of public space in their local neighbourhood.

often the focus of youth researchers looking intently for exotic manifestations of 'youth' culture. Consequently, a broad spectrum of young people (18 young women and 26 young men) from different cultural groupings, genders and ages were invited to participate in the interviews and workshops (Table 1).

A number of strategies were employed to encourage young people to participate, including: holding information sessions at the local school and in the community; placing fliers and posters in strategic locations; spending time at the youth centre; and spreading the work through participants.

Interviews were held in 1997, with young people being encouraged to nominate a venue for the interview in which they would feel most at ease. Most respondents chose the local secondary school, with a small number preferring a local community youth centre during a school holiday break.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews with young people have been

contextualised using physical data from landuse and aerial maps (current and historical), photogrids, spatial flow charts, photographs and videos, behaviour observation notes and council reports, meeting notes, and demographic data. The physical data provide a longitudinal and horizontal gaze at the social, cultural and geographical landscape and grounds the qualitative data within a historical context.

In addition to the qualitative data obtained from interviews with young people, data from interviews with the 1972 original researchers, and with local youth workers, teachers, community service officers, council workers and parents, helped to expand issues emerging during the study phases.

The site: a shadowy miniature version of a dream house

The site for the study is a 488 hectare housing estate in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Couched between a train yard and a polluted river, and divided by a major road, this once fringe suburb now finds itself juxtaposed between the inner and outer suburbs of Melbourne.

The area has four distinctive streetscapes – residential, industrial, commercial and arterial. The estate was built at the start of Melbourne's 20-year postwar public housing boom¹ when, according to Powell (1993:53), demand often outstripped supply: 'The suburban developments that accompanied changes after the war throughout Australia were not smooth and well-planned exercises, but often hurried and fitful responses to meet overwhelming and urgent needs after years of "making do".'

The consequence of the public housing boom was a number of 'fibro frontiers' which were: 'built by government; of a large scale and uniform appearance; constructed of poor quality, cheap materials; home to relatively high percentages of public renters; comprised of predominantly working class families; adjacent to manufacturing employment; stigmatised' (Winter and Bryson 1998). Powell (1993:72) claims



Picture: Karen Malone

that such housing constituted 'a shadowy miniature version of the dream houses depicted in the many new glossy home magazines, and in newspaper features'.

The greater part of the estate housing – semi-detached and detached houses and flats up to three storeys – was constructed from prefabricated concrete and fibro cement sheeting. Because of the construction material and the site (reclaimed wetlands), the residents have suffered the consequences of chronic rising damp damage. For this reason a considerable number of houses now sit vacant and in disrepair. Lack of maintenance has been an issue in the estate since its development. As a past youth worker at the estate explains: 'The rate that they are improving the flats is not keeping up with the needs. The concrete slabs were great in the 1940s and 1950s, but now the kids freeze in winter and boil in summer' (Interview 1997).

In regard to a similar housing estate in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, Winter and Bryson (1998) have argued that it was the poor quality of materials and construction of these early estates that set them on a path to 'becoming a site of urban poverty'.

The physical deterioration evident in the study area is due to two major factors: neglect by Housing Commission Victoria to maintain the housing stock, and the hesitancy by local councils to invest in the development and maintenance of community infrastructure. Inequitable distribution of financial and human resources by

the previous local council has meant the community has maintained the stigma of being both fringe and marginal. As residents explain, both of these government bodies have neglected the needs of the community over a period of 40 years. One resident said: 'I am very unhappy about the historical neglect of the area. I have lived here for many years and I know what was promised for this community.' Another said: 'We were the forgotten people in this area.' (Interviews with residents 1997)

'Flat, brown and not dissimilar to the table top I am speaking from', was how Peter Downton, Director of the 1972 *Growing Up in Cities* Project in Australia, described this area to the UNESCO General Assembly in the early 1970s (Interview with Downton 1997). When describing specific problems of the area he said: 'There is one primary fault in the outdoor public space in the study area – it is boring' (Downton 1973). In his final report to UNESCO, Downton (1973) noted that interviews with young people revealed a sense of boredom with the social, physical and educational environment. The total area of open space needed to be doubled to meet government standards; of those open spaces specifically provided for young people, most were suitable only for unspecified activities requiring flat, featureless areas of grass (possibly male-oriented activities such as cricket or football), thus limiting their use (especially for young women) and malleability.

Table 1. Profile of participants

	Female		Male	
All participants	18		26	
Age				
10 years	2	1		
11 years	1	4		
12 years	6	8		
13 years	4	6		
14 years	4	4		
15 years	1	3		
Time living in neighbourhood				
0–6 months	1	0		
6 months – 1 year	-	2		
1–3 years	3	6		
3–6 years	2	6		
6–10 years	4	5		
10 years plus (since birth)	8	7		
	Young people		Parents	
	F	M	F	M
Place of birth				
Australia	14	21	27	20
British Isles	-	-	3	8
Somalia	1	-	4	4
Vietnam	1	3	4	4
Mediterranean	-	2	2	3
South America	1	-	1	2
Tonga	-	-	1	1
New Zealand	1	-	1	1
Unknown	-	-	1	1

Source: Growing Up in Cities Project, 1997.

One task of the current study was to determine if any of these 'physical form' issues had changed for young people during the 25-year period between the two studies.

Physical Form of the Neighbourhood

The first of the four issues identified by young people as affecting their use of public spaces was the physical form of the neighbourhood.

According to Stilwell (1993), the neighbourhood form, its maintenance and the importance placed on public and private spaces by residents and outside decision-makers, shapes people's perceptions about society, themselves and the social values they adopt.

Developing a 'sense of place' is a term often synonymous with the relationship between place and an individual's perception of the distinctive character of a physical locality. The inability to construct physical images of place are often attributed to a person's placelessness (Relph 1976) or loss of sense of place (Pocock and Hudson 1978).

To understand the impact of 'physical form' on young people's sense of place, respondents were asked to draw or make a map, and photograph and describe their neighbourhood. The usefulness of the drawing and photographic exercises as a tool for analysing young people's perceptions of the neighbourhood was in what they contained as well as what was absent.

In the majority of drawings and photographs there were very few depictions of public or natural places. Most drawings and photographs illustrated elements close to or in young people's homes, and in the case of a number of the drawings, icons that represented issues for them – such as syringes, beer cans, cigarettes, fast cars.

This exercise raised questions as to why the majority of young people had interpreted 'neighbourhood' in social rather than physical terms. The results are in direct contrast with results from young

people in the other seven international *Growing Up in Cities* sites and a pilot study in another Victorian working class suburb. In studies of these other sites, the 'physical' environment was most significant in the drawings and photographs, with young people's drawings especially being colourful, rich and vibrant. The next step was to determine whether there was a correlation between the 'images of the neighbourhood' as represented by the drawings and the images constructed through the descriptive accounts.

Young people generally described the area as boring and dangerous.

It was deemed boring because there were limited public spaces available which catered for their specific needs and the urban form was monolithic and uninteresting for them. Group descriptions through brainstorming activities in the participatory workshop supported these perceptions:

About the GROWING UP

the program should include a focus on urban quality from the perspective of young people. From this recommendation was conceived the UNESCO-funded project *Children's Perception of Space* (1972). Coordinated by Kevin Lynch, the project was conducted in four cities – Melbourne, Warsaw, Salta and Mexico City. The project applied the question: 'What interchange between people and their environment encourages them to grow into fully realised persons?' to young people's relationship with their city environment.

The *Children's Perception of Space* project showed that the best urban environments for young people should have the following attributes: a community with a strong social and physical identity; opportunities for engagement, for having a role in the community; and a city that served as an educational facility, a place to explore and learn about the world. The findings revealed that these conditions depended not on standard statistical measures of young people's life quality such as family income or formal education (which had been the mainstream indicators of urban quality), but on finer grained differences in social and physical integration.

The compilation of the country reports were published in the landmark book authored by Kevin Lynch called, *Growing Up in Cities in 1977* (MIT Press).

After reviewing the findings Kevin Lynch (1977) wrote: 'A good city is one in which children can grow and develop to the extent of their powers, where they can build their confidence and become actively engaged in the world, yet be autonomous and capable of managing their own affairs.'

Twenty-five years on the project is being revisited. The replication study was conceived in 1994 by Dr Louise Chawla within the Children and Environment Program of the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, Trondheim, Norway. The goal was to return to the original sites to investigate the longitudinal impact of urban changes on young people and the cultural impact of global mobility, and to add new sites in Asia and Africa.

The sites for this contemporary revisit of *Growing Up in Cities* include: Buenos Aires and Salta, Argentina; Melbourne, Australia; Northampton, England; Bangalore, India; Trondheim, Norway; Warsaw, Poland; Johannesburg, South Africa; and Oaklands, California, United States. The project has been funded internationally through the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, the Norwegian Ministry of Child and Family Affairs, Childwatch International, and the Management of Social Transformation program of UNESCO.

Since the original project's initiation in 1970, children's rights in participating in the management of their urban environment is more widely accepted. There is now recognition among development agencies that increasingly the world is becoming more urbanised and the majority of the population in these urban environments are young people (more than 60 per cent of the population of South Africa, for example, are under 18 years).

In light of these growing trends, the goal of the replication project has shifted and intends to use participatory-action research with young people so as to apply in very practical terms the results of



Growing Up in Cities is an eight-country international participatory research project sponsored by the UNESCO–MOST (Management of Social Transformation) program. The goal of the project is to document some of the human costs and benefits of economic development.

This is done by showing how young people's perceptions and actual use of the micro-environment resulting from economic development affects their lives and their personal development. The micro-environment refers to the urban neighbourhoods of young adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 from low socio-economic backgrounds. In the study, the perceptions and priorities of young people themselves are used as the basis for participatory programs for (re)shaping urban environments.

The project aims to close the dualities and differences between rhetoric and reality, research and action. It also has longitudinal and cross-cultural dimensions.

The original *Growing Up in Cities* project was founded under the UNESCO program – 'Man and His Environment: Design for Living'. At a conference convened by UNESCO in 1970 to define the program, Kevin Lynch, an eminent urban planner from the United States, recommended that

My neighbourhood is . . . boring, dull, beautiful, doesn't have open spaces, dangerous, polluted, unsafe, busy, looks shocking (Group of young men, Workshop 1997).

My neighbourhood is . . . home, a place to hang out, trashy, polluted, lots of traffic, populated, dark, changing, old houses, lots of pubs, drugs (Group of young women, Workshop 1997).

The area was deemed dangerous because there were abandoned buildings, badly lit alleyways and streets, and a number of commercial centres (such as the local hotel) which had the reputation as being sites for drug-related activities and violence.

'It's trashy and there's nothing for kids to do, 'cause there's drug needles everywhere. Everyone, nearly everyone, does drugs and this [the site of the interview which was a reserve] is the only place we go, though sometimes we go down to the ford [river].' (13-year-old female)

'There's basically a lot of houses that have been pulled down lately and they're putting units up, stuff like that, mostly concrete frames, stuff like that . . . There's a school just around the corner and there was a language centre there as well, but they're knocking that down and putting new houses in. A lot of the kids in our street get into the [abandoned] houses. They - umm - a lot of the time there's been a few fires, at the youth centre and stuff like that . . . it's just a bit dangerous having them open like they are, 'cause there's a lot of smashed windows and stuff.' (15-year-old female)

This isn't to say there weren't positive elements of the neighbourhood described, drawn or photographed by young people. The river, individual parks, the sports complex and the youth centre were included in the range of written and physical images. They certainly knew these places existed

because some had made 'special trips' to take photographs. The question was whether these areas were used regularly by young people, and if not, why not?

'I like going down the river but most time is spent at South Road shops, alone. I ride along the footpath and go and buy stuff from there.' (12-year-old male)

Commercialisation of Youth Spaces

The second of the four issues identified by young people as affecting their use of public spaces was the commercialisation of youth spaces.

Table 2 provides a comparative analysis by gender of places nominated by young people as favourite places and those places most frequented by the young people. The data were interpreted using place categories of home and home sites,



IN CITIES PROJECT

the research. The project draws on the conceptual framework of the *Child-Friendly City* initiative launched by UNICEF in 1996, and responds to the rights for young people to participate in community decision making as conceived by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), and the United Nations Habitat 2 Agenda (1996). While the project was initiated before these international agreements and programs were conceived, it is now seen as one of the first international projects to integrate the principles of these agreements and programs into grassroots participatory action.

Another unique feature of the project is its interdisciplinary nature. In the replication project, as in the past, the work is conducted by interdisciplinary teams who combine experience in social research and city planning or design. The current project involves architects, urban planners, geographers, psychologists, anthropologists, educators, community developers, activists and social workers from cities around the world. To accommodate and develop a wholistic and interconnected research design across all these disciplines a multi-paradigmatic and multi-method approach was adopted by the original team leaders (a blend of both quantitative and qualitative methods).

In the current *Growing Up in Cities* project, the emphasis has been on a participatory research methodology. This emphasis has led to the modification of existing methods to enhance their 'critical' and 'transformative' intent, and for the

participants to become more actively involved in the research 'process'.

Study methods

There has been a range of methods used in both the original and current research, and the following is a list of methods used across the sites. Not all methods have been incorporated into the research design of every site. Those methods added to those in the original study are shown in italics.

- Inventories of local demographic and environmental features;
- Observations of young people in public and private spaces;
- Extended interviews with and by young people about the negotiation and use of public and private spaces;
- Young people's current and future perceptions and images of danger and problems in their use of public space;
- Young people's drawings and mental maps of the city image;
- *Young people reporting on their territorial range in the neighbourhood and surrounding city;*
- Participant-taken photographs;
- Participant-led guided tours of the neighbourhood;
- *Participatory focus group sessions and workshops;*
- *Young people's video images;*
- *Young people's images and designs for a child-friendly city;*
- *Interviews with parents, city officials and other people involved in youth related activities.*

Further initiatives

Funding for the ongoing international coordination and development of *Growing Up in Cities* through to 1999 has been provided by the UNESCO-MOST program. One of the major goals for the next two years is to start new international and regional networks by running workshops to train new city teams. The first of these workshops has already been conducted at the Averroes Centre in The Netherlands.

A manual published by UNESCO provides an overview of the *Growing Up in Cities* model and methods in a flexible 'tool-kit' format so communities can adapt the process to their local context. An academic book is currently in progress and will be published through Earthscan early in 1999.

Negotiations are also underway between UNESCO and Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation to produce a documentary on the project later in 1998, comparing four of the research sites, one of which will be Melbourne.

Further information

The *Growing Up in Cities* project has its own international website <<http://www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm>> and interactive networks through a forum discussion line on Childwatch International's linked website.

The current Australian *Growing Up in Cities* program is directed by Dr Karen Malone. It is funded through an Australian Research Council Small Grant, a Deakin University Postdoctoral Fellowship, and an Honorary Fellowship from the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Readers who would like further information on the project can contact Dr Malone at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, or through the project's interactive website: <http://www2.deakin.edu.au/GUIC>

– Karen Malone



'If we had tables and chairs and stuff then the young people would hang around, and we don't want trouble.'

streets and associated space, formal developed open space (parks, playgrounds, ovals), informal undeveloped open space (abandoned factories, river, wasteland), commercial places (shops, hotels, entertainment centres) and institutional/community facilities (sports centre, youth centre churches, schools).

The favourite and most frequented place for young women was the home or home sites. The greatest concern young women expressed about using commercial, community or open spaces was the possibility of encountering physical or verbal abuse when in the centres or en route. Consequently, even though community facilities were identified as a favourite place by one-third of the young women, they visited them infrequently.

Favourite sites for young men included both community and commercial facilities, although community rather than commercial facilities were more frequently used. Discussions accompanying these interview questions also revealed that 'frequenting' a place (such as the youth centre or a sporting complex) could include not actually entering but meeting friends

there en route to another venue, or just hanging around outside.

The findings indicate that although the area boasts a number of commercial and commercialised community outlets specifically designed for young people's use, these are not widely used (other than as meeting places). One such meeting place in the neighbourhood was the local sporting complex, a place young people described as interesting because there were always lots of people coming and going. The council-run community sporting complex is located in the centre of the neighbourhood. Equipped with three indoor basketball courts, a gym, a canteen and various meeting rooms, it attracts young people (and adults) from all over the region, who participate in sporting activities.

However, as the study revealed, the complex is not regularly frequented by 'locals'. This seemed to contradict the information presented in Table 3 which shows that one-quarter of the females and over one-third of the males nominated playing sport as a favourite activity. When comparing this with time use, again it became clear that favourite activity (such as favourite place) did not correlate with actual activity (or frequented place).

What, then, would account for the discrepancy between one in three young people wanting to play sport and less than one in ten actually playing a sport when they had at their disposal a large, well equipped and accessible sporting complex?

The young people were quick to answer this question . . . because they had to pay an entrance fee to get into the sporting complex even if they were only spectators . . . because they had to be a member of a team before they could play on the courts . . . because there were no facilities inside the centre where young people could comfortably socialise.

As the manager of the sporting complex confirmed (Interview, May 1997), these matters were not oversights by a management which did not understand the 'needs' of young people, but a regime of interventionist approaches specifically designed to keep young people out: 'We charge entry so that only those young people who have a legitimate role come in . . . the courts are constantly hired out because we need to make the centre economically viable . . . if we had tables and chairs and stuff then the young people would hang around, and we don't want trouble.'

Without legitimate 'user' status as 'consumers' most young people felt harassed or labelled as troublemakers if they 'hung around' this or other commercial centres.

The commercialisation of community facilities and the exorbitant prices charged by commercial recreation centres (for



Picture: Karen Malone

example, \$15 for a five-minute go-kart ride) positions young people as 'consumer identities'. This positioning serves to disadvantage young people who do not have access to a disposable income, therefore acting as an exclusionary practice by denying them access to public spaces.

These findings mirror a previous claim by White, Murray and Robins (1996:7) that: 'Money is a large deciding factor for young people when they make decisions about their leisure time. What can they afford?'

Restricted Mobility

The third of the four issues identified by young people as affecting their use of public spaces was that of restricted mobility.

In order to measure and record the impact of restricted mobility, young people were asked to construct a diagram of their spatial or territorial range on neighbourhood maps, moving outward from their own homes. When maps of the local government area were developed in the initial stages of the study for this purpose, it was with the perception that spatial range may include areas quite distant from the young people's homes. However, results of the spatial mapping exercise clearly revealed that very few young people's spatial range extended beyond the local neighbourhood. Young people had very 'bounded' spatial ranges, usually no more than one to two blocks from their homes, and sometimes as limited as little further than a house on either side of their own.

Young people defined their territorial range as being restricted by certain streets, houses or activities which presented threats to their personal safety – for example, not using a certain street because there were abandoned houses along it, not crossing over a particular road because of high traffic flow, or not walking through a reserve that was littered with syringes. The young women's maps illustrated that they had more limited spatial range than some of the young men, and this correlated with their most frequented places response, where 45 per cent of young women chose home or home sites (Table 2).

Causes of restricted mobility identified by young people included: having to stay home to babysit younger siblings; lack of or expensive public transport; being too

Table 2. Comparison by gender of young people's favourite and most frequented places in neighbourhood

Categories	Favourite places		Most frequented places	
	%		%	
	F	M	F	M
Home and home sites	33	17	45	17
Commercial places	11	31	10	14
Community facilities	33	33	25	48
Streets and associated space	-	-	15	3
Formal open spaces	16	9	5	11
Informal open spaces	5	9	-	-

Source: Growing Up in Cities Project, 1997.

Table 3. Comparison by gender of young people's top four choices of favourite activities and actual activities engaged in during out of school hours, in a typical day

Top four activities	Favourite activity %		Actual activity %	
	F	M	F	M
Playing sport	20	36	-	8
Messing around with friends	15	9	33	20
Watching television	10	6	28	20
Hanging around streets	10	-	22	16

Note: The percentages in this table represent the number of times these top four responses were nominated from a list of 11 activities. The only response not included which has significance for main time use, but not favourite places, was 'listening to the radio', listed by 12 per cent of males only. Source: Growing Up in Cities Project, 1997.

young to drive a car; not wanting to go places with their parents or relatives; streets with high traffic flow; not being able to afford a bicycle or skateboard; nowhere to go; and fears for personal safety when they were in the public domain.

'Well, I have to look after my sister every night so I just stay home and watch television. Sometimes I might play in the street outside my house.' (15-year-old female)

'I don't like to go outside my house – the only time I go outside without my parents is when I walk to and from school. I play in my backyard with my brother mostly.' (13-year-old female)

'I am not allowed to go across Ballarat Road because of the traffic – and the pub is up there too.' (12-year-old male)

'After school I go with my friend into the backyard and just talk.' (14-year-old female)

Personal Safety, Dangers and Fears

The fourth and final issue identified by young people as affecting their use of public spaces was concern for their personal safety.

Concerns for personal safety was found to have an almost symbiotic relationship to issues of restricted mobility. To describe the 'physical form' of a neighbourhood is to overlook a significant aspect – how it *feels*

to be there. Standing in the centre of the neighbourhood during our routine behaviour observation exercises was to sense emptiness, silence, absence.

Drug use has been reported as a major social problem for the neighbourhood. It contributes to both environmental degradation (broken glass and syringes) and a crime culture. Drug use and drug-related violence was by far the major concern of young people in this area in relation to their personal safety. Streets and street spaces was identified as the site where young people felt most in danger (Tables 4 and 5) due to adults or adult activities.

The following comments reveal some of the concerns young people feel about the dangers of the neighbourhood.

'Parks are dangerous . . . opposite my Mum's house . . . because sometimes you find needles there.' (14-year-old female)

'Normally we cut through the flats to come to the shops, and if I go through there sometimes I feel I'm a bit scared in case someone's there in the alleyway. People who take drugs and stuff, they don't know what they're doing once they've taken them.' (14-year-old female)

'Yeah, the "Ford". Oh the river when you're next to it is all down and there's heaps of bushes there, and you never know who's going to jump out. When walking back from YCW at night, 'cause it's all dark near there, I just carry a stick.' (14-year-old male)

Interviews revealed that up to 81 per cent of males and 89 per cent of females believed there were dangerous places in their neighbourhood, with one in every ten females stating that everywhere (or anywhere) in the neighbourhood was dangerous.

'Everywhere is dangerous especially at night. I can hear the drunk people yelling and that up at the flats when I'm in bed, and I get scared.' (13-year-old female)

'Anywhere is dangerous when it gets dark. If I was by myself I wouldn't go outside, and with friends I try not to, but I probably would still go out.' (15-year-old female)

Young people's images of danger and the enculturation of fear have evolved through a number of mediums: lived experience; harassment and policing of young people by regulatory agencies; parents projecting fears as a mechanism for scaring young people into containment; legends from the sharing of intergenerational 'stories'; media

Table 4. Comparison by gender of causes of danger for young people

Causes	Females %	Males %
Physical and verbal abuse by strangers	32	26
Drugs and alcohol	32	23
Natural occurrences	4	20
Traffic	-	11
Gangs	8	6
Pollution	8	6
Petty crime	4	6
Domestic violence	4	3
Prostitution	4	-
Lots of people	4	-

Source: Growing Up in Cities Project, 1997.

Table 5. Comparison by gender of dangerous places for young people

Place category	Females %	Males %
Street and associated spaces	40	40
Informal open spaces	11	20
Commercial places	11	14
Nowhere	11	19
Everywhere	8	3
Home and home sites	8	3
Formal open spaces	8	7
Community facilities	4	7

Source: Growing Up in Cities Project, 1997.

sensationalising the 'problems' of the western suburbs and young people being stereotyped as perpetrators of violence; and videos, television and games (especially real time 'cop' type shows and games).

This enculturation of fear seems to be manipulated by regulatory bodies as a means of 'keeping the kids off the streets'. For example, it was evident from our interviews with young people that parents, as a major controlling influence in their lives, often used 'stories' of violence to dissuade their children from hanging around in the streets.

Influenced by the exaggeration or 'beat-up' of youth issues by the media and the police, parents told us they feared that young people in public space were likely to get caught up in deviant behaviour, either as victims or perpetrators. Of course, such strategies do not work for all parents, but can be seen as a useful means of restricting mobility, especially in an environment where many parents do not return to their homes until late at night. According to young people, police used these strategies by stopping them in the street and warning them of the dangers of getting 'caught up' in street violence.

When the young people voice their concerns for their physical safety it is difficult to determine through which medium these fears have manifested themselves, and whether the danger is actual or is a



Picture: Karen Malone

They find themselves located in an ambiguous zone – too old for playgrounds, too young to be valued consumers.



product of manufactured or recycled 'stories'. Whether a young person has seen someone abducted from the street, has heard or read a story of someone being abducted, or perceives the chances of being abducted when you walk down the street is high, the end product is the same. The young person will not feel safe to walk in the street and will either retreat from the streets or have to find alternative ways of moving around the neighbourhood. The relationship between fear and mobility is omnipresent. The source of the fear is inconsequential to its impact.

Exclusionary Practices, Young People and Public Space

According to Sebba and Churchman (1983: 191): '[Separated spaces] can have a stabilising and regulating role at individual, group and community levels. Where no such fixed and clear boundaries exist, the territory may not serve this stabilising function and may be, in fact, a source of conflict and tension.'

Sebba and Churchman's (1993) support for 'clear boundaries' and 'separate spaces' to diffuse 'public place use conflicts' is representative of the style of exclusionary rhetoric that is becoming commonplace in Australian society. Positioned as the 'other' in the social and physical architecture of our cities, young people are portrayed through media and police campaigns as deviant, barbaric and unclean – a threat to social and physical order.

The tabloids have been quick to seize the opportunity to exploit a supposed 'youth crime wave', even though actual crime figures paint a very different picture (Guilliatt cited in Harari 1997; White cited Harari 1997). Alan Rose, the president of the Australian Law Reform Commission, speaking to *The Australian Weekend Magazine* on the 'beat-up' of youth issues around the time of recent state elections commented: 'It was almost a game to build the myth . . . almost on no basis of fact at all except the perception of young people congregating in public places – and the amount of graffiti in some parts of the cities' (Rose cited Harari 1997: 20).

These campaigns and myths have led to an increased call for regulating young people's use of public space: 'The visibility and presence of young people in the public domains of the streets, shopping centres and malls, particularly the marginalised, non-consuming individuals, has been met by concerted attempts to exclude or regulate them' (Wyn and White 1997:139).

The politics of exclusionary practices, represented by these campaigns, illustrate the desires of regulatory agencies to eliminate ambiguity in borders between categories of adult/child and public/private spaces. Young people find themselves located in an ambiguous zone – too old for playgrounds, too young to be valued consumers. When they transgress between these categories it becomes a source of anxiety for the boundary markers (Sibley 1995).

But these boundaries are not just constructed at a metaphysical level. Built environments, in the politics of border maintenance, assume symbolic importance as policing boundaries; young people can only enter into the public domain if they conform to specific interventions constructed by the regulatory agencies (Allen 1994; White, Murray and Robin 1996).

What the current *Growing Up in Cities* study has revealed is that, contrary to common belief, the majority of young people between the ages of 10 and 15 years in the neighbourhood in question spend limited time in public spaces. In fact, with the exception of a small group of 'streetwise' younger boys², most young people in this neighbourhood have positioned themselves as 'invisible' in the public domain. These 'invisible' young people spend most of their time close to or in their homes, or the homes of friends.

This is a silent, inverted neighbourhood. Young people are not embroiled in struggles of space use 'due to intolerance and lack of acceptance of young people playing in urban space' as is evident in Percy-Smith's (1998: 3) study of young people in a similar housing estate in the United Kingdom, where young people have been involved in campaigns of terrorism.

In the Melbourne neighbourhood surveyed, young people are not transgressing ambiguous boundaries and causing 'boundary' conflicts as Sibley (1995) and others have indicated can happen when young people are positioned as the 'other'. On the contrary, the majority of young people have, in fact, retreated from the public domain.

One possible explanation for this is the one we have proposed in this paper – the exercise of exclusionary practices. These exclusionary practices include: the marginalisation of young people's needs in regard to the physical form of the neighbourhood; the commercialisation of young people's space and young people's lack of access to personal income; restricted mobility due to personal economics, lack of facilities and personal safety; and the enculturation of fear through experiences, stories and stereotypes of youth as victims and perpetrators of violence.

Returning to Stilwell's (1993) notion that people's perceptions about society, themselves and social values are adopted through their experiences in public spaces, we wonder: What is the probable impact of exclusionary practices on the capacity of young people to connect with and participate fully in the geographies of an urbanising world?

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Notes

The term and concept of 'geographies of exclusion' (used in the title of this article) is taken from David Sibley's (1995) book of the same name.

1 Winter & Bryson (1998) state: 'In Victoria, between 1945 and 1960, the government built 47,000 dwellings on 231 estates, comprising 15 per cent of all dwellings built during this period.'

2 Supporting the stereotype identity, says Rose (cited in Harari 1997), sustains the myth of young people as criminals, who have the following characteristics: 'around the age of 12 to 14, male . . . congregate, particularly in public places, usually shopping malls or centres of country towns . . . "look like trouble" . . . be noisy . . . be on skateboards . . . take advantage of (some would say abuse) public spaces they're in'.

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