FEAR OF CRIME

THE FIELDWORK RESEARCH
The Criminology Research Council is the only national research funding body which specialises in the promotion of criminological research. It was established in 1971 under the Criminology Research Act, and membership includes representatives of the Commonwealth, all States and the Northern Territory. The Council meets three times each year and disseminates funding under a Research Grants Program and a Research Consultancy Program. Funding is made available for a wide range of criminological topics, relating to the causes, correction and prevention of criminal behaviour.

The National Campaign Against Violence and Crime is a strategic Commonwealth Government initiative to develop, implement and promote programs, policies and projects that prevent violence and crime. This approach involves partnerships with a range of stakeholders whose activities may impact on crime, including, Commonwealth agencies, State and Territory governments, local governments, non-government organisations, academic institutions, community groups and the business sector. The NCAVAC Unit is located within the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department.

Commonwealth, State and Territory governments cooperate as equal partners, through the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime and the National Anti-Crime Strategy. This partnership recognises the primary role of the States and Territories for law enforcement, crime prevention and community safety, and the key role of the Commonwealth in research, evaluation, training and social policy issues.

This collaboration will develop the right crime prevention and safety strategies for Australian communities by drawing on existing expertise at all levels of Australia’s government and non-government agencies.

The National Anti-Crime Strategy is a shared initiative of State and Territory governments and is supported by the Commonwealth.

It is the task of the National Anti-Crime Strategy to harness Australia’s crime prevention talent and ensure that all agencies and officials cooperate to develop and promote best practice in crime prevention.
FEAR OF CRIME

VOLUME 2

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CENTRE FOR CULTURAL RISK RESEARCH
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The National Campaign Against Violence and Crime is a $13 million strategic Commonwealth Government initiative to develop, implement and promote programs, policies and projects that prevent violence and crime and reduce fear of violence and crime. This approach involves partnerships with a range of stakeholders whose activities may impact on crime, including, Commonwealth agencies, State and Territory governments, local governments, non-government organisations, academic institutions, community groups and the business sector. The NCAVAC Unit is located within the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department.

Current priority areas for the campaign are:
- Improving crime prevention practice (training, evaluation, best practice)
- Fear of crime
- Residential burglary
- Domestic violence
- Young people and crime
- Ethnic communities
- Indigenous communities

NCAVAC is working on reducing crime in these priorities areas through funding both large-scale national projects as well as projects which meet more local needs. NCAVAC also has a strong commitment to developing training initiatives, disseminating information and coordinating Commonwealth activity.

There is at least one large national project in each priority area, as well as smaller jurisdictional projects. National projects are generally undertaken in partnership with the National Anti-Crime Strategy group (NACS). With most national projects there are two stages: stage 1 is generally an audit of existing programs and a literature review; while stage 2 is usually a pilot project in one or more locations. All reports on national projects are released in two formats: a full version and a summary volume.
The fear of crime project has been designed to take place in two stages. The recently completed Stage 1 included an audit of the literature and community programs, fieldwork research including interviews and focus groups, and development of workable strategies to deal with fear of crime. This work was undertaken in the form of a consultancy managed, and largely funded by the Criminology Research Council in cooperation with NCAVAC and NACS. The overarching objective of this research consultancy was “explore the ways in which people conceptualise and manage fear, especially in relation to the risk of becoming a victim of crime”, with the findings to be used to develop strategies for managing and reducing fear of crime.

Stage 2 involves the development, implementation and evaluation of pilot projects addressing fear of crime issues to take place in Tasmania and other jurisdictions yet to be decided.

The Centre for Cultural Risk Research at Charles Sturt University was commissioned by the Criminology Research Council to undertake stage 1 of this project, the product of which is a two volume report (copies can be obtained from the NCAVAC Unit):

- The first volume contains the audit of literature and community programs, explains the rationale for the fieldwork phase and outlines some steps to reducing fear of crime. Reflecting the complexity of the subject, this is a highly complex, theoretical, sociological paper.

- The second volume contains 3 separate fieldwork studies composed of a main study examining general fear of crime among 148 participants in Sydney, Hobart and Wollongong, rural Tasmania and Bathurst, and two further studies looking at fear of crime related to transport and the media for people in Sydney, the Blue Mountains and Bathurst. The research was qualitative, involving in-depth work with small numbers of people in order to really understand the context of people’s fears.

The most important findings and discussion points of the two volume research report are condensed into a summary volume in order to provide a convenient overview and reference for professionals and the public interested in fear of crime issues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE MAIN STUDY: Deborah Lupton</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Demographic Details of Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Quantitative Analysis — Marian Tulloch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE TRANSPORT STUDY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1: Focus Group Interviews — John Tulloch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues, Questions and Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents of Teenagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2: Long Interviews — John Tulloch with Marian Tulloch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 3: The Transport Industry — Mike Enders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buses, and Trains: Similarities and Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Systems for Dealing with Trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE MEDIA STUDY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1: Long Interviews — John Tulloch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Crime and Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The primary focus of the Fieldwork Phase has been qualitative. Methodologies such as the long interview and focus group have been too little used in fear of crime research, especially in Australia. Together these methodologies provide more in-depth insights into how people construct their fear of crime as situated everyday experience. Individually, these qualitative methodologies offer different advantages: long (one-to-one) interviews allow for a more sustained probing of ‘deep-structural’ emotional and intimate contexts which respondents may well not have the time or wish to reveal in a more public forum; focus groups can reveal the kind of debate and small-scale discursive interaction that is common in natural contexts (though in both cases it is important to be reflexive about the role of the research process in these interviews). The two distinct parts of the Fieldwork Report also work from this common core of qualitative methods to distinctly different (but complementary) research focii.

The Main Study interviews incorporate an innovative methodology including some of the standard quantitative items used in other fear of crime research, involving ‘tick the box’ responses. But the research method then went on to ask respondents to elaborate qualitatively on their responses. This study conducted interviews in Australian cities (Sydney, Hobart, Wollongong) and rural areas (Tasmania, Bathurst region of NSW), and covered equal numbers of men and women, and a wide range of socio-economic characteristics.

The Transport Study draws closely on the concepts generated by the Literature Audit Report (negotiation of meanings as circulating rhetorics; time and place as situational contexts; agency/structure; judgments, values, emotions and behaviours relating to fear of crime; knowledgability and reflexivity) to (i) make gendered and generational comparisons via focus groups, and (ii) to examine the situated interweaving of different circuits of communication in individual respondents’ daily biographies.

The Media Study brings together more formal textual (genre and narrative) analysis with ‘audience’ analysis, situating the genres and sub-genres of crime in people’s daily circuits of communication. Following the ‘place/time’ emphasis of the Literature Audit, the Transport and the Media studies were conducted in three areas of New South Wales (city — Sydney; tourist — Blue Mountains; rural — Bathurst region) and with three generations of respondent (teenager; parents of teenagers; older people).

*The Main Study:* Rather than adopt the ‘rational/irrational’ fear approach in much of the literature, this study examines fear of crime as a socio-cultural ‘way of seeing’. Personal attributes interact with age, gender and physical location in producing ‘lay criminological’ knowledges (note the emphasis in our Research Proposal to emphasise ‘lay’ in addition to ‘expert’ knowledge in this study). Personal experience of crime was strongly linked to heightened awareness of the risk of crime; and people’s sense of physical vulnerability was clearly structured through gender and age. However, while older people may feel physically
vulnerable, younger people are placed in more spatial and temporal co-ordinates resulting in fear of crime. Parents of teenagers exhibited a higher sense of fear on behalf of their children than about themselves, and struggled between surveillant fears for their children’s safety and the belief that their children should enjoy increasing autonomy.

Crime is typically conceptualised as nomadic (on the move) and as committed by the ‘unpredictable stranger’. Respondents were more afraid of this figure when moving in public spaces than when in their own homes, because they felt they are more likely to encounter ‘him’ there, and have less control over others in such spaces. The construction of ‘landscapes of fear’ (the dark alley, the park at night, the river or beach area, the housing estate, the shopping mall after hours) are part of people’s strategy in dealing with public space, as certain areas are ‘mapped’ mentally according to whether they are well-lit, ‘open’, highly or sparsely used at night, or populated by dangerous ‘others’. Areas in Sydney like Kings Cross, Redfern and Cabramatta are likewise mythologised as symbolic locations of danger. These are symptomatic locations of the ambivalent late-modern notion of the city (a place of danger as well as excitement and pleasure); whereas sites of highly publicised mass killings like Port Arthur and Strathfield were not identified as ‘dangerous’ because seen as random events unlikely to be repeated.

Though the home was seen as a place of greater safety and control, women were more concerned about securing it against invasion than men. Women are also acculturated (through childhood and by their male partners) to be more fearful of public spaces; and in addition women experience regular and disquieting sexual harassment from men in public places. Young people, in particular, are seen as a source of threat in public spaces, including by young people themselves (young women fearing sexual assault, and young men seeing themselves as potential targets of ‘homies’ and gang members). Increasing privatisation and individualisation in the late-modern ‘risk society’ may be an additional source of intensification of fear about public spaces for some, with one possible response being to withdraw into homes fortified against intrusion. Respondents indicated that Australian society was becoming less civil as people became more individualistic, lost interest in others and ‘community spirit’ disappeared. Thus crime was seen as part of this broader pattern of social relationships. Social institutions like police, judiciary and social welfare were seen to be failing; while young people’s alienation, unemployment and drug-taking led to an increasing fear of them as ‘unpredictable strangers’. Crime was seen as concentrated in dense urban areas, while people in small towns were seen as having a greater sense of community.
The mass media were acknowledged as providing both needed information about crime and increasing fear of crime (particularly ‘real’ stories in the news or on programs like Australia’s Most Wanted). At the same time, many felt that the media cannot be trusted to present facts about crime reliably. Neither media nor personal experience can be identified as more important than the other in generating fear of crime; rather they often work together synergistically. Further, people may well respond to a specific report of an incident as a means of projecting more diffuse and inchoate anxieties. These anxieties were often an amalgam of fatalism (crime as random and unpredictable) and victim-blaming (crime as the result of the ‘wrong attitude’).

Because people's fear of crime tended to cohere around the 'unpredictable stranger', people's strategies for avoiding it tended to address fear aroused by uncertainty. Five different 'generic' strategies were nominated: socio-economic solutions (addressing poverty and unemployment), ‘law and order’ solutions (harsher penalties, legalising heroin, gun laws), surveillance solutions (greater police presence in public spaces, CCTV in trains and shopping malls), community solutions (more community spirit, more ‘ownership’ of the system), and activity solutions (more leisure activities and facilities for young and unemployed people). Underlying these five types of strategy are two logics: that the ‘other’ may be made more like us (by reforming the conditions which shape them); and that the ‘other’ should be policed and kept away from us by surveillance and prison. Both logics are directed at the need to bring order to the ‘unpredictable stranger’. At the same time a range of personal strategies of crime prevention are also attempted to domesticate the unpredictable: strategies of staying alert to one's environment, avoiding contact, grouping, securing the home, and maintaining a visibly positive attitude that refuses the ‘victim’ role. Age can be a significant factor here: whereas older people may feel more vulnerable, they often have greater control over the extent to which they place themselves in risky situations; in contrast, younger people may have little choice about moving about in public spaces at night to reach leisure facilities, and it is here that they are confronted by ‘homies’ and other threatening people.

All participants in the main study also completed a written questionnaire. Because of the lack of random sampling, the data may not give a representative view of community attitudes. However, an analysis of the relationship among key variables provides support for the generalisability of some of the qualitative findings and a basis for comparison with overseas studies. As in previous studies, women perceived themselves at higher risk of crimes against the person, felt less safe walking the streets alone at night and did so less frequently. Underlying women's fear of attack is their perception that they are at greater risk of sexual assault. It is this perception of risk, not gender as such, which predicts worry about sexual assault. No gender differences were found in perceived risk of non-sexual assault. In addition to gender, age is a highly salient predictor of perceived risk and worry about crime. Middle-aged people perceive themselves
as most at risk of property crime and worry most about it. Perceived risk and worry about crime related to the person is inversely related to age. Young people see themselves as at greater risk and have a higher level of worry. The data on walking the streets alone at night suggests that older people tend only to do this if they feel safe. Young people, presumably because of the higher valency of social activities in public space, often go out alone even if they do not feel very safe. The geographic location of study participants was not a predictor of perceived risk or worry about crimes against the person, but residence in Sydney, whether or not respondents had direct or indirect experience of property crime, led to a higher perceived risk of crimes against property, such as burglary and car theft.

Transport Study: Three generational groups were interviewed via focus group and long interview. This revealed that teenagers have the greatest fear of crime in public transport, while their parents also had significant fears for their children when travelling at night, particularly at deserted bus-stops and stations, as well as on trains. Older people by and large avoid travelling on public transport at night, often giving plausible explanations like no longer having a partner as reasons for not wanting to go out at night. However, a minority of older people are strident about wanting to ‘reclaim public space’ from ‘undesirables’, and others argue that they would use public transport at night if safer.

Distinct patterns of response appeared according to age and gender.

- Female teenagers were fearful of the ‘unpredictable stranger’, being frightened particularly of sexual and physical assault. All ages of men were suspect, because teenage girls are subject to continuous sexual harassment (especially on trains) ranging from looks, through touching to actual assault. This spectrum of sexual harassment, which is intelligibly related to young women’s fear of crime when travelling, is often ignored or forgotten by professionals (City Rail, police etc) as a serious and significant source of fear of crime. Teenage girls adopt a wide range of surveillance and avoidance strategies to cope with fear of crime on trains, but by and large do not feel disempowered from travelling by these fears. Some travel in groups at night; others continue to travel alone, and say that they only worry when faced with specific situations.

- Male teenagers depart from the overall norm of fearing the ‘unpredictable stranger’, in that they have a very specific ‘anthropology’ of different subcultures of risk, which they can detail visually, behaviourally and culturally, and for which they devise specific fear management or avoidance strategies. Above all the ‘homies’ (who adopt the ‘basketball’ style gear of a black American sub-culture) are feared by teenage boys, because these groups operate in numbers and target trains and train stations as a central part of their ‘economy’. They can also target school-students wearing uniform (as at GPS schools), and we encountered very high levels of fear among big, male teenagers in relation to this group.
Parents are the age group who are most concerned, at the practical level, by the ‘breakdown in community spirit’ and in seeing transport crime as part of this broader pattern of declining social relationships. This is because parents fear more for their teenage children than for themselves; and because many are trying to reach a balance between protective surveillance over their children and allowing their children space and autonomy. As teenagers travel at night a lot for their leisure activities, this makes public transport a focus of parental worry; and a compromise between surveillance and autonomy is (where parents can afford it) provision of mobile phones, Cabcharge and so on. Parents are also very concerned by their children coming home from evening activities via deserted stations and bus stops, and many are prepared to get up at all hours of the night to pick them up in cars from these places. Unlike teenagers, parents have little direct contact with the subcultural groups that may threaten their children. Consequently, a significant part of their discussion of fear of crime on public transport is via comments made by teenagers. As a result, they talk more about specific groups like ‘homies’ and ‘bombers’ than older people do, but have a much less precise knowledge of the ‘who, why and what’ of these subcultures than teenagers do.

Older people are concerned about travelling on public transport at night (particularly trains), but by and large do not do so. Declining physical powers makes many older people feel nervous and vulnerable; but as a group they have had little experience of frightening situations on trains (even after a lifetime of travel). They tend to be more concerned about direct physical risks: e.g. from bus steps that are too high off the ground, or from students coming home on the train after school who may knock them over or trip them with their big bags. However, it is important to modify this generalised picture in two ways. i) A number of different age categories are included in the notion of ‘older people’ or the ‘elderly’, and older people themselves make very clear distinctions between the frail and the not-so-frail. It is a very important matter of identity to some older people to be able to continue to travel independently locally or on the train, and these include some of the strongest advocates of ‘reclaiming public space’. ii) Older people are a composite of a lifetime of identities and time scales; consequently the same person may speak of many years of fearless train travel to and from work, a few years of great anxiety when their teenage children were travelling by public transport, and also predict a future when they will be more nervous because more frail.
Certain things are common across all generational groups: all feel that train travel is less safe than bus travel; all argue for significantly more uniformed security personnel on trains; all argue for the re-staffing of stations at night; and nearly all construct ‘landscapes of fear’, which in this city/country study around Sydney included the city’s Western suburbs. Given the fear in most groups of either ‘homies’ (by teenagers) or ‘gangs’ of young people (by older people); and given the wide spectrum of harassment encountered by young women on the trains, public transport by train was isolated as being one of the most fear-inducing activities in public space. There is a significant cause for concern here, particularly as the rail staff we interviewed often expressed even more fear, and it seems clear from these interviews that many train guards are afraid to move through the train at night. Together with very inadequate means of communication between train personnel and police (no direct contact at all; and, at best, chancy links via signal boxes), this invisibility of professional staff is, according to accounts from all quarters, leaving train passengers at night isolated and a potential target for those groups (like ‘homies’) who focus on the railway system.

The Transport Study is offered in this report in three contexts: i) as a study in itself of one of the more fear-inducing areas of public space; ii) as a potential example of the risks, the avoidance behaviours and the possible strategies that may be adopted in ‘reclaiming public space’ — since many of the same problems (e.g. with ‘homies’) clearly arise in other feared public spaces at night (such as shopping malls in Hobart, Wollongong, Bathurst and Western Sydney); iii) as a model for ‘stakeholder partnerships’ (see Literature Audit Report, Introduction), since this is the only part of our Fieldwork where a range of stakeholders were brought into the research process.

The Transport Study also indicates, via its analysis of long interviews, the importance of understanding the situated, local and daily routine nature of ‘lay knowledge’ in relation to fear of crime; and in particular the interweaving within any one biography of a range of different ‘circuits of communication’ (the media, teenagers’ stories to their parents, local gossip, etc). The time/space synergies of these different circuits of communication are important to recognise, especially given the tendency of City Rail management to blame fear of crime primarily on the media (even while often being fearful of their own family members travelling by train).
The Media Study: As reported in the Main Study, many people were both cynical about the media's accuracy and yet at the same time argued that this was the main way that they came to 'know' about crime. Young people, in particular, use media crime stories generically and sub-generically. That is, they often draw on the news and 'really real' genres like Australia’s Most Wanted to learn about the probability of being a victim of crime, the police's poor record in solving or preventing violent crime, the ubiquity of crime internationally, and the degree of police corruption. This is nearly all 'bad news': the Cleveland Street/Redfern teenagers comment that there is no mention of the Aboriginal community spirit and solidarity even in the local papers; while City Rail management comment that local Cabramatta papers have still not reported the better lighting and upgrade of their high-crime station. Consequently, teenagers tend to be scared of these 'reality' media crime genres, and often relate the fears attached to them to their own situation: travelling on the train, going through a car park in Penrith, 'seeing' a face from Australia’s Most Wanted while walking at night. In contrast, fictionalised cop series are often enjoyed where they are 'realistic' (in potentially being 'about' your local community, even if set in London) and with good acting and narrative 'twists'. At best, however, teenagers say that police fictions where the 'good guys' win are but brief comfort; fear of crime to the person is likely to increase again at the very next news broadcast. We received the strong impression that no media form (either fiction or fact, national or local) provided satisfactory information or comfort from fear of crime. One Sydney teenager who had been a victim (or near-victim) of mugging, home break-ins and sexual abuse (as well as having a drug-addict in the family) articulated this particularly clearly: for her, news was 'scary' (on probabilistic grounds) but did not deal with the more sensitive side of sexual or drug abuse as she had experienced it; while police fiction did deal with these issues, but the series themselves were 'unbelievable'.

Parents and older people also negotiate their fear of crime sub-generically. Both of these age groups preferred The Bill and other English police shows to American cop series. For parents this was because of issues of 'relevance' and 'realism', issues of violence, and issues about the portrayal of organisational cultures in a meaner, more corrupt and/or managerialist world. For older people, the English series like Heartbeat and The Bill either worked off their memories of a safer era when police were on the beat and the local sergeant knew the name of (and tanned the bottom of) every local miscreant, or else showed an equivalent world of decent face-to-face relations where (in contrast to the police corruption which 'saddens' them on the news) the police 'do it right'. Parents and especially older people are also concerned about new communication forms and crime. Older people say that if US cop series encourage teenage violence and crime by 'how to do it' stories, the new technologies make things even worse: the Internet shows young people how to make bombs; violent video games desensitise the young; and overall the media as 'babysitter' is helping (with drugs and unemployment) to create a future for their grandchildren which they fear to contemplate.
Not all individuals and groups saw things this way: some parents and teenagers resisted the notion that new technologies created more violence (arguing that this information had always been available); some pointed to the more ‘probing’ programs like Cop It Sweet, Scales of Justice, Phoenix, Good News Week etc which in different formats and with different generic inflections provided the young (and adults) with better models than in the past. In particular, our analysis of the long interviews revealed the way in which Gerbner’s ‘mean world’ (see Literature Audit, chapter 5) is worked with, played with, and recontextualised (sometimes negatively, sometimes positively) in people’s daily media reading and viewing. For example, the case study of Jan (the Blue Mountains mother with a daughter who was sexually harassed on the train) indicates how a news report of a knitting on the train was embedded in a range of other Experiences, discourses and modes of communication to create a very high level of fear of crime in her family. On the other hand, a teenager’s discussion of a Four Corners account of drug gangs in Cabramatta showed a positive (and actively non-racist) use of what otherwise might be seen as a standard tale of ‘unpredictable strangers’ in our media-stereotyped ‘landscapes of fear’.

The media study in particular draws on our analysis in the Literature Audit Report to indicate the way in which different kinds of qualitative research can be combined to explore fear of crime and the media in a situated, localised, individualised, and reflexively aware way. As such, it is a paradigm case study of combining ‘expert’ (i.e. media) with ‘lay knowledgabilities’ in understanding fear of crime.
THE MAIN STUDY
SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a predominantly qualitative study (using indepth interviews and focus group discussions) researching fear of crime among 148 participants living in Sydney, Wollongong, Bathurst and Tasmania (Hobart and rural areas close to Hobart), carried out in June and July 1997. The report first presents details of the methodology of the study and the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants as a group. Then follows a lengthy section on the study’s findings, organised under topical headings based on the questions asked of the participants. A discussion section brings together the main themes and issues of the findings. The report ends with two appendices: the first providing detailed socio-demographic information about each participant, the second giving an analysis of the quantitative data.
METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of the research consultancy as a whole, as outlined in the consultancy brief of the Criminology Research Council, was ‘to explore the ways in which people conceptualise and manage fear, especially in relation to the risk of becoming a victim of crime’, with the findings to be used to develop workable strategies for managing and reducing fear of crime. The methodology for the fieldwork phase was developed based on the findings of the first phase of the study (see the Fear of Crime Literature Audit Report). This report identified a number of key issues:

- Qualitative methodologies have been too little used to address issues of fear of crime, particularly in the Australian context. They have much to offer in terms of providing more in-depth insights into how people come to construct their fear of crime, particularly in the context of their life experiences. Hence our decision to adopt a predominantly qualitative approach in this project. One-to-one interviews provide the opportunity to explore individuals’ experiences and beliefs in depth, while focus group discussions are productive in encouraging debate among participants. An innovative methodology was developed which incorporates some of the standard quantitative items used in other research (as well as some items devised specifically for the present study) involving ‘tick the box’ responses, but which then goes on to ask people to elaborate on their answers so as to explain why they gave certain responses. This design thus seeks to address the commonly-identified problem of quantitative research in the field — that it fails to allow people to elaborate, and therefore give meaning, to their answers to closed-ended questions. We are aware of no other research on fear of crime which has attempted such an approach.

- The attributes of age and gender have been identified as particularly important in previous research on fear of crime. It was therefore decided to single out younger people (aged between 16 and 20 years), older people (aged 60 years and above) and women (of all ages) as appropriate for focus group discussions, allowing them as a group to discuss issues of relevance in relation to fear of crime. Focus groups with these three groups took place in all four locations. Additional focus groups were run in Hobart (a group of homeless men) and in Sydney, where a family group (parents and adolescent children) and a western suburbs group were added for diversity. While ethnicity and sexual identity have also been identified in the literature as important to shaping people’s responses to and perceptions of crime, for the purposes of this research it was decided not to focus specifically on these because of resource, time and ethical constraints (for example, possibly requiring interpreters for interviews or group discussions with people for whom English is a second language).
Given that the focus group participants were selected according to the above guidelines, it was decided to select the interviewees to provide heterogeneity, with roughly equal numbers of men and women, a wide range of age groups and socio-demographic characteristics, and including some people of non-English-speaking background who could speak English well enough to be interviewed in that language.

Issues of time, space and place emerged as integral to the ways in which people construct their fear of crime: for example, public versus private space, night versus day, familiar places versus unfamiliar places, urban versus rural spaces. The questions in the interviews and focus group schedules address these issues from a range of perspectives. (A smaller, separate sub-study was also developed to address the specific issue of travel on trains.)

The mass media have been identified as influential in people's understandings of crime, and several questions were therefore incorporated on the media (as well as developing a smaller, separate sub-study focusing specifically on people's use of and responses to the media coverage of crime).

It was considered important to identify the range of personal strategies that people employ in dealing with their fear of crime, as well as identifying who else they think is responsible for dealing with crime. This addresses the issue of control and personal agency, or to what extent people feel empowered (or alternatively, powerless) in dealing with the risk of crime, and the implications of this for their fears. Notions of community also contribute to people's feelings of safety or danger. Many questions in the interview and group discussion schedules address these issues specifically.

People's personal history of crime, their knowledge of others' experiences, their everyday routines and their location in the life course are also important to their fear of crime — several interview/discussion questions hone in on these issues.

When the Consultancy Group met the Advisory Group (comprised of representatives from the Criminology Research Council, the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime and the National Anti-Crime Strategy) to discuss the findings of the literature audit and plans for the fieldwork phase, it was decided that the fieldwork should take place in four sites: Sydney, Bathurst, Wollongong (all in New South Wales) and Tasmania (Hobart and rural areas close to Hobart). The New South Wales sites were chosen both because of the researchers' location (in Bathurst and Sydney), involving ease of conducting and supervising research and access to research assistants, but also because it was thought that including research participants from the largest city in Australia (Sydney), a small rural town (Bathurst) and a large, post-industrial city (Wollongong) would provide a good spread of perspectives in terms of participants' spatial location and socio-demographic background. It was decided to supplement these sites with that of Tasmania because that State has identified fear of crime as a priority.
The interview and focus group schedules were piloted before the bulk of the study was underway, to ensure that questions and the structure of the schedule worked well. No problems were discerned at the pilot stage, and no changes were therefore made to the protocol. All interviews and group discussions were carried out in June and July 1997.

PROCEDURE

All participants were asked to respond to a set of closed-ended questions as well as expanding on their answers as part of either a focus group discussion or an individual interview. The open-ended discussion/interview questions largely worked from the questionnaire items, inviting participants to provide more detail to explain their answers. All discussions and interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Purposive sampling was employed in recruitment. Participants were recruited by the research assistants located in each site, all of whom are local residents. The research assistants were asked to use their knowledge of the community to recruit a wide range of people. They approached existing community groups to access respondents and used limited snowball sampling via contacts already established.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

Interviewees were given a sheet with the list of demographic and closed-ended questions on it. For each demographic and closed-ended question in turn, they were asked to give their answer to the interviewer, who recorded the response on their own copy (which were kept for data entry). After the interviewers recorded these responses, they asked the set of open-ended questions associated with that particular item. The interview ended with a set of further open-ended questions. Most interviews lasted for between 45 minutes and an hour in length.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROCEDURE

Before the group discussion began, each focus group participant was given the sheet with the list of demographic and closed-ended questions and was asked to record her or his responses on the sheet and hand it back to the discussion leader (who kept it for data entry). After each participant had done this, the taped group discussion began. The discussion leader went through the open-ended questions and asked the group to discuss their responses as a group. With some exceptions (where questions were not appropriate to ask in a group format) the same questions were used in both interviews and focus group discussions. On average, the focus group discussions ranged in length from one to two hours.
Analysis

Each interview and group discussion tape was fully transcribed, and the transcripts were then analysed by the author of this chapter. The transcripts were read with an interest in documenting patterns in the experiences, beliefs and emotions described by the participants. The responses to the closed-ended questions were entered into a database and statistically analysed. (See Appendix 2 for details of the quantitative findings.)

A Note on Terminology

Some critics of previous fear of crime research have argued that ‘fear’ of crime should not be confused with people’s perception of the risk of crime and their ‘worry’ about crime. In the present research, I decided to treat assessment of risk and worry about crime as different (albeit related) concepts. It was decided not to differentiate between ‘fear’ and ‘worry’, however, because in practice it is difficult to distinguish these concepts from each other and they are often used in everyday parlance interchangeably in relation to people’s responses to crime (for example, to say that ‘I am afraid that my car will be stolen’ may mean that I am somewhat worried that it may happen, or it may mean that I am very anxious about the possibility that it may happen).

Using the term ‘fear’ when asking questions of people also may tend to elicit responses that deny fear, particularly for men. As Myslik (1996) has commented, because men are in general socialised to deny fear, they are less likely to admit to feeling fear than women. I agree with his point that “It is misleading, therefore, to rely on the term “fear” in discussion of crime perception. It is more accurate to discuss the breakdown in feelings of safety or security” (1996: 165). The term ‘fear of crime’ in the present research, therefore, is used to refer to an emotional response to the risk of a crime happening to oneself or to others that incorporates elements of fear, worry, vulnerability and loss of a sense of security or safety. Throughout the interviews/group discussions, participants were asked about their feelings of safety or danger in various contexts rather than directly about their fear of crime.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The total number of participants was 148, comprised of 65 interviewees and 83 focus group participants. In Sydney, five focus groups and 25 individual interviews were carried out; in Bathurst, three focus groups and ten individual interviews; in Wollongong, three focus groups and 15 individual interviews; and in Tasmania four focus groups and 15 individual interviews.

1 Thanks to Marian Tulloch for arranging the data entry and performing the quantitative analysis.
A larger number of female (69 per cent) than male (31 per cent) participants were recruited because women had been identified as a priority for research attention, as had older people, and the majority of older people are women. The proportion of men and women in the individual interviews, however, was roughly equal: 57 per cent were female and 43 per cent were male. In terms of age, 23 per cent of the participant group were aged between 16 and 20 years, 32 per cent were aged between 21 and 40 years, 26 per cent were aged between 41 and 60 years, and 19 per cent were aged between 61 and 85 years. Of the group, 5 per cent were unemployed, 5 per cent were home-makers, 27 per cent were students, 11 per cent were unskilled workers or sales staff, 15 per cent were in trade, commercial or lower level managerial occupations, 18 per cent were in professional occupations and 19 per cent were retired. In terms of highest education level achieved, 27 per cent had completed secondary school without a final year (Year 12 or equivalent) qualification, 17 per cent had completed a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, 12 per cent held a technical qualification, 18 per cent had completed some university education and 24 per cent had completed a university degree. Forty-three percent had never been married, 35 per cent were currently married, 12 per cent were divorced or separated from their spouse and 10 per cent were widowed. The vast majority of the participants (80 per cent) had been born in Australia and spoke English as their first language (91 per cent). (See Appendix 1 for full demographic details of each participant.)
Please note: To preserve anonymity, all interviewees were given codes as identifiers. The first letter in the code represents the location (S — Sydney, W — Wollongong, T — Tasmania, B — Bathurst) and the second letter represents gender (F — female, M — male). The number which makes up the rest of the code is sequential for each location.

FEELING SAFE OR UNSAFE WALKING ALONE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The interviews and group discussions began with a series of questions, standard in previous 'fear of crime' literature, that asked people to state how safe they felt walking alone in their neighbourhood during the day and at night. People were also asked whether or not they walked alone in their neighbourhood during the day or night. We were interested in exploring how people came to construct their perceptions about feelings of safety in these contexts, and therefore each item was followed with a number of open-ended questions asking people to explain their answers. If people did not often walk alone in their neighbourhoods, was it because of fear of crime or some other reason (for example, they simply did not like walking and preferred to drive)? If they said that they felt ‘unsafe’ walking alone in their neighbourhoods, what was it that made them feel ‘unsafe’? If they felt ‘safe’, why was this? Participants were also asked in open-ended questions whether the time of day or night made a difference to their feelings, whether walking with someone else whom they knew made a difference, and what strategies they used to deal with their fear.

In response to these questions, the expected differences between feeling safe walking in one's neighbourhood during the day compared with walking at night were found. It was clear that the vast majority of participants had no major sense of fear about walking in their neighbourhood during the day. Ninety-two per cent of the participants said that they often or sometimes walked alone during the day (70 per cent often, 22 per cent sometimes). Only 4 per cent said that they would feel rather or very unsafe doing so. In contrast, only 41 per cent often or sometimes walked alone in their neighbourhood at night (19 per cent often, 22 per cent sometimes). More participants felt fearful about walking at night: 41 per cent said that they would feel rather or very unsafe doing so (29 per cent

It is important to emphasise that these statistics are not generalisable to larger populations, as the participant group is not representative of the general population and was selected purposively rather than randomly. The statistics are provided to give an indication of distribution of responses within the participant group only.
rather unsafe, 12 per cent very unsafe). As has been found in most other studies on gender and fear of crime, men felt safer than women walking alone in their neighbourhood at night (see Appendix 2 for quantitative analysis).

When the reasons given for these answers are explored in detail, several factors emerge as important in people's conceptions of 'safety' and 'danger'. The phrase 'It's a safe area' was often used as a reason for feeling safe walking alone in one's neighbourhood. Safety was frequently described as involving the area being 'quiet', often combined with other attributes, such as the other residents being affluent, or there being no undesirable types hanging around, as in the words of one man living in rural Tasmania: 'It's safe here, not many boogie men or anything, not many criminals or anything' (TM2). Several people explained that they did not 'feel any threat' to themselves personally, and this again was related to the area being 'quiet' or 'safe'. These explanations suggest that people's sense of safety is influenced by how many other people are circulating regularly in the neighbourhood. For some people, lack of other people (resulting in 'quiet') makes them feel safer. For example, a man living in rural Tasmania said that he felt very safe in his sparsely populated neighbourhood because: 'It's very quiet, you hardly see anybody about walking at any time of the night or day' (TM2).

Others, however, felt more worried about crime when there were fewer people around their local neighbourhoods, and felt safer when there were more people around. As a Wollongong man commented, he felt safe walking alone in his neighbourhood at night and day because 'There's always a lot of people around. You'll very rarely be walking down the street by yourself. You always see somebody else, it's usually somebody else going to buy the paper or go for a walk' (WF14). One woman in the Hobart women's discussion group talked about the suburb in which she lived that had areas of bushland reserve around it. She said that she did not feel comfortable walking in the reserves by herself during the middle of the day, when few other people were around: 'I think because it's isolated and I feel I'm putting myself in a vulnerable position... if you're on your own, then you could be a target for strange people or whatever. I definitely run across people there who make me feel uncomfortable occasionally.' Another woman in that group noted that she felt safer walking around Sydney or Melbourne at night than in central areas of Hobart, because there were more people on the streets in the larger cities. The same reasoning was given by a participant in the Sydney women's discussion group, who said that because there were a lot of people always walking around her suburb (Bondi), going to restaurants and engaging in leisure activities, she felt quite safe walking around that area on her own both during the day or at night.

This figure is almost identical to the findings of the New South Wales Police Community Attitude Survey carried out in January 1996, which found 40 per cent of the population of New South Wales feel it is unsafe to walk their local streets at night (cited in Homel, 1996).
A distinction was commonly drawn by those who felt worried about crime when walking in their neighbourhood between ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ times of day. The middle of the day was seen by several people as the ‘safest’: ‘Probably the time of day that’s safest would probably be about 10 o’clock to 4 o’clock I suppose’ (TF12). For most people who felt unsafe, night (when it had become dark) was a particularly ‘unsafe’ time, because things were no longer as readily visible. As a Hobart man (TM10) commented

I suppose at night there is a slightly different feel about it. It’s not the same as the day time ... I mean, I don’t feel like there’s any overriding danger in this area, but at night time there’s a slightly different feel to any area, isn’t there? You feel more threatened. You’re more likely to feel threatened at night than during the day.

He went on to say that the time of night made a difference — he felt more worried about the threat of physical attack after about eight or nine o’clock. Others were also quite precise about the time of night they considered to be unsafe

Probably in the summer time, when it was light, I would feel safer up until nine, ten o’clock. But when it’s like now [in mid winter] it’s dark at half past five or five o’clock or whatever, I wouldn’t like to be about by myself. (WF2)

Early in the evening, I wouldn’t be as worried as late at night and early in the morning. (BF6)

Say about from half past eight to at least twelve o’clock — you wouldn’t be walking around at that time of night because you wouldn’t feel safe. (TF12)

With the onset of darkness, what otherwise might be considered a ‘quiet’ and therefore ‘safe’ neighbourhood may be viewed somewhat differently. As a Tasmanian woman (TF5) who lives in a rural area with only a few houses around her stated, she felt ‘fairly safe’ walking in her area during the day because ‘there’s certainly not many people walking around and, you know, cars intermittently coming, and so just the remoteness of it’. But when it came to night time, this same remoteness took on a different, more sinister meaning

Because of the remoteness, basically because it’s so far out of town and there’s not many, the houses are sort of fairly distant from each other. So there’s only a few cars going up and down. And I don’t know, I suppose if you were walking along and a car stopped or something, there’s not much you can do about it. You can’t get to a neighbouring house, so if you yelled out nobody would hear anyway.
Most participants’ accounts of how safe they felt walking around their neighbourhood were quite specific in terms of identifying particular streets or areas within the neighbourhood as ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’. As a Sydney woman (SF3) noted, there is a part of a street in her area that she avoids, because it is near a park, is badly lit and there are not many people around. While she would walk there during the day, she would not do so at night because of fear of rape.

For women in general, their primary fear when walking at night was sexual assault or other physical assault: being ‘grabbed and attacked’ as one woman put it (SF6). This was particularly the case for young women, who often found themselves in situations where they felt as if they might be at risk of a stranger approaching them, such as waiting at a bus-stop or train station. A participant in the Sydney young people’s group commented, for example, that the crimes she feared the most were rape and physical assault, explaining that ‘Being a young girl you worry about it a lot’, while another female participant added ‘You’re probably the easiest target’. Older women, by contrast, tended to feel less at risk of such incidents because they did not go out as often in public spaces. As a participant noted in the Sydney older people’s group: ‘I believe I’m not frightened because I don’t put myself into these vulnerable situations. If you think that something could happen to you, you just don’t do it.’ (See further discussion of this difference between younger and older women in the section ‘Assessment of risk and feelings of worry about specific crimes’ and in Appendix 2.)

Male participants, particularly those who were adult rather than adolescent, commonly made reference to their gender, size and bulk as a reason for feeling safe walking alone during the day or at night. As a 21-year-old Bathurst man (BM4) said: ‘I consider myself quite big, I guess, because I am a male, and I’m six foot six. And I think it’d be different if I was female probably. But I think being big, I feel confident that’s all, walking by myself.’ He went on to note that sometimes he enjoys having a jog around the streets late at night to clear his head, and realised that his female house mates did not share the same sense of freedom.

Feelings of safety were also related to how well people knew the area and its residents, how ‘visible’ threats were considered to be and the ‘openness’ of the area. For instance, a Tasmanian man (TM8) said that he felt ‘very safe’ walking alone in his neighbourhood at night or night ‘because there’s good visibility. I know the area where I’m walking and I know that there aren’t any spots where I could be assaulted. I mean there’s no dark alleys, put it that way. It’s fairly open’. A Sydney man who had lived in the suburb of Newtown for many years described feeling safe walking there because ‘I feel this is my territory, people know me’ (Sydney family discussion group). In contrast, a Sydney man (SM15) who had recently moved to the western suburbs said that he felt ‘rather unsafe’ when walking alone at night in his area because of the ‘reputation of the area’, commenting that it was ‘notorious for crime’. He felt that at night time, because it was darker and there were fewer people around, ‘it’s just an attraction for the thieves’.
The participants often drew upon their past experiences of moving around their neighbourhood in making assessments of how safe they felt walking in it. A Bathurst woman (BF1), for example, said that she often leaves the door of her house unlocked when she is out during the day, leaves her windows open for air in summer and leaves her car unlocked. She said that she feels ‘comfortable’ about doing so: ‘nothing has ever happened to make me think my safety might be threatened. It’s quiet in the day time, almost a semi-rural feeling.’ Here the phrase ‘It’s a good area’ was often used to denote that people considered their neighbours to be respectable and non-threatening. As a Wollongong woman (WF10) noted, her area was ‘a good one’ because her neighbours had ‘all been here since the year dot... That’s why it was really good when I came here, because it was like an older neighbourhood’.

Those people who said that they did not feel safe walking in their neighbourhood sometimes drew upon their perceptions of the other people who both lived or entered the neighbourhood when explaining the reasons for their fear. One Hobart woman, for example, said that she never walked in her neighbourhood because of her sense that she no longer knew the people in it, coupled with her perception that there was a high rate of property crime in her area:

> It just makes me feel that, you know, it’s unsafe now. Mainly because the area I’m living in now is becoming too — you’re unfamiliar with the people that live in the area and there’s been a high crime rate at the area I live in. Yeah, there’s been a lot of break ins and there’s been a lot of robberies and things like that, so you just feel unsafe. (TF12)

This woman went on to describe how her perception that her local area had changed dramatically in terms of who was now living there had contributed to her feelings of fear:

> Mainly the area has changed so much and you just don’t feel easy ... Everybody’s sort of moved out and new people have moved in. And everybody’s trying to keep to themselves, which is probably a very sensible thing to do. But you just don’t know people’s backgrounds. I know that sounds terrible, but it’s just the way you feel. (TF12)

When the participants described of whom they felt fearful when walking in their neighbourhood, the group mentioned most often was young men hanging about in public spaces. As a participant in the Sydney women’s discussion group noted:

> You see six of them, baseball caps on backwards, they’re probably as innocent as anything, but they’ve got sometimes that vibe to them ... It’s not if there’s one or two [of them], it’s if there’s a group. I don’t necessarily think they’d do anything to me, but it goes through my head, “What are you up to?”
Young people themselves were also wary of such groups, and feared being ‘bashed’ by other young people in gangs. For example, participants in the young people’s group in Wollongong noted that they were the subject of regular harassment on the part of gangs of young people, and often feared that they would be physically assaulted by them. They said that they felt most vulnerable from crime when they were walking alone in public spaces and came into contact with these gangs. They were particularly worried about ‘homies’ (‘home-boys’, members of gangs), noting that such gang members typically carried weapons such as knives and knuckle dusters. ‘Homies’ were described by a Sydney boy as

\textit{The violent kind of gangster boofy type who listen to rap and wear Adidas gear and stuff. And yeah, I’ve noticed a lot of them are ethnic and Mediterranean, or in America it’s predominantly black Americans, but here it’s predominantly Italian and Greek. That’s pretty unfair to say that, but that’s just what I’ve noticed. (SM2)}

In response to this fear, at least one male member of the Wollongong discussion group said that he carried a knife around with him, in case he ran into trouble with gangs. Members of this group, who were from disadvantaged backgrounds, were very negative about the police, noting that they or their friends had been harassed or even physically assaulted by police officers, and that they did not trust them to protect them from crime. One boy noted that he had ‘been on streets’ himself for a couple of years and said that during this time: ‘I used to cop floggings off the police all the time.’ Another participant said that a friend had been run over by a police car, inflicting serious injuries upon him.

Adult men tended to be most wary when walking in areas where they were likely to be assaulted by drunken men. For instance, a Sydney man (SM18) recounted how he lived near a pub, and was wary of walking near it late at night because of the drunks emerging from the pub who might be likely to assault him: ‘it’s just a question of not getting inadvertently caught up with a belligerent drunk.’

For those who felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood because of their fear of crime, it was generally agreed that walking with someone else would make them feel safer. This was particularly the case for women. For some women, feelings of being ‘rather unsafe’ were transformed in feeling ‘very safe’ if they were walking with another person: ‘If I’m walking with someone else I hardly think about being unsafe at all’ (WF4). Another woman (WF13) noted that when she walked with her female friends, because they were laughing and joking together thoughts of being afraid simply did not enter her mind, whereas if she were walking alone she would often think about the possibility of attack and feel more vulnerable. For some men, however, walking with another person who was a woman took on a somewhat different meaning, because it involved them feeling as if they had to ‘protect’ the woman in some way, which might put them in a dangerous situation:
If you’re by yourself, you can just run away. But if you’re actually with someone, you’ve got to think of the whole scheme of things then. It exacerbates any potential situation for assault. (SM18)

Depending on who that person was, if I was with a female I’d probably, I’d feel the traditional gender thing I suppose. I’d feel that it was part of my role to protect her if something happened. But with another male — “See you later mate!” if you get into trouble. (TM10)

This issue was also raised by a younger Sydney man (SM2), who observed that there is an assumption that men are responsible in some way for their female partner’s safety and protection, both in public spaces and at home. He noted of his girlfriend that ‘I would definitely feel guilty if something did happen to her while I was with her, and I couldn’t prevent it or something’.

The strategies adopted by people to deal with their fear of assailants when walking alone in the neighbourhood included simply avoiding this activity, or at least confining it to the times of day or night at which they felt safer. Others described behaving in a way that avoided eye-contact with others: ‘Just be assertive in what your aim is and never look a person who looks — who’s only going to hurt you — just keep walking straight ahead of you and never look left or right. Just keep walking’ (TF12). Many participants, particularly women, said that they avoided making eye-contact with strangers as a means of warding off trouble. Another common strategy described by the participants was to keep aware of other people occupying the same space, and to take evasive action — crossing the road, for example — if they felt at all apprehensive about such others. Some described how they kept in a constant state of awareness and alertness of others around them, particularly at night.

If I’m walking, at some stage I think, “What if? What if that person is going to do something? What would I do?” You just run through what your options would be. Just an awareness thing I suppose. (Hobart women’s discussion group)

Other people described keeping to well-lit streets, streets that they knew well or where they knew residents into whose houses they could duck if they felt at risk from crime as strategies they had adopted to deal with their fear. Participants in the Sydney young people’s group noted that they engaged in such strategies as walking quickly, telling themselves not to be worried, crossing the street if they came across an individual or group of people that worried them and trying to walk in lit areas, close to houses and close to other people. Several women said that they carried their keys in their hand, ready to use against an attacker. Some women also carried around personal alarms or whistles to use when walking alone, but they were in the minority.
The participants were asked, in an open-ended question, how safe they felt about walking alone, during the day and at night, in another part of their city or town that were less familiar to them than their neighbourhood. When answering this question and explaining their answer, most people drew distinctions between particular locations in which they felt relatively safe and those in which they felt unsafe.

For most of the people living in Hobart and nearby rural areas, regardless of gender or age, the parks and the open-air city mall in the middle of the business district in Hobart were identified as the places of most danger in terms of crime. A Hobart man described in detail his perceptions of the risk of crime and how it related to particular sites and times in his city in terms of his strategies of avoidance. The mall featured large in his ‘mental map’ of places to avoid

*If I go out drinking I walk home, so you know, I’m often walking the streets of Hobart at midnight or 1 or 2–3 am. So I guess there’s probably not a time I don’t leave the pub at Salamanca [Place] or wherever I am and walk home, without thinking about the possibility of [crime] and sort of deciding which route I’ll take. Like I’d never, for instance, go through the city mall of a night time. I avoid the central city area and the mall, that park, whatever it is — the one where the fountain is. I’d avoid all that area around there.* (TM9)

The greatest source of danger in relation to the mall, it appeared, was the groups of people who frequented it, described by some as ‘street kids’. They were seen as having little to do and as engaged in criminal activities such as mugging, theft and assault because of their disaffection and boredom

*You go into the city, and just in the mall there are so many young people there that obviously aren’t working. They just sort of hang around, they obviously have some problems. That really shows that there’s nothing for these people to do.* (TF4)

One participant in the young people’s discussion group in Hobart noted that nearly all his/her friends ‘had either been abused or assaulted’ while walking through the mall or in a nearby area of the central business district in the past six months. Another said that he himself had been assaulted in the mall and a third described how her/his father had had his nose broken at about 6 o’clock one evening when attempting to walk through.

The mall in the centre of Wollongong city and its surrounding streets was also identified by participants living there as a ‘dangerous place’ they avoided because of the fear of crime. A Wollongong woman (WF4) described two incidents of sons of her friends being physically assaulted at night by gangs of young men in the mall. As a result of hearing about these assaults, she said, she had avoided walking through the mall by herself in the evening. Another Wollongong
woman (WF5) noted that her brother, a young man, and his friends had been beaten up by a gang of 16- and 17-year-old boys in the mall, and was hospitalised as a result. She too had avoided walking in that area at night since this incident. Several Wollongong residents also identified the local beaches and nightclubs as places to avoid at night. A Wollongong man (WM14) said, for example, that he felt ‘very safe’ walking alone in his neighbourhood, but avoided the beaches and parks in Wollongong, as well as parts of the city around pubs at night, as he felt that he would be more likely to be attacked in these places. He said that he had heard in the news media of more and more crimes of violent assault happening in Wollongong in places he had previously thought of as ‘relatively safe’, and this had made him more wary of walking alone in such areas: ‘I mean I wouldn’t be terrified, and it’s not as if I would be looking over my shoulder all the time, but in comparison with a few years ago I would be far more wary of doing it.’

For some Bathurst people, ‘down by the river’ was identified as a place they would avoid at night time, because it was a very dark area and it was known that muggings happened there and that groups of young men sometimes went there to drink. As for Wollongong residents, the university campus and parks were also mentioned by several Bathurst women as a place where assaults and rapes had occurred late at night, and that therefore they made attempts to avoid those areas at that time. Women in Bathurst were also wary of local clubs and pubs late at night in terms of the drunken men congregating inside and outside of these places, noting, as one woman said, that ‘Bathurst doesn’t have a very good reputation for night time’ (BF10). Participants in the Bathurst young people’s group also noted that ‘bashings’ were a common event in that town, particularly by drunken men around pub closing time. They argued that Bathurst was one of the worst towns in New South Wales for rape and sexual assault, again identifying the university campus as a site where such crimes were common. Several Bathurst people mentioned the suburb of Kelso as a dangerous place, because there were Housing Commission estates there, with a high proportion of Aboriginal and unemployed people.

People living in Sydney tended to feel afraid in inner-city areas such as the city centre and the suburbs of Redfern and Ultimo, particularly deserted dark alleys in those areas. This was often a problem if people had to return to their parked car, or walk through the streets to catch public transport. The need to do so sometimes involved states of high anxiety. As a participant in the Sydney women’s discussion group recounted

_I worked in Ultimo for eight years, and if we were going to the movies I’d often leave the car there at the back of the shop. And I’d just be absolutely scared walking down the lane at the back to get the car, and just getting into an open carport sort of thing. And I’d get in there and be going [to myself], “It’s all right, breathe,” and then have to convince myself that nobody’s hiding in the back seat of the car before I could get in._
Participants in the Sydney western suburbs group noted that they avoided the local shopping centre at night and did not like going to service stations at night because of the groups of young people who hung around those places. Some of the participants in Sydney were concerned about such crimes as having thieves rob them while they were sitting in cars waiting at traffic lights, and several people took steps to lock their car doors when driving for this reason, particularly at night. Redfern was described as a suburb where such crimes had become more common. One participant in the Sydney women's discussion group had actually been the victim of such an attempted crime in Redfern, and said that since that time she never drove through that area late at night when she was on her own.

A 17-year-old Sydney boy (SM2) spoke about his 'uneasiness' walking around the city during the day, because of his fear of assault by 'homies'. He said that he and his male friend had been assaulted by such boys when in the video game arcade Timezone on Pitt Street during the day (they had hit them on the head and tried to steal their wallets), even though many other people were around at the time. This experience had made him wary of such places. He had also been mugged with two of his friends on another occasion by 'homies' — this time at night, in the suburb of Turramurra, when he had been living there. He went on to say that 'Quite a few of my [male] friends have been attacked by 'homies' and hoods and stuff'. Although he currently lives in Redfern, which, as noted above, is a suburb identified by many others as 'dangerous' because of crime, he had not personally experienced any crime in this suburb, and therefore felt safer walking around there compared with how he felt when in the city. He took steps never to walk alone in areas such as Pitt Street to avoid such crimes happening again, although he know that this is 'not enough', as the previous crimes had happened when he was with his friends. He had developed strategies to deal with confrontations involving 'homies' or other gangs, including handing over his wallet if they asked for it without arguing, and not attempting to fight back if he was by himself, because this would 'just anger them more'.

As this suggests, in relation to areas of their city or town where they felt at greater risk of crime the participants used the strategies of avoiding these places altogether or as much as possible at times (usually at night) when they felt that they were particularly dangerous. They also again described being wary, cautious and on their guard as strategies of dealing with their feelings of being at risk: 'I tend to watch people that are walking on my side of the street. You tend to just use your vision a lot more. You are just sort of probably conscious of situations that are dangerous' (TM8).
SAFETY AT HOME

The participants were asked to state how safe they felt when in their home during the day and at night. Here again, a high level of feelings of safety was evident among this group. Nearly everyone (99 per cent) said that felt very or fairly safe from crime in their own home during the day (81 per cent very safe, 18 per cent fairly safe), and 95 per cent said that they felt very or fairly safe in their own home at night (57 per cent very safe, 38 per cent fairly safe)4.

When the participants were asked to explain their answers, it was clear from their explanations that the home is perceived as a site of safety, protection from others, a place where one can withdraw from the threats offered by strangers in public spaces. The participants felt they had far more control over the risk of crime in their homes, because they could ensure that it was secured against invasion of criminals from outside and they could regulate the entry of others from outside with the use of doors and locks. A Wollongong woman described the various procedures she followed to secure herself in her home at night to make her feel safe

*I keep all the doors locked always, and check them as it’s getting darker, keep all the windows locked. I always keep the light on in the lounge room and another light on the house because if there’s more than one person home there’s usually a couple of lights on. And if I still feel a bit nervous before I go to bed we’ve got a security system that I turn on. I did that last night. (WM5)*

People often used the phrase ‘I feel safe within my own home’ to denote a sense of ownership of the space, positioning the home conceptually as a protective site: once one enters it, one is cocooned from the frightening, uncertain outside world. Because people feel as if their house is ‘their private space’, they are more likely to feel secure. As one Hobart man (TM8) commented, because he felt that his house was ‘my domain’, he would feel ‘more angry than upset if somebody come into the yard. I’d probably think, well, they’re in my domain. Whereas if it’s out in the street I feel as though it’s probably fair game’. The participants felt that they could lock themselves against the outside world, and barricade themselves inside. This was evident in the words of a 23-year-old Sydney woman (SF6), who although feeling ‘very unsafe’ when walking alone in her suburb of Bondi at night because she had heard of rapes and murders happening in the area, felt ‘very safe’ in her own home alone at night. This was because of the extensive security system she had for her house

* The New South Wales Police Community Attitude Survey, January 1996, found a greater proportion of their sample (11 per cent) felt unsafe when they were at home alone at night (cited at Homel, 1996).
One of the main features I like about this place is the security grilles on every single window. Like, it’s just basically impossible for anyone to get in here. I’ve got a security door, the building’s a security building. I mean that’s one of the reasons I love this place. I feel completely safe here, I don’t get scared at all, and you know, it’s very high density living here, so there’s people around 24 hours [a day]. So I don’t feel unsafe in this house. Whereas the last house I was living in, which was a free-standing house, and a large house, I didn’t always [feel safe]. I would have to check all the windows and all the doors. I felt really unsafe — I would not stay there by myself ever.

For some women, whether their partner or any other person is at home or not can influence how safe they feel at home at night. One Sydney woman (SF3) noted that when her husband was at home she felt ‘very safe’ at night, but when he was absent, she felt only ‘fairly safe’: ‘it’s more uncertainty when he’s away, rather than feeling that anything really would happen, that vulnerability by yourself.’ In another example, a Wollongong woman (WM4) noted that she only felt ‘fairly safe’ in her home at night (although ‘very safe’ during the day) because she lived alone, and therefore tended to be ‘a little fearful. Nothing has ever happened to me but I’m a little nervous sometimes, if I hear strange noises or things’. She said that she attempts to assuage her fear by making sure that she locks her doors at night.

Here again, however, people’s previous experiences led them to feel secure or insecure within their homes. The home is not seen as safe for some people if their feelings of safety have been violated previously. Some participants felt less safe in their own homes if they had previously been burgled or the victim of other crimes when at home (see discussion below under ‘Personal experience of crime’). Others felt unsafe if they had recently heard about violent crimes happening nearby. A participant in the Wollongong women’s discussion group said that she often felt unsafe at home when alone there at night, and that her knowledge of crimes in her neighbourhood had contributed to this feeling of fear.

In my neighbourhood there have been three murders in the last couple of years: a stabbing on the corner, an old lady walking home from bingo one night — her body was thrown in the dumpster two blocks from my house — two youths broke into a bloke’s house in Kembla Street in the day and bashed him to death. My neighbourhood’s sort of part gentrified, part ramshackle housing, there’s some unsavoury types. That certainly colours your perception of whether or not you’re safe in your home.
In a closed-ended question, the participants were asked to indicate whether they had ever experienced harassment, and were given the examples of sexual harassment, road rage, racist comments and anonymous telephone calls. If they said that they had experienced harassment, the interviewees (but not focus group participants for reasons of privacy) were asked to describe one of their experiences to the interviewer.

A third of the participants had often or sometimes experienced harassment (8 per cent often, 25 per cent sometimes): 46 per cent had rarely experienced harassment and 22 per cent had never experienced harassment. Incidents of road rage and receiving anonymous telephone calls were the most frequent experiences of harassment. People differed quite substantially in their feelings and responses to such incidents. One Tasmanian man who had experienced road rage on the part of a large truck, made stringent attempts to take the driver to court, but failed in this attempt. An older Sydney woman (SF1) said that she had recently experienced ‘road rage’ on the part of a male motorist at a set of traffic lights: ‘the fellow behind me, and I could see him in the rear vision mirror, he took his hands off the wheel and he shook his fists and he screamed, just “Aaaahhhhh!”, rage, yelling.’ This experience had made her much more wary of other motorists while driving: ‘since then I have noticed that I tend to, if I get anyone like that behind me, or is someone is sitting right on my rear, I pull over when possible and just let them go past, to avoid any situation.’

Some people who had received anonymous telephone calls at home laughed this experience off and seemed not to be greatly affected by this, but others appeared to be quite shaken. A Wollongong woman (WM4) who had experienced anonymous telephone calls from someone who made sexual suggestions to her decided that it must be one of her students (she is a secondary school teacher) and guessed his identity. She eventually simply told him to ‘stop this nonsense and don’t be silly’. She did not feel threatened because she had decided it was a young boy who was doing this rather than a more dangerous adult. In contrast, a Tasmanian man (TM2) had felt rather disquieted when he had received a series of anonymous telephone calls and did not know who was the culprit. This experience, he said, had ‘made me very uncomfortable for probably several weeks after’. In response to his feelings of being ‘uncomfortable’, he unplugged the telephone at night for a period of about two weeks to avoid any calls.

Several women said that they had experienced incidents of sexual harassment. In most cases, this took place in a public space, and involved men making unwanted sexual advances or suggestive comments to them when they were alone, or calling out abusively from cars. Younger women appeared to have been particularly vulnerable to such incidents. Several Bathurst women said that they
sometimes found men drinking in pubs there to harass them, and that they sometimes felt uneasy going into pubs for that reason. As one of them commented, the feeling she gets in Bathurst pubs from men is ‘a sort of an overhanging threat of aggression or violence all the time’ that makes her feel wary: ‘There just seems to be — there’s no specific incident, but just talking to some people, having people speaking to you, you feel the threat of aggression, or misunderstanding’ (BF6). Female participants in the Bathurst young people’s group also made reference to the ‘white, ocker male’ culture they thought was dominant in Bathurst and which made itself known when men gathered in groups to drink alcohol.

Some participants who were of Asian ethnicity had experienced racist comments. A Sydney woman of Chinese ethnicity (SF16) noted that she had experienced people shouting at her from cars, making derogatory comments about being ‘Asian’, but this had happened only rarely. She said that such occasions did not bother her very much, and that if the comments were very nasty she would respond in kind. She was, however, concerned that her husband, who is also of Chinese ethnicity, might be subjected to physical violence by racists. Because he was smaller than most men she was worried that he would not be able to defend himself effectively against attackers of larger build. An Indian man (WM12) who had recently moved from India to Wollongong to study at university said that he thought there was some degree of racism in Australia. Although he personally had not yet experienced racist comments, friends of his visiting from India had. This made him wary when out in public spaces, for he was concerned that he would become a target one day. Nonetheless, he said that he felt very safe in general in relation to crime in Wollongong, which he considered to be a safe city in relation to many others around the world, including Indian cities. A Sydney Aboriginal man (SM20) said that he had regularly experienced racist comments throughout his life, such as being called a ‘black bastard’. He said that did not let this worry him, however, and was proud to have Aboriginal blood.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF CRIME

Previous literature has suggested that personal experience of crime influences people’s fear of crime. The participants were asked to state whether any of the following things had ever happened to them personally — mugging, sexual assault, home burglary, physical assault (other than mugging) and car theft. If they had experienced any one or more of these crimes, the participants were then asked to describe their experience and whether they had adopted any strategies to avoid experiencing such an incident again. (These open-ended questions were asked only of interviewees, as we thought that asking people to talk about such personal experiences in a group discussion setting would be inappropriate.)
Of the five listed crimes, home burglary (35 per cent), physical assault (24 per cent) and car theft (23 per cent) were the most commonly experienced among the participants. Only 10 per cent had been mugged and 10 per cent had been sexually assaulted. If participants had personally experienced a crime, its effects — whether or not it made them feel worried or unsafe for a long time afterwards, for example — varied according to a number of factors. These included whether the incident was seen as an ‘isolated incident’ or as part of a continuing series, whether the participant thought it was likely to happen again, how long ago it happened, the relation of the crime to their everyday life in the present and how ‘serious’ it was perceived to be by the participant.

A Wollongong man (WM1), for example, said that he had experienced an incident of physical assault when at a pub about fifteen years prior to the interview. Because his lifestyle had changed over the years and he no longer frequented such venues, he did not feel at risk from this crime in the future, and had not changed his behaviour in response to avoid it. A Hobart man (TM9), however, who had also been assaulted while in a pub, still frequents such establishments regularly. As a result of his previous assault experience, he had developed strategies that involved assessing the places at which he drank and where he walked at night

I’m cautious about which pubs I drink in. I’m always careful, you know, self management. Although I’m happy to walk the streets around here at night, there are some times and places that I wouldn’t go to. Yeah, I think I’m good at assessing the risks now, and sort of know where to be and where not to be.

One participant in the young people’s group in Hobart noted that he had been assaulted in the city mall by a young man who was with others at the time. As a result of this experience, he said, he was left even more worried about such crime, because the police were called to the scene, drawing attention to him, and he was worried that the other members of the group would come after him

It meant that the police were walking around, like they knew the group of people [the assailant] was from, so they’d hassle them to try and find out who it was. And that made it even more worse for me. It meant there was, instead of one person there was about twenty, like a big group of people that knew who I was and weren’t very happy.

The strategy that he and others in the group had developed to deal with their fear of gangs of young men (and for some girls, their fear of gangs of young women) was to ‘Try not to be by yourself’. As one girl noted: ‘Even if you’re with another girl then there’s someone that can run and get some help.’
Several women who had experienced sexual assault or other threatening behaviour on the part of men said that they had changed their behaviour accordingly. A young woman (BF8) who had experienced sexual assault said that this experience made her aware of the importance of presenting a certain demeanour when in public and avoiding potentially dangerous situations:

*I think after it happens once, you learn how to arm yourself, how to walk looking like you mean business, seeing warning signs. Like not putting yourself in an environment you can’t completely control, like going somewhere and drinking excessively with a bunch of people you don’t know. You just know how to not put yourself in that uncontrollable position, and after you experience it you just arm yourself with that knowledge.*

Another woman (a participant of the Wollongong women's discussion group) said that she had been sexually assaulted twice in her life, once at the age of ten and again as an adult, fifteen years ago, when a man had grabbed her in a public place. She said that these experiences had led to her becoming much more fearful about such crimes happening again:

*For a long time I went around looking over my shoulder, I know it sounds weird. I keep the doors locked at home, there’s a lock on my bedroom door, if [her partner] is away overnight I don’t stay alone, I stay at my mum’s place. I have a fear that I will be helpless and someone will sneak up behind me, and that happened 15 years ago.*

A participant in the Hobart women's discussion group noted that after having been a victim of assault on a number of occasions by people she did not know, she had become quite fearful of others, and had become more aware of danger, at least for a time:

*Immediately after [the incident of crime] it’s sort of like a shattering of loyalty or trust in humanity generally. I just didn’t trust anybody that I didn’t know and I certainly was far more — you know, it was that antenna thing again. I was far more aware of being somewhere and keeping a look out. I mean [the crimes] happened in quite different circumstances, but I certainly changed my behaviour. And then [the fear] would level out, you know, after the anguish or the initial fright or whatever.*

As this woman's words suggest, people's initial feelings of fear after having been the victim of a crime such as an assault may be acute, but may also significantly diminish over time. This was also evident in the words of a woman living in Bathurst (BFs), who had felt very safe when in her home until a man began sitting outside her house in his car and staring at the house. When this happened, she began to feel afraid within her house for the first time: 'I would wake at the slightest sound, and was worried.' She dealt with her fear by borrowing a friend's
As would be expected, the more serious the crime, the longer this diminishing of fear may take. The severe and continuing loss of security that being a victim of a serious violent crime may cause was vividly evident in the account of a particular woman (BF3). A number of years prior to the interview she had been the victim of several serious crimes at the hands of one man when she was alone in her home at night. This incident had left her very shaken and afraid even about walking near her home during the day. This participant noted that because she had been a victim of these crimes, she now realised how unpredictable such events could be: ‘Things can go wrong that you don’t expect. Always in my life before I thought, “If I’m organised to deal with whatever contingency, it’ll be okay.” But now I know that it doesn’t matter how organised you are, things can still go wrong.’ She commented that even now she still wakes at the slightest sound when home in bed, and does not feel that she can stay in the house alone at night — she needs someone there with her always, even if it is only her children. To deal with her fear, she said, she tries not to watch frightening programs on television (including the news), and stringently avoids programs such as Australia’s Most Wanted or thriller or crime films like Fatal Attraction. If she feels particularly uneasy, she takes her dogs outside in the yard and walks them around, checking that no-one is there. She has had an electronic alarm installed and security doors with good locks since this incident, but still often feels unsafe at home.

Those who have been burgled at home often find the experience confronting, overturning their notions of ‘home’ as a safe place. As an older Sydney woman (SF1) noted, when her house was burgled, she felt very angry

I suppose the intrusion of people breaking into your home, which is really very sacred, that makes me feel angry that somebody should come in. And that’s what I felt when we were burgled. Mostly I felt just so angry that somebody with dirty little paws had opened our cupboards, and I felt that was an intrusion of our lives.
A Wollongong woman (WM4) similarly said that she had felt angry and ‘violated’ when her house had been burgled, and she had also felt more frightened about the future risk of burglary when once she had felt very safe in her area. One participant in the Sydney women’s discussion group noted that over the past twenty years the houses she had lived in had been burgled several times, and this makes her feel less secure.

*I don’t feel like my home is my absolute castle that can’t be invaded, I always feel like almost that it’s just a matter of time. I’m really particular about the deadlock being deadlocked before we leave, and I get really cross with [my husband] if he goes out and doesn’t deadlock because it’s got glass in the door and could just be smashed and opened. So I’m really like a bit neurotic about that.*

Another member of this discussion group noted that she never opens the door to her house during the day if the doorbell rings, unless she is expecting someone, because of her fear of crime. A third woman in that group contended that ‘I find men have a different sense of safety to women’, and went on to say that her male flatmate tends always to forget to engage in procedures such as closing windows and locking doors when he leaves the flat, because he is cavalier about the risk of burglary. She, on the other hand, is very careful to ensure that the flat is properly secured whenever she goes out. A fourth participant, however, noted that she felt very safe, for a number of reasons: ‘I’ve got bars on the windows, neighbours very close, I know everybody in the block of units, everybody next door, the street is very busy, I don’t feel scared at all.’

Some participants who had been burgled previously appeared to deal with this by accepting such crimes as a ‘fact of life’. As one Sydney woman (SF3) who had been burgled several times noted, she had not engaged in any strategies to avoid burglary happening again, because she was living in an area where this crime was common, and there was little one could do to prevent it. She said that she was only ‘slightly worried’ about being a victim of this crime again. Similarly, a Wollongong woman (WF13) who had been burgled when she was out of the house said that she was upset at having items of sentimental value taken, but apart from this was not overly worried about the experience. She said that this was because the burglars had only taken things, rather than trashing the house or attacking anyone, and she thought it was probably ‘just kids’ rather than hardened criminals.

*I don’t really think it made me that more fearful because it wasn’t a violent crime as such, it was just a robbery. I suppose it is a violent crime, but I wasn’t really frightened or hurt. And so many other people we know have been robbed, it sort of makes it almost commonplace, so I don’t think it’s something unusual.*
The participants were also asked whether any of the five crimes described above (with the addition of murder) had happened to a close family member or friend. The reason for including this question was because an association has been made in the literature between people's knowledge of others' experiences of crime and their own fear of crime. For those interviewees who said that at least one of these crimes had happened to people they knew well, they were then asked to talk about how they felt about this and whether it made them more worried about the crime happening to them. (Again, for reasons of sensitivity, these open-ended questions were asked only of interviewees, not of focus group participants.)

The participants were more likely to have known someone who had been a victim of home burglary (68 per cent), physical assault (42 per cent) and car theft (41 per cent). A quarter of the participants had known someone who has been mugged, 26 per cent knew someone who had been sexually assaulted and 6 per cent knew someone who had been murdered. For those people who had close friends or family members who had experienced such crimes, it depended on the nature of the crime and where it took place how much this affected their own feelings of risk and fear, or whether they responded with different emotions.

Several people said that they felt angry rather than fearful when they learnt of family members' or friends' experiences. One woman (TF12), for instance, described her feelings of anger at her elderly uncle being burgled and his house wrecked by the burglars. She said that her knowledge of her uncle's experiences had not made her feel more at risk from the same crime, but rather had made her more aware of what she saw as injustices in the legal system: 'I felt that the magistrates don't give those people who caused the crime severe enough penalties. It's just a laughing joke what they give them, and I think they should be dealt with more severely.'

It was evident in several participants' accounts, however, that their friends' or family members' experiences did arouse a greater sense of personal vulnerability, making them realise that they could be at risk. For example, a Hobart man (TM2) described a physical assault that a friend of his had experienced in the infamous Hobart city mall, and how knowledge of this had contributed to his own fear of that place ‘because he explained to me in detail what happened, which made it very personal — more close to home’. A Wollongong woman (WF2) described how her friends' and relatives' experiences of purse-snatching and car theft had made her more wary of this crime, and she had engaged in strategies such as clenching her purse tightly when in a public space and being careful about where she parked: ‘it certainly did bring it home that it can happen to you.’ Another
Wollongong woman (WF4) said that a close friend of hers had been raped, and her friend’s recounting of this experience to her had made her feel much more vulnerable about the threat of such a crime to herself: ‘because you always think those things happen to somebody else, and then when it happens to someone who you know very well, it brings it very close to home.’ For a few participants, other people’s experiences made them feel more concerned about the safety of their family members. A Hobart man (TM9) noted, for instance how his knowledge of three different occasions of sexual assaults that had happened to women he knew had made him feel more worried not for his own safety, but for that of his daughter.

When incidents happen to close friends or family members who live in a different city or town, however, the participants tended to comment that they did not feel more vulnerable because the crime happened in another place. This was also the case if they thought that the crime had occurred in different circumstances from those in which they generally found themselves. Thus, for example, a Bathurst woman (BF10) recounted how a female friend of hers was attacked by a man when walking to a railway station in Sydney, and only just managed to fight him off and get away. The participant had been shocked by this incident, because she considered that part of Sydney (a suburban area) to be ‘low risk’, and the crime took place at 8 am in the morning, a time she considered to be generally safe. For a time, when she was living in Sydney, she felt worried about a similar crime happening to her. Nonetheless, she said that she felt ‘relatively safe’ from such incidents now that she was living in Bathurst: ‘I generally think this is a fairly safe area to be in.’

In another example, a Hobart woman (HF15) said that a friend of hers had recently been burgled. Although this friend lived only a few streets away from the participant, the incident had not made the woman feel more worried about being burgled herself. This was because, she said, her friend lived alone, and was out regularly at night time, whereas she herself lived with her family and a dog, so she thought that there would be much less opportunity for her own house to be burgled. Another friend of this participant had been physically assaulted. Here again, the woman said that this incident, while making her feel angry on behalf of her friend, did not make her feel more personally at risk, because her friend was simply ‘in the wrong place at the wrong time and not somewhere that I’d normally be’.
Previous researchers in the ‘fear of crime’ field have suggested that there is a strong relationship between perception of risk in relation to crime and how afraid people may actually feel about crime. To explore elements of this relationship between perception of risk and fear of crime, the participants were first asked to state how much at risk they felt from mugging, sexual assault, home burglary, physical assault and car theft. They were then asked to explain their ratings of risk for each crime. (Because this would have been an unwieldy process in a group discussion, as well as raising issues of sensitivity, only the interviewees were asked to give these reasons.) The participants were then asked to rate how much they worried about experiencing any of those incidents as part of their everyday life, and again the interviewees (but not the focus group participants, for the reasons stated above) were asked to explain their ratings.

Table 1 shows the percentage responses of the participants to their ratings of risk and of worry for the same crimes.

Table 1:
RATINGS OF RISK AND WORRY ABOUT SIX CRIMES, WHOLE GROUP, PERCENTAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>High Risk</th>
<th>Very Worried</th>
<th>Moderate Risk</th>
<th>Moderate Worry</th>
<th>Low Risk</th>
<th>Slightly Worried</th>
<th>No Risk</th>
<th>Not Worried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mugging</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sexual assault</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home burglary</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>murder</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical assault</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>car theft</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the data in Table 1 show, the participants in general felt far more at risk from the crimes of home burglary and car theft, and to a lesser extent, of physical assault, then they did from mugging, sexual assault and murder. (As noted above, these were also the crimes of which they were more likely to be victims previously or to know people who had been victims.) The participants were also more likely to be worried about these crimes than the others, although there was a marked difference between their risk rating and their worry. Thus, for example, 68 per cent considered themselves to be at high or moderate risk of home burglary, but only 39 per cent were very or moderately worried about this crime happening to them; 58 per cent saw themselves as being at high or moderate risk for car theft, but only 28 per cent were very or moderately worried about it. These differences in ratings of risk and assessment of worry were the case for all the crimes, with fewer people admitting that they worried about the crimes than assessing themselves to be at risk from them.
The data produced by the open-ended questions (asking for explanations of people's ratings) give some very interesting insights into how people determine their level of risk in relation to such crime and how they negotiate their feelings of fear. In response to people's ratings of relative risk and worry about crime, personal experience clearly played a major role (see also the findings of the quantitative analysis in Appendix 2). For example, one man living in rural Tasmania (TM1), who said that he thought he was 'at high risk' for home burglary, said that he based this rating on his knowledge of neighbours' experiences:

Like Glen and Melissa have been done [burgled] ten times — it's nine or ten, you know, since they've been here. Wayne and Jane — they've been done three times. And the surfe on the corner. What's his name? Stuart. Yeah, he's been done about, you know, four or five times.

As a result, he not only considers himself to be 'at high risk' for home burglary, he also worries about it a lot

   I'm sort of likely to be worried — like the whole time I was away I was worried about me bloody house, whether there was going to be anything in it when I came home. That's the first thing you see, you know, if it's been broken into or not.

Several people drew attention to what they saw as being the link between how they behaved and the risk of crime, implying that victims of crime may be in some way responsible. As one woman (TF13) noted, she did not feel at risk from or worried about physical assault because: 'I just don't draw attention to myself, to be physically assaulted. I don't ever think I would antagonise anyone to that degree.' A Sydney woman (SF25), when describing the experiences of her friend who had been sexually assaulted, argued that she thought that her friend should have been 'more aware' and that she had 'put herself in a vulnerable position — she was affected by alcohol'. It was also implied in some people's explanations that people who are victims of crime in some way have an approach to life which 'attracts' such victimisation. For example, a Bathurst woman (BF1) rated her risk as 'low' for all the crimes mentioned, and said that this was because of the belief system to which she subscribed, involving the assumption that 'you have some kind of control over the creation of your own life as it goes along — I don't put those kinds of invitations out'. A Sydney woman (SF10) similarly commented that

   I have this belief, and it's very much my own, and I know that very few people agree with me, but I feel that people somehow attract these things to them. I don't seem to attract it to me and I don't believe it's going to happen to me. And it doesn't happen to me, because I don't believe it's going to happen to me — I don't attract it to me.
A Sydney man (SM12) noted that he felt at ‘low risk’ from mugging or physical assault because ‘my attitude is if you walk around the streets with a positive attitude, then, you know, it’s not going to occur to you. It’s basically allowing people to get into your shell’.

It is interesting that the Bathurst woman (BF3) described above, who had been the victim of a number of crimes, said that she felt at ‘low risk’ of the listed crimes happening to her in the future. This was because she still felt such crimes were less likely to happen in a country area, as well as the extra security measures she was taking to protect herself. Despite this assessment of low risk, this woman had higher levels of worry, based almost purely on her previous experience. She said that she felt ‘moderately worried’ about having the crimes of physical and sexual assault and home burglary happen to her again, as well as about murder: ‘even though I don’t really think they’re likely to happen, because of my lifestyle and the precautions I take, I still worry about it.’ She was also worried that the same person would come back to take revenge on her for telling the police about him. Again she referred to the ‘unpredictable’ nature of such crimes and how one could not always protect oneself against them.

Given the importance of these assessments for people’s feelings of fear (or security), it is worthwhile examining some people’s explanations for their ratings in detail. A 27-year-old Hobart man (TM8) said that he thought that he was at ‘low risk’ of mugging because he is ‘fairly vigilant’ in being cautious about where he goes. Despite this, he commented, ‘there’s probably a vague chance that one day you might be mugged, depending where you go. I mean, you could go to another country’. He therefore rated himself as being at ‘low risk’ rather than ‘no risk’ of this crime. He rated himself as being at ‘no risk’ for sexual assault, because he was a man, and as such, he considered it extremely unlikely that he would be assaulted in such a way. For home burglary, he rated himself at ‘moderate risk’, saying that although this had never happened to him ‘if you’re out at work or something, your house is unattended so it’s probably the easiest thing’. He considered himself to be at ‘no risk’ for murder because he thought that he had not antagonised anyone in such a way as to provoke such an attack: ‘well, it would be fairly rare for someone to come and murder you out of the blue and I haven’t put anybody’s nose out of joint that much.’ He rated himself as being at ‘moderate risk’ of physical assault, however, because it was something that could suddenly happen unexpectedly: ‘you see a lot of bar fights and that sort of thing and you could always be caught up in something like that. You could be at a soccer match and there’s a riot or something.’ This man ranked his risk of experiencing car theft also as ‘moderate’, because ‘depending what sort of car you drive, somebody might think, “Oh, I like that car!”’. 
We can see in this man's explanations for his rankings of risk of crime a number of factors interacting to produce his assessments. They include his own behaviour, assessment of the sorts of places in which he usually finds himself, his gender, the extent to which he considers crimes to be common in his local area or likely to happen unexpectedly, the nature of his relations with others and assessment of the attractiveness of his personal property (specifically his car) to thieves. His assumption that as a man, he would be at little or no risk for sexual assault was echoed in most men's assessments. However, he and other men also pointed to the fact that they were often out at night alone, in situations such as pubs where people can get drunk and start fights, so considered themselves to be at some risk of physical assault or mugging. (See Appendix 2 for further discussion of the statistical nature of the relationship between gender and perceived risk of crime against the person.)

When we look at the explanations this same interviewee gave for his rankings of how worried he felt about these crimes happening to him as part of his everyday life, a related set of assumptions are brought into play. He said that he was 'slightly worried' about mugging. Although he thought it was 'fairly rare, I mean you don't tend to read about people being mugged that much', he said that he still tended to have a concern 'in the back of your mind' about the threat: 'Just, if you're out at night you might be mugged or if you're at a teller machine you could be mugged there. So you have it in the back of your mind, but it's not a huge worry'. He was not worried at all about sexual assault: 'If somebody was going to assault you they probably wouldn't sexually assault you. A bloke would bash you up and take your money, whereas if you're a female it's a different thing entirely.' He said that he was 'moderately worried' about home burglary because 'you tend to hear a lot of stuff about burglary'. He was not at all worried about murder 'cause I just can't see it happening to me out of the blue', but was 'moderately worried' about physical assault, because friends of his had experienced such a crime in the local area

_You hear of it happening. I mean, some friends of mine were assaulted, oh, a few years ago. Like they were a bit drunk at the time, but it was in the mall actually and they were staggering through the mall and these street kid types — oh, I don't know if they were street kids, but they were little people. And these two play rugby, and they thought “Oh, we’ll be right!” And they were beaten up quite badly, taken into hospital. So that’s probably why moderately worried._

For similar reasons, this man said that he was 'moderately worried' about car theft because it had happened to friends of his: ‘So that made me a bit more sensitised to car theft.’
In this man's assessments of how worried he was about such crimes happening to him, there is a strong relationship between his assessment of risk and his concern. Knowledge of other people's experiences appeared to play somewhat of an overtly larger part in his concern, however, perhaps because such knowledge brings with it a greater and vivid awareness of how crime can affect its victims physically or emotionally.

This participant's explanations and reasonings may be compared with those of a 31-year-old Bathurst woman (BF6). She said that she considered herself to be at 'moderate risk' of mugging, explaining that she is aware that it happens but tries to avoid walking alone at night and other situations where it could happen. She thought she was at 'low risk' of sexual assault because she does not put herself in situations where it might happen, between 'moderate' and 'high' risk of home burglary 'just because I've experienced it quite a few times, and it seems to be quite prevalent', 'low risk' of murder ‘because I think that would be more bad timing, bad luck, in the wrong place at the wrong time', ‘low risk' of physical assault because I try to avoid aggressive people, so I don't think that would happen very much, that could only be being in the wrong place' and 'moderate risk' of car theft because: 'I think it is a high risk because it seems to happen quite often. And you know, I've had quite a few incidents on the street I live in where we've seen people, once we saw someone trying to get into the neighbour's car.' In terms of how much she worries about these crimes happening to her, she said

Well, with mugging, maybe when I'm out at night I'd be worried, but walking around doing everyday things and doing shopping and stuff, no, I'm not worried about it at all. And that's the same as sexual assault — only if I'm out at night I might worry about it. Home burglary, well, I worry about that and you know, when I go to bed I always make sure everything's locked, or when I go out make sure everything's locked and that sort of thing. Murder, no I don't think, that would be a very slight chance of happening. Physical assault, I just don't worry about that. Like I said before, the risk of it doesn’t seem that high for me, unless someone was going out of their way to pick a fight. I usually keep out of things and I don't live with a violent person. Car theft, because it happens quite a bit, yes, I worry, but there's not much I can do about that, I don't even bother locking my car doors, because I'm worried they'll break the windows to get in anyway, and because it's not such a good car I don't bother about insurance or an alarm.

Here again, the individual's previous experiences, her assessment of contextual factors such as location, time of day or night, those with whom she associates and how attractive her property may be to thieves combine to produce her feelings of safety or danger.
Only a minority of participants in the study appeared to be very fearful about crime. One was the Bathurst woman (BF3), described above, who been the victim of violent crime in her own home that had severely undermined her sense of security. Another very fearful person was a 23-year-old Sydney woman (SF6), who appeared to have developed a fearful approach because of a number of incidents that had happened to her or her friends. She said she had been the victim of an incident of an attempted mugging when in the suburb of Glebe in the year preceding the interview. Returning to her car alone at about 9.30 pm after picking up some take-away food, she was confronted by a group of 15- or 16-year-old Aboriginal boys, who proceeded to call out abusive comments to her and tried to grab her wallet. When she refused to let go of her wallet, one of the boys kicked her, and then they ran away. This experience, she said, happening ‘in a very public place — just off a major road’ had made her very shaken and insecure about walking alone at night in parts of Sydney: ‘I didn’t report it or anything, but I was really frightened. I was quite hysterical. I got in the car straight away and rang [her boyfriend] and he came and picked me up from there because I was just too shaken up to drive.’

This woman’s car had been broken into five times in the past two years, and when living in the suburb of Beecroft her house had been burgled twice. These incidents, she said, all made her feel fearful of these crimes happening to her again. She now does not walk alone at night unless she considered the area to be ‘safe and well-lit’, and ensures that she parks her car in such places rather than dark, deserted places. When she has to walk alone at night, she tries to walk in the middle of the road rather than on the pavement because the light from the street lights makes her feel safer. A friend of hers had recently been sexually assaulted, and this had made her feel more frightened about such a crime happening to her

I mean, that just frightened me all over again. You know, I just thought, “Oh my God, how easy it is!” She lives in Sydney and she was just walking home from Wynyard Station and she was attacked. And it’s just really frightening ‘cause it’s just so easy. You know, I mean it wasn’t like she was walking down back streets or anything horrible like that.

When this participant was asked how much at risk of the six crimes she considered herself to be, she said that with the exception of murder, she was ‘at high risk’ of all of them, and ‘constantly worried’ about them, particularly physical and sexual assault. She also said later that she ‘strongly agreed’ that she worried about being a victim of crime. She related her assessment of risk not only to her previous experiences, but also her gender and physical characteristics. She said that the fact that she was a woman, very slightly built, and young, meant that she felt physically vulnerable to attacks by men. She said that she is constantly harassed by men when walking around in public spaces.
Being a young female I feel at high risk for sexual assault, definitely. You know, just walking round the streets at night. And I’m constantly getting comments from guys and that scares me. I mean it aggravates me at the same time, but it scares me, that’s the main thing it does when they say things to me. I get really frightened because I think you know that’s where [assault] begins really.

This young woman’s very fearful responses may be compared with another Sydney woman (SF7) who, at 83, is 60 years older. This elderly woman had not been the victim of any of the listed crimes, and could not think of any of her friends or relatives who had. She said that she was at ‘low risk’ of mugging because during the day she only made short trips to the shops, always in her car, she did not tend to go out at night and did not walk about much outside because she has a bad knee, so ‘I’m not available a great deal for mugging’. She felt she was at ‘low risk’ of physical and sexual assault for the same reason, and did not feel at risk from home burglary because she had a very good security system. As a result, she said, she was not worried at all about these crimes: ‘It doesn't concern me. I feel confident.’ This woman lives in the wealthy suburb of Woollahra, and said that this makes her feel more ‘confident’ about her safety than if she lived in the western suburbs of Sydney, where she thinks there is more crime.

The concept of fate also tended to emerge when people were describing their chances of being the victim of crime, and this is itself mediated through assessments of location, personal experiences and others’ experiences and so on. As a Wollongong man (WM3) commented, home burglary is ‘part of living in the late twentieth century I think. It’s just one of those things that sooner or later happens to a lot of people, and I just feel I’ve been lucky so far’. The words of a Wollongong woman (WF2) echoed these sentiments: ‘I tend to think that we’re in the minority the people that haven’t been burgled, we’re in the minority, and you just sort of waiting, when is our turn going to be?’ The alternative to this, of course, is a person’s assessment that the probability of the crime is low, and that therefore she or he was at low risk. As a man living in rural Tasmania (TM2) commented

A lot of stuff is playing by averages isn’t it, playing by the numbers? I mean, there’s not many cars stolen in this area, as far as I know, in fifteen years. There’s been one broken into, as far as I know, in fifteen years. I guess you could become very paranoid about locking your car every night, and certainly I’d do that if I lived in the city, or in the suburbs even. But being outside the suburbs, it somehow seems as though you don’t need to do that, so I don’t consider it to be a huge risk.
Because of this assessment of low risk, he said: ‘I never worry about my car being pinched from my yard. The only time I think about it is when I go into town [Hobart] to have a meal’. In contrast, a Sydney man (SM5) said that he considered himself to be at ‘high risk’ of car theft and was ‘very worried’ about this crime. He lived in an area where there was a high rate of car theft, and he considered his car to be a valuable possession and attractive to thieves.

If I was driving an old car, like an old Datsun or something like that, I wouldn't worry about it because it's only worth about $1,000. And if someone stole it they'd probably just go for a joy ride. But now my car is worth about $20,000, and for me it's a lot of money, it's one of my assets and investments. And if that gets stolen, that is a lot of loss for me. That makes me worried a lot.

This man had taken several expensive precautions to protect his car, installing a car alarm and using a steering lock, and he often checked outside his house if he heard a strange noise at night to ensure that no-one was trying to steal it.

Table 1 shows that people are more likely to rate themselves of ‘low risk’ of less common crimes than ‘no risk’. Many participants, while noting that some crimes, such as murder and violent assault, were very unlikely to happen to them, explained their rating of the likelihood of being a victim as being ‘low’ rather than non-existent stemmed from their belief that because such crimes are known to happen sometimes, then they may well happen to them one day if they are particularly unlucky. As a Sydney man (SM5) noted of his rating of the risk of murder.

Well, I mean every day you hear on the news about somebody getting murdered, or somebody got a gun and accidentally on the rampage. And there’s obviously road rage, where people run over pedestrians or something like that. So I would say it’s going to be a low risk, but it’s hard to say.

For some participants, their belief that ‘the luck of the draw’ could result in them being a victim of such crimes led to a certain amount of worry. For instance, a Sydney woman (SF8) said that she worried about being a victim of crime, particularly violent assault: ‘I don’t know that it will happen to me but it happens to some people so chances are that, like you might win the lottery. You might win, you might be a victim of crime, a violent crime. It’s the same odds.’ For others, however, the concept of fate allowed them to simply approach the risk of crime with relative lack of concern. A Wollongong woman (WF5), for example, noted that even though she felt at ‘moderate risk’ from crimes such as mugging and physical assault, she was only ‘slightly worried’ about these crimes happening to her as part of her everyday life because: ‘As long as I take care, there’s no real point in worrying. There’s not much I can do about it if it suddenly just happens. If I’ve taken every precaution I can, then worrying about it before it’s happened isn’t going to make any difference.’
This woman’s explanations suggest that some people would rather approach life without worrying about crime, and deliberately seek to expunge such fear from their thoughts. This was also evident in the words of a Hobart woman (TF13), who noted that she does not worry about crime ‘at all’ as part of her everyday life. She said that she engages in activities to protect her safety, but these have become habitual rather than the outcome of a strong conscious sense of fear.

*Well, I would still do commonsense safety procedures like locking up and things like that, but you do it without thinking. And like, when I lock the door I’m not following through because the house is going to be burgled if I don’t lock the door or whatever. So in everyday life it doesn’t really enter into my mind.*

In another example, an elderly Sydney woman (SF1) noted early in the interview that she was ‘very afraid’ of walking around her neighbourhood at night, because of her awareness of her physical vulnerability to attackers, and subsequently avoided doing so. When, however, she was asked later in the interview to rate how much ‘at risk’ she was from the six crimes, and how worried she felt about them, she said that she thought that she was at ‘low risk’ from all of the crimes except car theft, which she rated a ‘moderate risk’ for the times that she parked her car in the city. She asserted that even though she was aware of her physical vulnerability, she did not let this worry her, but simply took steps to avoid being placed at risk.

*Look, I have to say I’m not at all worried, not about any of [those crimes], I really don’t think about it. I do take the precaution of seeing I’m locked in and I don’t open the door to anyone.*

(Interviewer): So you think that reduces your worry, because you take all the steps you can take?

*Yes, that’s right, if you’ve done everything you think is possible to avoid a situation, then if it happens, it happens, doesn’t it? I’d probably say, “Well, it was written.”*

According to this logic, crime strikes randomly. Therefore, it is believed that one can do certain things to protect oneself against crime, but these strategies are not fail-safe: crime cannot always be predicted and therefore prevented.

Many people said that they were more worried about being the victim of a physical attack than being the victim of a property crime, even though they may have rated themselves as being at ‘low risk’ from assault. A Wollongong woman (WF4), for example, said that she did not feel at risk from sexual or physical assault because ‘I think I don’t put myself in the situation where that might happen. I’m relatively careful. While I don’t let the fear stop me doing things, I don’t think I do silly things’. Nonetheless, she did worry about such crimes.
because she found the idea of assault to the person as being far more serious than property crimes: ‘I’d be much more affected by mugging, sexual assault and murder or physical assault than I would be by home burglary or car theft.’

Another Wollongong woman (WF8) who had previously been the victim of both sexual and physical assault, and whose female partner had also been the victim of assault, said that she worried far more about assault happening to her again than she did about theft of her property:

> It worries me the most because it’s an attack to my body and my soul and it’s not something that you can go to a shop and buy new ones. If someone steals your car it’s sad, but six months down the track you’ll get a loan and buy a new one, so you’ll move on. But if someone really hurts you physically you might end up scarred the rest of your life. It’s nothing you can do about it so you can’t buy a new body, a new soul. That’s why, I guess, it’s really terrible.

Similar explanations were provided by a middle-aged Sydney woman (SF8), who thought that she was at ‘low risk’ of being mugged or the victim of physical assault because ‘I don’t anticipate that it’s going to happen, I don’t think about it happening’. She was, however, ‘very worried’ about these crimes happening to her, because ‘it’s just the thing you fear most I think’. In contrast, she thought that she was at ‘low risk’ of car theft because after having experienced this crime, she had put a security alarm system in the car, and now thought that it was less likely to be stolen. She was therefore ‘not at all worried’ about car theft. She rated herself as being at ‘moderate risk’ of home burglary because she considered the suburb in which she lived as being ‘a high burglary area’, but was only ‘slightly worried’ about this crime because it did not involve physical violence.

**DANGER IN AUSTRALIA AND ITS CITIES AND TOWNS**

The final set of closed-ended questions accompanied by open-ended questions was comprised of a list of opinion statements to which the participants were asked to indicate the strength of their agreement. The first three statements — ‘Australia has become a more dangerous society to live in’, ‘Big cities in Australia are more dangerous than they used to be’ and ‘Small towns in Australia are more dangerous than they used to be’ — were designed to elicit the participants’ perceptions of the general state of Australian society and urban landscapes in terms of danger and how problems could be tackled. Once the participants had given their answer to the closed-ended question, they were asked to explain why they had responded in such a way, what they thought had happened to make Australia/big cities/small towns more or less dangerous, and what they thought could be done to make them safer.
In response to the statement ‘Australia has become a more dangerous society to live in’, there was generally agreement across the group: 80 per cent strongly agreed or agreed. When explaining why they agreed, many people tended to make reference specifically to their belief that crimes had increased in relation to their belief that Australia had become more dangerous. Participants referred to the days when they were children, and how crimes had appeared to have increased in number since then, leading to people becoming more worried about crimes such as burglaries, murder, muggings, home invasion and car theft.

*In the late ’60s or the very early ’70s, things weren’t the way they are now. Even in Sydney, I think, people felt fairly secure. I mean, I can’t ever recall having heard of any neighbours or anybody living around us who was ever robbed. I mean it just didn’t seem to happen then, or if it did, it was pretty rare and didn’t rate much of a mention. But certainly now they are very security conscious.* (WM14)

Some people noted that the news media were full of stories about crime, and that suggested to them that the situation had grown worse in Australia in relation to the risk of crime.

*I think because of the number and type of crimes that are being committed daily, I have become aware lately, because I listen to the news at seven o’clock every morning, that I suppose six mornings out of seven the news opens with a murder or a physical attack, bodily harm, arson, something really nasty.* (SF1)

Most of the participants pointed to general economic decline and unemployment as inciting people to commit crimes in order to support themselves.

*I think because of unemployment and so on, I just think that there are more people out there, there are more ‘have nots’ out there and more ‘have nots’ without very much to do and who resent the people who have. The frustration that people must experience when their life is so unsatisfying, so purposeless.* (WM4)

People often referred to generalised feelings of anger or despair in the general community and a loss of the spirit of community as contributing to a greater propensity for random violence and crime.

*There’s a lot of pain in the young people, a lot of hurt, and a lot of anger. And so they’re really just, a lot of people who are potentially you know, going to commit these crimes, are just out for themselves. They’re really no longer growing up with a sense of neighbourhood, with a sense of belonging to a community.* (SF17)
Again several participants harkened nostalgically back to the days when they were children, when things seemed safer and more secure.

Well, there’s a lot of anger out there I suppose. You know, you tend to find that, since the community spirit isn’t quite what it used to be I suppose. Well, when I was a kid I lived in a small suburb, and you tended to know everybody. But we don’t know everybody where we live now. (TM8)

The problem of people having little to do with their days — specifically in relation to young people and the unemployed — was very commonly identified as a cause of crime.

It’s not the fault of the people that are unemployed, it’s the fact that they’ve got to do something with their time, and there’s not enough, specially in Tasmania, to amuse themselves. So it reverts to being a more dangerous society. (TF12)

The link between people’s addiction to illicit drug use and crime and violence was frequently made: ‘I think there’s a lot of crime relating to an increase in the hard drug use, where people need to steal things to support their habit’ (SM18).

The notion that a strong and committed sense of principles and morality had broken down in recent times was also put forward as an explanation for increasing danger in Australian society.

I guess the breakdown of religious belief plays a part, because you know, there isn’t that sense of morality. A lot of people don’t have any morals. And that’s quite acceptable in the ’90s, not to have morals. There’s not that sense of concern for your fellow human being. You know, I mean if you harm them, not sort of thinking about how they might, how that’ll affect their lives, like you maim them, for example, or kill them. (SF11)

Related to such explanations were those that referred to ‘changing values’, ‘the cult of the individual’, the ‘selfish society’ and people’s loss of respect for each other and for others’ property: ‘I suppose in this day and age people are less likely to want to become involved in a situation. I mean, I think people run from it because of just a lack of caring and “Oh, I don’t want to get involved” or whatever’ (SM12).

Several participants raised the issue of young people having less guidance and discipline in their lives compared with past eras as a reason for why they might turn to crime when they grew older. They suggested that young people today lacked the strong sense of morality and principles that previous generations had possessed: ‘I just think it’s the generation now, and I just don’t think that they’ve got any morals about anything’ (WF10). The notion that ‘things have become worse’ because of lack of disciplining of children in the context of the family and the school was particularly evident in the arguments of those who identified...
children's upbringing as a source of crime. As one participant in the Hobart older people's discussion group observed: ‘Today, I mean everybody gets everything, lots of the youngsters they get everything they want. Now in our days we didn't have that. I mean, if you wanted something you had to earn it.’ These older people went on to argue for stricter discipline exerted upon children at home and at school to control bad behaviour that might eventually lead to a child becoming a criminal. Members of the Sydney western suburbs group (who were all aged in their 20s or 30s) also agreed, noting that since corporal punishment had been abolished in schools, ‘there is no discipline, there is no respect... there's no fear of God to be put into those kids anymore’, as one participant put it.

Interestingly enough, several young people shared this view. For instance, a young people's discussion group in Hobart referred to their perception that many young people were becoming alienated and disenchanted with life because of such phenomena as broken homes and high rates of unemployment, and lacked strong principles or belief systems for how to conduct their lives. They argued that some young people therefore turned to crime, to ‘take out’ their frustrations and worries violently on others.

_They just get frustrated by all the problems that they are surrounded by._

_Unemployed parents, divorce and problems like that and they just want to take it out on somebody. And then there’s gangs and stuff._

_I think the whole society departed from a known value system to some extent. It’s like people don’t know where they stand, kids don’t know what they are going to do when they grow up, they don’t know what they believe about themselves about society, about other people. They don’t know what’s right and wrong anymore._

_I think they do care and they express it through crime often. It’s like, well, they’re testing their boundaries. They are saying “What can I do, what can I get away with?” and “I’m angry about things that have happened to me.”_

The participants in this group went on to argue that some young people they knew of who were involved in criminal activities did so because they had ‘nothing else to brag about’, as their self-esteem was so low.

Several participants blamed what they saw as excessive violence in the mass media — particularly television — as a cause of violence in the community among younger people.

_I think that a lot of kids’ anti-social and violent behaviour stems from what they see on television and what they see in the movies they watch in their bedrooms when their parents think they’re doing their homework. Because a lot of movies that they see just appall me, the amount of violence that on. I think those things that kids are exposed to in the media might affect them later on. (WM14)
The minority of people who disagreed that Australia had become a more dangerous place again tended to draw on their memories of youth in comparing today’s society with that of previous times:

I think all in all it’s probably safer in a way. I don’t think it’s institutionalised violence, but the cultural violence associated with, certainly I saw around me and felt growing up, doesn’t seem to be there now. When I was a kid there were gangs in surrounding suburbs and neighbouring areas and if you were out at night and their gang got you you’d probably get beaten up. So I don’t know if there’s such things here now but you know, they certainly don’t trouble me ... I grew up in Melbourne in a big city. I suppose [crime is] always a possibility there. But I don’t feel any less safe on the streets of Melbourne than I did when I was 25. No, I mean I think it’s less. (TM9)

Members of the Sydney older people's group, who were aged between 66 and 75, recalled the ‘tough times’ of the Depression and world wars of their youth to argue that things were not as bad in contemporary times as younger people thought they were: ‘They have no idea what tough means!’ Others argued that perceptions that Australia has become more dangerous are different from the ‘reality’. As a woman in the Hobart women’s discussion group asserted: ‘I agree that there’s a perception that Australia has become more dangerous but I don’t know that it actually has or not, or whether it’s just that people think it has.’ She said that she thought the mass media had contributed to this perception. Another woman in that group drew attention to statistics she had seen concerning the disparity between perception that crime had risen and actual crime statistics:

I vaguely recall some figures I read probably within the last year or so. They were Bureau of Statistic figures on actual crime and it hasn’t risen. Some of the more violent crimes have gone down, car thefts have gone up, but actual violence against people crimes had not risen. And I agree with [other group participant], a lot of it’s how the media deals with it. Thirty, 40 years ago perhaps there was a different — perhaps the media dealt with it differently. It wasn’t as pronounced in television and radio and newspapers. So I think there’s more of a perception that there’s more crime than the fact that there actually is. Although there’s certainly more car theft and those thefts on property have gone up, but not on people. So just sort of knowing that, I don’t feel that there is more crime, I feel that there’s a perception that there’s more crime.

A participant in the Sydney women’s discussion group drew attention to her belief that crime such as sexual assault was probably reported to the police much more in the present day compared with past eras, and this could give the impression that the rates of such crimes had risen.
There was also agreement among the majority of participants (86 per cent) that big cities in Australia had become more dangerous. Here the main focus was on the alienation and loss of community spirit in urban areas, the crimes and violence caused by the illicit drug trade and what was seen to be the growing gap between the rich and poor. People also made reference to big cities becoming even larger, resulting in a greater mass of people having to live together and thus creating more tensions and flashpoints for violence: ‘There's more people and more crowding and more cars, more road rage, more stress, for the same reasons. Everyone's working harder. Big cities are manic places’ (Hobart women's discussion group).

Reference was made to big cities drawing people seeking employment who could then not find work, resulting in the problems caused by unemployment being exacerbated in cities

There are more young people with nothing to do hanging around the cities than there were before. And I would say this is a result of more unemployment that the young people have got these days. So people with no jobs are hanging around, I mean, usually ends up leading to trouble and I think they tend to congregate ... the influx of youth with nothing to do in the city would lead me to think that they are a bit more dangerous than they used to be. (TF5)

A small number of participants also associated what they perceived to be a higher crime rate with increased immigration to Australia, arguing that people from particularly Asian countries were turning to crime when they arrived in Australia. This was an issue that participants in the Bathurst women's discussion group raised

This is going to sound racist, and I don’t mean it to at all, because I’m not a racist, I actually have an Aboriginal godchild, but I do believe that the immigration policy that we’ve had, and the lax security, that we have allowed Asian gangs to infiltrate our country. And I think they are behind a lot of the crime in Sydney.

They’ve proven that. Look at the Koreans, and the gangs, there are so many gangland killings, aren’t there? Look around Cabramatta and whatever.

Members of the Sydney older people's group (all of whom were Australian born and from an English-speaking background) were also somewhat negative about immigration: ‘You have only got to walk down the street in Sydney and look at the people that you pass. How some of them ever got into Australia, I wouldn’t know — dreadful types — evil looking types!’ They later went on to say that they believed that people who were not ‘native Australians’ had not been imbued with the same ‘ethic’ as people who were Australian-born, and that high levels of
immigration had resulted in people coming into the country who turned to crime to support themselves. The participants in the Wollongong young people's group thought that racism, or distinction between ethnic groups, was at the heart of the crime to which they felt most vulnerable: physical assault on the part of ‘homie’ gangs. As one participant argued: ‘most of the gangs are racist. Like one group say they're going to bash people who are Asians, just because they're Asians. I think racism has a lot to do with crime.’

There was much less agreement among the participants that small towns in Australia had become more dangerous: only 56 per cent strongly agreed or agreed. Those who agreed gave reasons relating to the unemployment problem in small towns and the lack of activities for young people and the unemployed. Some of those who were neutral or disagreed argued that small towns appeared to have changed little in past years (particularly when compared with large cities)

> Having been raised in a small country town and having gone back there on a regular basis over the past 20 years, 30 years, I have to say that it’s the same. The town’s the same, the people are the same — just as friendly. There’s the same amount of people doing wheelies in the streets. There’s the same amount of fights in the pub, in fact probably even less fights in the pubs these days. You don’t get hit on the head with bottles and stuff any more, usually. (TM2)

Others argued that because of their smaller populations, there was less source of tension. A Sydney woman (SF10) who had lived in the New South Wales country town of Albury noted, for example, that ‘in Albury we felt so much safer. I mean, we would say something could go wrong in Albury but it’s not as likely. The percentage wouldn't be nearly as likely as it would walking in Redfern or inner city Sydney somewhere, because there’s fewer people’.

Several people saw small towns as having a greater sense of community because they were smaller and more insular than the more anonymous big cities, and people knew each other

> It’s a case where everybody knows everybody. If you do something you can’t get away with it. I had a friend living in a town and he did something, and three minutes later the cops were there to pick him up for it, because they knew who he was and where he lived. Whereas in the city it’s just so hard, we got all the suburbs, and there can’t be a quick response unless they’re right there near the incident. (SM5)

Those people who agreed that small towns had become more dangerous drew attention to their belief that social problems were even worse in such places because of such factors as the rural recession, causing unemployment and boredom for young people and violence
I think small towns in Australia are in real trouble. And I think if anything, the rate of danger, if you like, is probably greater than cities because of despair in the country town. They just see everything slipping away from under them. They feel they’re going backwards faster than forwards, I would think. And this is just my impression, that because of frustration and anger directed against things that you can’t control, I think it could manifest itself into the violence in the family. (Hobart women’s discussion group)

I think in the country it’s more boredom, of kids, of young people. Not all young people, of course, but young people getting into trouble for want of something to do. (WF2)

In terms of what they thought could be done to make Australia and its cities and towns safer, the majority of participants put forward socio-economic solutions, ‘law-and-order’ solutions, surveillance solutions, community solutions and activity solutions. The socio-economic solutions were in response to participants’ perceptions that anger, violence and crime are the direct outcome of the poverty caused by long-termed unemployment. The solution to this, it was argued, is to deal directly with unemployment somehow or provide more social welfare support.

The federal government, it could look at its economic policies, I think, and be more considered about the way their economic policies can disadvantage certain sections of society. And not look at economic growth as the be-all and end-all, but be more concerned with social capital, looking at welfare policies, looking at the way our society runs and not always trying to put profit before people. (WF13)

Several people took an approach that was influenced by a left-wing political orientation in arguing that the sources of crime are structural and related to social inequalities. As a result, they argued, governments must focus more attention at developing support for dispossessed and alienated groups, rather than taking an individualistic, ‘blame the victim’ approach.

You need a better socialist structure. I mean it’s becoming more and more, just politically to the right. The individual, the you look after yourself, you know, everyone’s out for themselves. There are other countries in the world that do that differently where there’s a social sort of safety net, a support structure that works all the way through the workforce, the education system, it just goes through the fabric. And I just think we’re heading down the road of the USA where it’s not like that. (Hobart women’s discussion group)

The second type of solution, those involving ‘law-and-order’ problems, included propositions that illicit drugs such as heroin should be legalised, thus alleviating the crime and violence that are seen to be the outcome of users’ desperation to acquire their drugs.
They’ve got a whole lot of people in gaol because of drug problems. And the dealers wouldn’t be in there if drugs were legal, because they’d be sold at legal places. So we wouldn’t have drug dealers in gaol, they’d have to find something else to do. And the people who are in there for drug abuse would have somewhere legal to go and get drugs and have it supervised, and they wouldn’t be in danger. Those people would all be gainfully employed. We need more money in rehabilitation and less money in putting people in gaol. (BF3)

In this category also was the solution of addressing what was seen to the inequities in the criminal justice system, so that criminals were ‘properly’ punished for their crimes

People just get away with a lot more too now, like in the courts and stuff. I don’t know, sometimes I just think they don’t even want to put them into jail. And the gaols, I think, should be a lot harder than what they are now. Like, they should be back to what they were in the olden days, when it was an unpleasant place to go to. (WF6)

Some people mentioned gun licensing laws as a means of reducing the danger posed by ready access to guns

Well, I think the new gun licensing laws that they brought in definitely should make it more, possibly not more difficult for a criminal to obtain a gun, but probably restrict access of many people to guns. And so maybe that’ll reduce the incidents of shootings, not by criminals, but by people who — like crimes of passion and things like that. (TF5)

The ‘surveillance’ solution raised the issue of the need for greater surveillance of open spaces, particularly in areas of cities which were seen to be places where dangerous groups congregated and harassed other citizens. This involved greater police presence in areas that participants found threatening, as well as the use of video cameras in places such as malls and train stations. Some participants argued that people don’t know the police as well as they used to, and police were not seen to be part of the community as much as they once were. They contended that if the police could regain some more visibility within communities, than people’s fear of crime might be lessened. The need for a greater police presence was discussed by participants in a young people’s focus group in Hobart

I think that police aren’t — we just don’t know them as much as it seems like people used to know them. Like when police used to go on the beat and things like that. I’ve got English parents, but you know it seems like especially in the small towns they’d know who the policeman was, and policemen would go around schools and things like that. And I think authority was more respected because they were people’s friends and they said, “Okay we’re here to look after you.” But it sort of seems like now —
There is a lot of corruption now too.

Like they have put that new police thing [booth] in the mall but you don’t see policemen around that often or there not there when you need them. You see them walking around the mall in the middle of the day and then you walk down there at 11 at night and there is no one around and so I think they could make themselves more available.

More of a police presence. Friendlier.

Yeah.

Friendly police presence.

A Sydney youth (SM2) also supported the idea of more police presence of public spaces used by young people. He was worried about the threat of mugging and physical assault, and thought that having more police patrolling the areas he thought were particularly dangerous, like Hyde Park, Pitt Street and George Street, where he said that ‘hoods’ and ‘homies’ tended to congregate, would make him feel a lot safer when walking in those areas.

Many of the Tasmanian participants noted that the introduction of surveillance cameras at the city mall (a place, as noted above, which was seen to be one of the most dangerous in terms of crime in Hobart), had been a positive step in reducing their fear of entering that space.

Well I don’t believe in using police forces as a solution, because I think the solution’s deeper than that. That can work, and it does work obviously in the Hobart mall, where they’ve got that surveillance thing going there. That’s reduced the level of threat that people feel there, it’s more of a people’s place now than it used to be, since they put those cameras in there. (TM10)

A Sydney man (SM15) who often visited Cabramatta also spoke approvingly of the installation of video cameras in public places in that suburb as a means of making people feel safer.

The ‘community’ solution put forward was in relation to people’s sense that people had become more mobile, not staying in areas long and getting to know their neighbours, that society was breaking down, becoming too focused on individuals, and that a sense of community was being lost. Participants argued that to deal with crime and fear of crime, a greater sense of community was needed, involving people feeling more empowered to have a say in the system, working together as a group: ‘A sense of everybody having a feeling of responsibility for their neighbour and for the people around them’ as a participant in the Hobart women’s discussion group put it. One participant in the Sydney women’s focus group noted that her neighbours had held a street party, and she has found this occasion a ‘terrific’ way of meeting and getting to know her neighbours and encouraging a sense of community. This discussion group then went on to engage in a collective nostalgia about previous times when neighbours knew each other and had a strong sense of community and friendship.
Isn’t it good when you walk down your street next week, and you actually know people?

That’s right.

The street in Balmain, when Sarah was very little, was fantastic. Everybody in that street knew each other, all the kids were in and out of each other’s houses, they all knew the old couple up the road who would always be finding them toys. And you know, Halloween, they’d all get together and go around the neighbourhood trick or treating and it was lovely.

Where I grew up it was like that.

You knew everybody.

Cracker night, everybody from the neighbourhood would come —

Christmas, everybody’s mum would make things to give everybody for Christmas.

Jars of jam were going back and forth all over the place.

People putting forward the ‘community’ solution tended to be against the notion of surveillance and harsher penalties for crimes, arguing that these simply exacerbated the existing problem and did not deal with its underlying causes. Some participants referred to the need to make people feel more in control, give them more say and to change their attitudes to more positive ones so that they would feel less inclined to behave in destructive or criminal ways. A Tasmanian man (TM2) gave a concrete example of what he meant by this.

It all comes down to changing people’s attitudes, and if they feel, I guess, that they have some ownership of the system, they would be more prepared to abide by it. So mainly the answer is to give more people more say. So that a good example is people that write into the paper, to the editorial and say, into the letters page, and say, you know, have a go at all these skateboarders in town, racing around the place having a wonderful time. And I saw one letter recently that said why not turn Franklin’s Square into a big skateboard ramp. And that’s one of the best ideas that’s been in the paper for years. Put a skateboard ramp in Franklin’s Square so that the cops spend their time not chasing the kids off the streets, off the footpaths knocking old grannies over, but everybody can see these kids doing amazing things at the skateboard ramp. And so it’s just a shift in the perception of how we see it. So we should have more situations where people can have input into the system that we all have to abide by.
The ‘activity’ solution was raised in relation to the problem that was identified as young people and the unemployed having too little to do, and therefore turning to crime and violence as a source of entertainment and thrills. It was thought by people who proposed this solution that giving such groups access to more facilities and activities would ‘get them off the streets’ and divert their attention and energies in less destructive ways.

Well, involve more things for unemployed or street kids and things like that to be able to do to keep them off the streets and make the place a better, make it more safer to live in... Probably more employment and more things to amuse themselves to be able to do. You know like, picture theatres or like basketball courts or something where they can all communicate and have a game of basketball or, like community centres or something where they can go and amuse themselves. (TF12)

CRIME RATES AND WORRY ABOUT VICTIMISATION

The remaining six opinion questions were all specifically about crime. They included the following: ‘Crime rates have been rising in Australia’, ‘There is a high rate of crime in my local area compared with other areas in Australia’, ‘I worry about being a victim of crime’, ‘I worry about my children becoming a victim of crime’ (for those who have children), ‘I worry about my children when they go out at night’ (for those who have teenage children), ‘I worry about my partner becoming a victim of crime’ (for those who have a partner) and ‘I worry about my parent/s becoming a victim of crime’ (for those who have at least one parent still living). These questions were posed to determine general perceptions of the prevalence of crime in Australia and participants’ local area and how afraid they felt about personally being a victim of crime or those close to them being a victim. Here again, these closed-ended questions, to which participants were asked to indicate the strength of their agreement, were all accompanied by a set of open-ended questions asking them to explain their answer and to give details about how they thought conditions could be made safer or what strategies they adopted to deal with their worries.

In response to the question ‘Crime rates have been rising in Australia’, most people (77 per cent) agreed. When giving reasons for their response, some people made reference to their perceptions that rising crime rates are related to societal breakdown, conditions such as high unemployment and incivility in general.

I think with people unemployed, if you’re unemployed for two years you start getting incredibly resentful. I could imagine that if I saw some people with belongings and for long enough you were deprived of them, you could start putting a coin across somebody’s smart car or whatever. I think you could get incredibly resentful. (SM12)
Again, it was commonly noted by the participants that crime was receiving a high degree of attention in the news media, giving them the impression that things were getting worse.

Whenever I turn on the news, all I hear is “Oh, this happened today, it's all bad news, it's all crime.” And like, fair enough, that’s the news, but it’s you know makes you worry that today somebody had an argument and it ended up in a shooting, or somebody robbed a bank. You don’t hear that the crime rate is low. (SM5)

The notion that ‘more people equals more crime’ was also put forward again

I mean you’d have to say because there’s more people. I mean crime can be like from graffiti to jaywalking to murder. Because you’ve got more people you've probably got more crime. (TM8)

The belief that the ‘system’ is too lenient on criminals was also expressed as a rationale for why people think that crime rates are rising in Australia

Sometimes I think the justice system, a lot of the time the punishment doesn’t fit the crime. Where you get people who inflict grievous bodily harm on people and they ruin their lives and then they do 12 months [in gaol] ... Gaol sentences don’t seem to work. (WM15)

The minority of participants who disagreed or who said that they were ‘neutral’ on this question again pointed to what they saw as sensationalism in the mass media in terms of exaggerating the risks of crime

I think I’m sort of neutral on that one because I think our perceptions are so influenced by the media that you just don’t know what to believe. And if I look at my own particular circumstance and all the people I know and who’s ever been burgled and that sort of thing, I think “Well gee, there’s no crime in my sort of circle.” But then you look at the newspapers and you see TV and there’s so much emphasis given to it that you don’t really know. (Hobart women’s discussion group)

Most people strongly disagreed or disagreed (73 per cent) that their local area had a high rate of crime compared with other areas in Australia. Wollongong participants tended to compare their city with Sydney favourably in terms of crime rates, arguing that Wollongong was safer than particular areas in Sydney, such as the western suburbs, Cabramatta and Kings Cross. Some Wollongong residents, however, thought that their city had a higher rate of crime than other places because of its working-class population and large numbers of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. For example, one Wollongong man (WM7), himself from an Anglo-Australian background, argued that young men from Italian and Greek backgrounds in that city tended to ‘hunt in packs’, engaging in
violence against other young people. A Wollongong woman who was born in Croatia (WF8), however, noted that she feels safer in Wollongong because there is a high proportion of immigrants from non-English-speaking background who support each other and provide a sense of community.

People in Sydney tended to say that their local area had a lower rate of crime than other areas, and that they felt most unsafe when in city areas, for example, near office buildings where they work, at night than in their neighbourhood. Participants in the Sydney western suburbs group commented on others' perception that the western suburbs had a higher rate of crime than other areas of Sydney because of its association with working-class and unemployed people. They denied that this was the case, arguing that the mass media tends to highlight crime in the western suburbs even though just as much crime is occurring in wealthier areas of Sydney. As one man recounted: 'My wife has parents in Canberra and when they found out we moved to Blacktown [in the western suburbs] it was like, “Oh no, you’re not moving there are you? That’s really bad!” When it isn’t. Canberra has a very high crime rate as well.'

Some people who lived in Sydney suburbs such as Bondi, Darlinghurst and Leichhardt, however, said that they were aware of higher rates of crime in their suburb than other suburbs. As a man (SM12) living in Darlinghurst noted

> When you get your car insured, they ask your postcode and you say it’s 2010, which is Darlinghurst. And they always say “Oh, OK” — like crank it up. And when I moved from Paddington to Darlinghurst I actually had to pay a supplement on my insurance because I changed postcodes so there is obviously a view that Darlinghurst is a very, or you know, fairly unsafe area.

People living in Tasmania, either in rural areas or Hobart, tended to argue that their area had a lower rate of crime than other areas in Australia. For some Tasmanians in rural areas, a sense of community in their area, the idea that because they lived in a small town people knew each other, and the notion that ‘everyone looks out for each other’ was given as the reason why they did not have a high rate of crime

> Rather than anything else, I think it’s a community thing. Most people know each other, or know of each other. We know who the thieves are and quite often they’re caught. So I guess it’s a small community attitude more than just programs like Neighbourhood Watch and stuff. (TM2)

When asked to specify what sorts of crimes happened in their local area, people tended to mention theft, break-and-enter crimes and car theft. They based their knowledge largely on word-of-mouth from others living in the area and from reading the local newspaper, and less commonly, on personal experience of such crimes. One of the participants in the Sydney western suburbs group said that
she found a local newsletter that was distributed to be very informative in terms of giving information about crime in the local area: ‘It’s really interesting. I tend to be more informed in that. I find it’s really interesting, to see what’s happening.’

When asked how they thought how their local area could be made safer in terms of crime, people talked about such strategies as ensuring that ‘undesirable’ types of people were not allowed in. One Hobart woman (TF12), for example, said that she thought that crime had risen in her local area since the Housing Commission had built residences there

*I just think our area was fine until they put a Housing Commission area in the middle of Mount Nelson. And now this crime has only just eventuated since the Housing Commission area has been built around near our area. This happened probably about, 10 years ago, or 15 years ago? Something like that. Beforehand everybody felt safe, now you just don’t feel safe anymore. I just think — I know I shouldn’t say it and I shouldn’t be discriminating or whatever ‘cause people have to live somewhere — but when people are paying out fortunes for their block of land and for their homes that’s just wrong to see a Housing Commission area stuck fair in the middle of an elite area.*

Neighbourhood Watch was frequently mentioned as a way of preventing crime in the local context, and most people who talked about Neighbourhood Watch were positive about it

*Well I think this Neighbourhood Watch thing’s probably a pretty good idea. I think that would act as a deterrent to burglars. Burglary and car theft is the only thing that would concern me in this area, and I think those things, I think the Neighbourhood Watch set-up would act as a deterrent to that.* (TM10)

Others drew again on the notion of ‘community’ in relation to neighbours keeping an eye on others’ property as a means of preventing crime in the local area

*If there’s people at home, you know, even if you just see something you don’t know, or even just like neighbours saying “I’m going away for the weekend, could you take my stuff out of the letter box?” Or like the people across from us, they went to Hawaii so I parked me car in their drive just ‘cause it looked like somebody was there. All that sort of stuff.* (TM8)

When asked if they felt worried about being a victim of crime, there was a mixed response among participants: 46 strongly agreed or agreed, 23 were neutral and 31 disagreed or strongly disagreed. When thinking about crime in relation to this question, most of the people who were worried about being a victim tended to be more concerned about their personal safety than their property. Such individuals said that their awareness that their personal safety could be threatened did have some impact on their daily lives, at least in some contexts
Oh I suppose, I mean, more than anything else I guess it's personal safety. But you know, it's not a big worry. I don't, it doesn't stop me — well, I suppose sometimes it does stop me going where I want to go or doing what I want to do. But most of the time it's not a problem. But it would be that thing of, you know, walking up the street at night and, you know, having somebody take your wallet or just give you a clout for the hell of it. Well I don't think it will happen to me, but I realise that it could, if you know what I mean. (TM9)

Some participants noted that they were 'careful' and took precautions about crimes, but this did not mean that they lived in fear. As a participant in the Sydney older people's group said: 'I just think that it's no good shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted and I just think you have to be careful. And in the same way, if you're driving in a strange area in your cars, you should keep your door locked.'

Participants in the women's discussion groups were asked specifically if they thought that being a woman affected their fear of crime. Most female participants agreed that it did, mainly because being a woman meant that they were subject to sexual attacks from male criminals, and because they considered themselves to be physically weaker than men, and therefore more vulnerable to physical or sexual assault. The female participants in the young people's discussion group in Hobart noted that they were particularly concerned about sexual assault, above any other crime:

I worry about being dragged into an alley way somewhere and being raped and murdered. I've seen that it can happen pretty easily and I mean, you don't have to be dressed in a short skirt and you know, it could be whatever. I suppose it's just the luck of the draw.

I don't worry that much but if I do it's usually about sexual assault and I think that's because I'm a girl and young, and you just feel vulnerable. You just think, 'Well, if someone was going to get picked out for something like that then that might be me.'

(Interviewer): What about you other girls? Is it a problem, sexual assault?

Yeah, that's what I worry about the most.

Not anything else really.

The boys in the group were asked what they were concerned about in terms of the risk of crime. They said that they were worried about physical assault, particularly when being confronted by groups of other young men who have weapons.
You worry a bit because it doesn’t matter how big a person you are or like whatever you see people carrying — like I’ve seen people carrying weapons around. And I got threatened one time with this group with chains and knives and stuff. That worried me enough. There was a security guard there, but it gave me a bit of a shock realising it doesn’t matter how big you are or whatever.

Yeah, I’m really wary. I mean I might be over paranoid — even when I’m walking home and things, like I tend not to do it by myself anymore. Even if it’s one person I’ll cross the road if it’s at night time, yeah.

Participants in the Hobart older people’s discussion group agreed that their age affected their fear of crime. They said that they felt more vulnerable because they did not have the strength to fight off attackers or run away, and thought that criminals considered them ‘easy game’. They thought that as older people they were more vulnerable to being ‘bashed up’ and robbed. Members of the Wollongong older people’s group, however, while noting that they were more vulnerable because of their age, said that they did not worry much about being a victim of crime as they felt that they did not place themselves in situations where crime would be likely to happen. A married couple in that group were asked if they worried about each other being a victim of crime, and both said that they did not really think about it. The male partner said, ‘I don’t worry about myself and only very slightly for Mary’ and the female partner asserted, ‘If Alan were later home than I expected him, I’d think more of a car breakdown or something like that. I certainly would be anxious, but no, I wouldn’t imagine that he’d be the victim of crime’.

This was echoed in the Sydney older people’s group, who said that they did not worry about their partners. Only one member of this group said that his advanced age made him feel more vulnerable to crime: ‘I’d like to be fitter and that, than what I am, you know. I’m reasonably fit but I wouldn’t be fit enough to take on two now, if they were any good.’ Another member of this group said that he thought the only crime to which older people might be more at risk was mugging, because muggers were ‘cowards’ ‘so they’re going to pick on the weakest and most infirm type of person they can find. So a little old lady is a lot easier target than a 25-year-old footballer’. A third (female) member, however, disagreed with this, commenting that: ‘I would feel much more vulnerable as a 25-year-old glamorous girl going out at night, than I would at my age.’

Here again, notions of fate were drawn upon in people’s explanations of why they worried about being a victim of crime. A Wollongong woman (WF11), for instance, said that she did worry about being a victim of such crimes as home burglary and mugging, if not ‘on a day-to-day basis’, because ‘it’s just so common, you hear about people being mugged and places being robbed and stuff. The incidents are
so high you think you know one stage it could happen to you — you could be part of the statistic’. However, it was common for those who disagreed they felt worried about being a victim of crime to claim that they preferred not to worry about such things, or to position themselves as ‘victims’, preferring to adopt a more positive or combative attitude. A young Hobart woman said, for example

I just don’t think it would happen to me — I don’t think I would be a victim in that situation. Even if a crime did happen to me I wouldn’t classify myself as a victim of it. If I went down I’d definitely take them down with me. (TF13)

Others said that they simply did not think much about crime — it wasn’t an issue that occupied their lives in a significant way. Still others noted that while they were not obsessed by worries about being a victim of crime, they kept the risk in the back of their minds, and it did influence their behaviour in some ways

It’s hard to answer that. I mean, to say I was worried means to me like I sit here and worry about it every day and I don’t do that. But I think it would be wrong of me to say that I’m not apprehensive about it at the same time. I am conscious of it, but I suppose I’m conscious to the extent that I wouldn’t physically — I would avoid situations that might put me in danger or expose me to those sorts of things so I worry about it to that extent, but I don’t sit there worrying about it every day. (TF5)

Everyone seems to think they’ll get burgled at some time. You think “What happens if they got in and trashed the place?” But I don’t know that I’d say I worry about it. I’ve got too many other things to worry about! (Hobart women’s discussion group)

Similar perceptions were expressed by Sydney participants. While they still tended to acknowledge the high possibility of such crimes as car theft and home burglary in their neighbourhood, and that they were highly aware that their car might be stolen one day or their house burgled, many people said that there was a difference between being aware that a crime such as theft might happen, and living ‘in total dread or fear’, as one participant in the Sydney women’s group put it. Indeed, here again some members of that group argued that a fearful demeanour attracts crime in some way: ‘If a woman walks around expecting to be mugged, the more chance that you’re bringing that to you.’

Worry about others being a victim of crime

Those who had children (including adult children) were asked to say how worried they were about their children becoming a victim of crime. Of the 66 participants who answered this question, 85 per cent strongly agreed or agreed. For the most part, parents of younger children (adolescents or younger) said that their concern centred on the threat of strangers attacking or abducting their children. Parents of daughters were particularly worried about sexual attacks on them.
If one of my girls was raped I don’t think she’d ever recover. I don’t think you’d ever recover really fully from that. You’d be scarred. I would worry that they would be involved in a situation like that. I would worry about the effects it would have on her; I would be worried about why they were involved in it anyway. All those things, I worry about all those things. (SF10)

Parents felt as if they were charged with the responsibility for their children's safety (when they were young) and that any incident in which their child was involved reflected their lack of proper care and vigilance. As a Sydney woman (SF11) said of her nine-year-old daughter: ‘I’d be more likely to put myself into a vulnerable situation but I couldn’t ever forgive myself if I knowingly allowed my daughter to be in a vulnerable situation and if something happened.’

People drew on their knowledge that such things had happened to others' children (often through reports of abductions or sexual assaults on children in the mass media) in constructing their concern. They felt as if such a risk was out of their hands to control to some extent, as their children could come into contact with people who might assault them in numerous places where their parents were absent, such as school, child-minding facilities, on public transport or in the street. As one man (TM9) said of his concern that his seven-year-old daughter might be sexually assaulted

I mean, of all my worries about criminal activity of any kind, I think that’s probably the greatest. I mean, I probably spend more time concerned about that than about anything else these days. I think just the fact that they have happened to others and you know, you realise that that’s the world we live in where children are sometimes the victims of these sorts of crimes. And it’s the fact that it’s as I say, it’s closed or something. You know, it’s an area of her life that I don’t think I’d have access to, and for that reason it always concerns me.

Parents of adolescent sons said that they tended to worry about their sons being physically assaulted, particularly by gangs of other male adolescents or young men. As a woman in the Sydney western suburbs group commented of her 16-year-old son: ‘I know that he also has a fear, if he goes anywhere where those gangs are, he’s gotta be extra friendly to whoever’s in those gangs.’ Parents in Sydney were worried about their children using public transport, particularly at night and particularly if their children were female (even if aged in early adulthood). Several parents made reference to their adolescent sons, however, as being tall or big, and therefore less likely to be assaulted than a smaller boy, or a girl. As a participant in the Bathurst women’s discussion group said: ‘I'm not worried about Sam, he's a big, strong boy.’ Some parents, however, were worried about their children even when they were aged in the mid-twenties or older. As one woman said of her adult children: ‘I worry about them, just because they’re my children. It would be worse for me if my children were the victim of crime than it would be for me to be the victim, much, much worse’ (WF4).
Just as one's fears for one's own safety may be acutely raised, and then eventually subside following a particular incident, this may happen with parents' fears from their children. For instance, a participant in the Hobart women's group noted that after a young man had been attacked in his home in the suburb in which she lived, she became worried about the safety of her own children, and for a six-month period made sure that they were never alone in the house. Her fears eventually disappeared, and she did not bother with this strategy after the six months had passed.

Worried parents made sure that they advised their children about how best to deal with the danger of assault. They engaged in such strategies as telling younger children to be careful of strangers, and advising older children not to use public transport alone at night, offering to pick them up wherever they were or to give them money to take a taxi, or asking them to travel with their friends rather than alone. They advised their adolescent children not to walk through parks and to keep to well-lit streets. Parents of older children asked them to ensure that they kept their doors locked at home and were cautious about their safety. Most parents, however, were also concerned not to make their children too fearful and distrusting of others. They therefore had to reconcile their own fears for their children with their belief that children should not have to approach the world in an overly fearful and cautious manner.

I'm quite conscious, because I've in the past been quite worried about at night and things, I've projected that on to my children. And so I think it's really important for them to be able to develop a sense of independence and freedom in the community. So I think probably I tend to say go and do things and just hope that nothing happens but rather than instil in them a fear of not going out and doing things, I'd rather that they go out and experience things. (Hobart women’s discussion group)

In relation to how worried the participants felt about their partner becoming a victim of crime, there was generally agreement among those who had a partner (79 participants): 67 per cent strongly agreed or agreed. Men, however, were more concerned about this in relation to their female partners than women were about their male partners. Men worried about their partner moving around in public spaces, using public transport, and so on. They tended to think of such crimes as sexual or physical assault when describing from which crimes their partner might be at risk.

I'm not being sexist, but because she's a woman she's more vulnerable to attract more crime. Like people would say "Let's go mug her because she can't defend herself or do anything about it." And that's where sexual assault — you hear every day how women get raped or mugged in a dark alley. I always worry about that, I always say [to my partner] "Take a mobile phone", or "When you go out, go with your friends." (SM5)
My wife is quite petite, very attractive, pretty young thing. And she’s not that strong, so somebody could very easily pin her and I think eventually she would have no choice but to submit — she’s light, she is only 50 kilos so they could throw her around quite easily. (WM15)

Many men were who were worried about their female partner did attempt to advise them about how best to protect themselves, or took steps themselves to participate in preventing their partner from being faced with the risk of sexual or physical assault. One Hobart man, for example, told his partner (a nurse) that he was happy to collect her after she had finished late shifts at the hospital, so that she did not have to take public transport, even though this meant him getting out of bed in the middle of the night. Most men did note that their partners had their own strategies to protect themselves against crime, such as carrying a mobile telephone, taking a self-defence course and generally ‘being sensible’ or ‘being aware’ as some men put it.

Women tended to have less concern about their male partners, often making jokes referring to their burly physique as adequate protection from physical assault. As a participant in the Sydney women’s group described her partner — ‘He’s a bit of a strapping — well you know, he’s solid enough’ — and another Sydney woman (SF8) noted that her partner is ‘physically very strong and he’s not the sort of person that people seem to victimise’. Some women were worried, however, that their male partner might be involved in physical assault should a crime such as home burglary take place while they were at home, if their partner attempted to defend the property or the family. A Sydney woman (SF6), for example, described her male partner as an ‘aggressive person’ who would be likely to fight back if someone pulled a knife on him or pointed a gun at him, and so she was worried that he might become embroiled in physical violence. A Wollongong woman (WF13) said that her partner was ‘foolhardy’ and tended to get involved in situations when it would be better simply to stay out of them: ‘I think a lot of men have that attitude, that “I can solve things therefore we won’t call the police. I will just try to apprehend the baddies by myself”.’

Such women attempted to persuade their partners not to get involved, or to back away from situations that might place them at risk of assault. One girl in the Wollongong young people’s group noted that she worried about her boyfriend and ‘nagged’ him about being careful

He has put himself in jeopardy a few times, actually, through carelessness, whether it be drunk and roaming round at silly hours or something like that. And he has been assaulted before, so actually he does make me paranoid sometimes.
Of the 103 participants who still had at least one parent alive, most (59 per cent) strongly agreed or agreed that they worried about their parent/s becoming a victim of crime. People who had elderly parents were particularly concerned about them. The crimes they particularly worried about their parents facing were physical assault, burglary and ‘home invasions’. This worry was often related to the fact that their parents were older people, and thus less able to defend themselves from an attack, or lived alone (particularly for elderly mothers) and were at home for much of the time, so that they would be confronted by burglars if they broke in to steal something. As a Wollongong man (WM14), whose parents were in their 80s, put it

You get older and you’re not as able to run away, you can’t defend yourself as easily. People take advantage of you, just like they take advantage of kids. They take advantage of old people because they’re basically fairly defenceless, there’s not a lot that they can do.

Those participants whose elderly parents were in nursing or retirement homes were less worried, because they thought that living in such a communal situation, with young staff members around, gave a significant measure of safety for residents. Some people were worried not so much about their parents’ physical safety but rather that their parents would lose their property in a home burglary, as they were not well off and would find it difficult to replace such items as televisions.

Those who disagreed that they worried about their parents being a victim of crime either felt that their parents were young enough to look after themselves, or that their parents lived in situations where they were very safe. One man living in rural Tasmania, for example, noted that his mother had lived in the same small country town for 40 years, had never experienced crime in that time, and knew everyone there — neighbours ‘kept an eye’ on her. His response may be contrasted with a Hobart man whose mother, aged in her late 60s, lived alone in inner-city Melbourne and had already been burgled once. He thought that ‘it was very much a possibility’ that a burglar might try again and that she would find herself facing him and would not be able to protect herself: ‘A woman in her late 60s would not be much of a — I mean, my Mum could yell but she couldn't do much else’. Most people who were worried about their parents said that they had talked with them about ways of protecting themselves, or took steps to assist in this. One Hobart man, for example, often ferried his mother around in his car at night when she was in the city so that she would not have to catch public transport or walk around a deserted car park. Another Hobart man had advised his mother to have deadlocks put on her doors, not to answer the door at night, to be cautious and to participate in Neighbourhood Watch.
It was not only people with older parents, however, who were concerned about their parents. Some of the young people also expressed concern about their parents' safety. For example, participants in the Wollongong young people's group, who were, as noted above, from disadvantaged backgrounds, were concerned about their parents because they lived in areas where gangs were active. One member of this group noted that his/her mother lived in a Housing Commission unit, and they were concerned about her safety because they knew that 'homies' hung around such units, mugging or bashing people or setting fires. As participants in the young people's group in Hobart noted, while this was not something that necessarily occupied their thoughts much of the time, they did have an underlying fear that their parents might be attacked

*If anyone attacked them — like just sometimes the thought comes into your mind, “Oh that would be horrible!” But it's not like you get up every morning and think, “Oooh, I hope that doesn’t happen!”*

(Interviewer): Well, what is it that you worry about? If you worry about your parents, what is it that you worry about happening to them?

*Murdered.*

Yeah, you think of ultimate things because I suppose you think that would affect you. You think about ultimate things. Since you were little you always think what would happen if they did die.

These participants, however, did not ask their parents to engage in any particular strategies to protect themselves, noting that they would not be sure what to tell them, or that they thought their parents were 'pretty sensible' in any case.

**DANGEROUS PLACES AND PEOPLE**

The final part of the interview involved a series of additional open-ended questions addressing aspects of perceptions of crime and fear of crime. Participants were first asked what sorts of crime they thought were most common in Australia. Most referred to such crimes as property crimes (that is, theft and break-and-enter) as the most prevalent, with crimes such as physical assault, vandalism and sexual assault also mentioned by many people. There was only the sporadic mention of white-collar crime such as fraud or tax evasion or domestic violence. As one participant commented, 'I suppose when I think of crime, I think of physical crime, sexual assault, muggings, physical assaults, murders' (WM16). Participants in the Hobart young people's group noted that although such crimes as white-collar crime and fraud might be common, it was difficult to know, because 'you never hear anything about it'.
The participants were then asked to say what they thought was the least safest place in Australia in terms of the risk of crime to people there, and to explain their answer. The point of this question was to elicit how people come to construct their notions of ‘danger’ and ‘safety’ in relation to crime and spatial locations in terms of cultural mythologies. People often relied on the mass media rather than personal experience or others’ experiences in constructing their notion of ‘dangerous places’. As a Hobart man (TM11) who singled out Cabramatta explained his choice, it was ‘the media focus on its drug culture’ that influenced him. Most people in Tasmania mentioned Sydney, or particular suburbs in Sydney (Kings Cross most commonly) as the most dangerous place in Australia. They explained that their choice of this area was directly associated with their notions that a high level of criminal activities took place there and that ‘dangerous people’ habituated the area.

Oh, there’s a lot of money there I guess. There’s a lot of, well, prostitution, drugs, weird people, sensible people too, but again it’s a situation that you are in isn’t it? More than I think the people concerned, the circumstances they’re living in that makes them violent, aggressive. (TM2)

Participants in the Hobart young people’s group identified Kings Cross as the most dangerous place as well. They acknowledged that they had never been there, but were aware that ‘crime is an industry there and everybody knows that and so people who want to commit serious crimes will go there’ and that police corruption was also part of the Kings Cross scene. People in Sydney and Wollongong also mentioned Kings Cross and Cabramatta as dangerous suburbs, for similar reasons.

Kings Cross seems to be a place that attracts drug addiction and drug addiction attracts immoral behaviour and criminal behaviour because people are desperate because of the addiction. They’ll do anything from murder to stealing. (SF10)

Redfern was also singled out because of what was seen to be high rates of mugging and theft there, particularly related to its Aboriginal residents. A young Sydney woman (SF16) who sometimes has to travel via Redfern train station said that she often feels apprehensive in that area because of the Aboriginal people she encountered there.

I really hate to say this, but yeah, most Aboriginal men I tend to sort of be wary about because the ones that I have met are either drunk or high. Or, you know, they ask for money outside the [Redfern] station and we do get a few white man who are drunk and they do ask for money. The Aboriginals tend to be more scary, because there are a lot more of them there.
One Sydney man (SM9) mentioned all three suburbs as dangerous

*I mean, you’ve got Everleigh Street in Redfern where no one’s looking to lose, and that’s where there’s crime, there’s drugs. And you’ve got Cabramatta, there’s heavy drug dealing going on. And there’s no people, I mean, prepared to testify or anything because they’re frightened for their lives. You’ve got Kings Cross where practically the whole joint is run by crime and supported by police force.*

A Sydney woman (SF8) noted that she had lived in Kings Cross, and did not consider it the most dangerous place she could think of. Indeed, she said that she felt far less safe at her hobby farm near Oberon (in the central west of New South Wales) than she did at Kings Cross. She said that she usually felt safe in cities, but at the farm, when alone at night, she felt quite isolated and more vulnerable: ‘I’m always aware that somebody could just drive up and shoot me, or sit behind one of those trees with a gun aimed at the house, so I try not to think about those things.’

Other places mentioned as unsafe included the inner-city area of Sydney, ‘dark alleys’ in towns and cities, parks at night, ‘lonely city streets’, trains, and areas around nightclubs and pubs (because of the threat of physical assault from drunken men). A Sydney man (SM18) identified the long subway tunnel at Central Railway Station in Sydney as the most dangerous place he could think of: ‘Because it’s remote, and you’ve got a long view of whether people are around you or not, and there are a lot of derelict people living in that area, in the park opposite the station.’ The participants in the Sydney women’s discussion group described car parks, particularly at night, as the most unsafe place they could think of: ‘They’re so cold and dark and anyone could hide behind a car. I just race to my car in a carpark.’ They also described train stations and bus stops as particularly unsafe places.

Places where disadvantaged people lived, such as Housing Commission estates and the western suburbs of Sydney, were also singled out as ‘dangerous’.

Members of the Sydney older people’s group said that they were glad they lived in the northern rather than the western suburbs of Sydney because they saw the latter as replete with ‘dangerous people’

*There’s so much crime in the western suburbs and also there’s so much unemployment out there and they’re got nothing to do and they get around in vans. And of course, I think there’s some elements of the Asian groups now and clubs and all the drugs that are self evident, the peddling and all that. You’ve only got to read the newspapers and it’s all that ever happens. There’s crime nearly every night out west somewhere.*
It was very uncommon for the home to be singled out as a place of danger in terms of the threat of crime. The only people who did so were two Bathurst women, one of whom (BF1) noted that 'I think the home is probably pretty unsafe for some people too, women and children'. In noting this, she drew on her own experience of domestic violence and her knowledge that her mother had been sexually assaulted as a child by her uncles.

The participants were then asked whether they thought there were some groups in the community that engaged in more criminal activities than others, and, if yes, to explain their answers. Most people mentioned ‘marginalised’ groups, the impoverished or people ‘pushed into it for economic reasons’ as more criminal. Young men, illicit drug users (often referred to as ‘junkies’) and the unemployed were particularly identified as a major groups more likely to commit crime. The Hobart young people’s discussion group, for example, identified young unemployed men as engaging in criminal activities more than other groups, particularly muggings, physical assault, theft and illicit drug use. They noted that if they were walking down the street alone, they would be far more scared of a group of young men or young women (if the latter looked as if they were gang members) than of people by themselves. As one participant noted: ‘It’s only if they’re in a group. If it’s just one of them, it’s all right. They won’t say anything if there’s just one of them.’

Some of the girls in this group described how they found older men worrying, because they had had personal experience of such men approaching them when they were alone in a public place, such as a bus stop, and trying to engage them in a conversation in a manner they found threatening in terms of a possible sexual advance or assault. This was echoed by a participant in the Sydney young people’s group, who said that ‘I think the people I worry about most are the sleazy old men’. Young people in Sydney also identified ‘homies’ as the group most likely to commit crimes, particularly against other young people, and were worried about attack from ‘homies’ themselves.

The reasons participants gave for choosing young unemployed man as a major group engaging in criminal activities included the lack of anything for them to do (crime as a source of thrills)

Teenagers, young male teenagers, they seem to be all the time in court or something. You read about somebody of 17, 15 [years old]. I think a lot of them try to get a reputation for the crimes before they can actually do the crime, I mean do prison time for them. Probably structural too, I mean there’s probably not much for them so they think “Oh stuff this, I’ll drop out of school.” And then, it seems to be the fun thing to do, a bit of adrenalin. (TM8)
poverty-related reasons (crime as a means to pay the bills for unemployed youth)

They’ve got no money, because the dole doesn’t pay a lot of money and that’s when they start getting into crime. And that’s where it will start, “Oh yeah, I can get away with this,” and that gets worse and worse and worse.
(Sydney western suburbs group)

drug-related reasons (crime as a means to support an illicit drug habit)

If you think of muggings and burglaries, well, that’s money to provide for it, the drug habit. Or sometimes they’re under the influence and they lose self control or whatever. (Hobart young people’s discussion group)

and anger, alienation and loss of hope

A lot of very angry kids, you know, I don’t blame them.
I don’t blame them either.
I’d be bloody angry too, growing up in society nowadays.
How do you encourage them to be involved though? When they’re angry and don’t want to know?
And they can see how fucked we are with the world?
Exactly, we’ve got no answers for them, have we?
No.
So that’s why they’re angry half the time. You know, “You tell me that I can’t do this, but what have you got to give me?” We don’t have jobs for them.
(Sydney women’s discussion group)

Such factors as family background, involving the way that young people are brought up by their parents and the kind of example given to them, were also frequently mentioned as leading to youth crime. The participants in the Sydney older people’s group thought that dual-income families contributed to social problems, because children were not receiving enough attention and discipline, and argued that women should go back to working in the home and raising children. Members of the Hobart young people’s group again referred to the problem of alienation and lack of principles and purpose that young people had, and the importance of family values in shaping those of young people

I think it almost always goes back to your family and the values that you’ve had given to you at home. And I mean, heaps of so-called, well, heaps of middle-class kids are often really rebellious. And so I’m not saying how much money you’ve had or anything like that. It’s just whether you’ve got direction in your life, whether you’ve got anything to live for basically.
They need to feel that they're needed and that they're good at something and they probably need something that's interesting too.

They need to know that they're loved.

‘Peer group pressure’, in the case of ‘homies’, for example, was also raised as a reason for why some young people become involved in crime.

The participants in young people's focus groups were asked if they thought that others were frightened of them because they were young people. There was strong agreement among the young people that others, particularly elderly people, did hold a perception of them as likely to commit crime. As one girl in the Hobart young people's group noted, she thought that her appearance has something to do with this:

Old people specially, they kind of get this stereotype of young, into drugs, etcetera. I’ve often seen, I don’t know, maybe it’s the way I dress sometimes, but I have noticed elderly people crossing the road when I’ve come towards them. I feel really bad.

A boy in the same group made a similar observation about the link between his physical appearance and others' reactions: 'It's a physical image I think. People worry about it no matter how friendly you are.' He and others in the group said that to deal with others' apprehension, they attempted to be friendly and to say 'Hello' and smile at them.

When asked if they thought that anything could be done to reduce ‘dangerous’ groups' crime activities, the participants again raised the solutions of the government providing more funds for social welfare for the poor and doing something to reduce unemployment rates, providing activities for young people and the unemployed, reforming the justice system so that criminals were 'properly punished' and legalising illicit drugs. Other solutions raised including providing better education to young people (so that they have a better opportunity to find employment), providing training in living skills for marginalised people likely to become involved in crime, and a more effective policing system (so that more offenders are caught and brought to justice), and greater police presence in ‘dangerous’ areas.

The next question asked participants whether there were any parts of their town or city that they avoided because they worried about placing themselves at risk from crime if they were to go there, and, if yes, to explain their answers. In the answers to this question, as in the previous question about the ‘least safest place in Australia’, the intersection of ‘dangerous places’ and ‘dangerous people/groups’ is apparent. For instance, a Sydney woman (SF10) observed that suburbs in which there was a high level of poverty, such as Redfern, tended to have a lot of ‘angry people’ who were more prone to violent crime: ‘I just hear it...
when I'm there, people in the street yelling, angrily. And it just seems to be because of the high density living and the poverty.’ Members of the Wollongong older people’s discussion group noted that some disadvantaged areas of Sydney were full of angry people, and they worried about being confronted by them. As one member of this group said: ‘I’m more frightened of angry people than I would be of stealing and things like that. I think they’d lose control, when you weren’t expecting it, for no reason.’

Similarly, a Hobart man (TM11) nominated an area of Hobart which was occupied largely by Housing Commission residents as a place he felt worried about entering, whether during the day or at night. He said that this was because he had heard of such incidents as bus drivers having their windows smashed by residents, and he felt that the people who lived there had too much time on their hands, being unemployed, and had a largely aggressive or violent approach to others: ‘You just get a sort of a sense that yes, this is an area that’s sort of struggling and you wouldn’t want to say “Boo” to somebody you didn’t really know properly. You have to be a little bit cautious.’ Here again, for people resident in Hobart and nearby towns, the Hobart city mall was commonly identified as a place of fear because of perceptions of the groups who ‘hung out’ there, particularly at night, threatening those who attempted to walk through. People told stories of their own experiences and of others in being confronted by these ‘street kids’ and how this had affected their perceptions of the mall.

Street kids, where they get into a group, you can tell them. I know it’s not their fault because they’ve got nothing to do and nobody sort of wants them. But I’ve seen them do some terrible things in town, ‘specially in the mall there one time. There was one young fella there one day, he just went up and he bashed this kid’s head against a phone box for no reason ... But what can you do about it? It’s just the way society is, getting more violenter [sic] every day. (TF12)

A Sydney woman (SF8) noted that she found frightening the drunken men who were often milling about Taylor’s Square in Oxford Street, Sydney because of their unpredictability: ‘Drunks, I hate drunks on the street lurking around. You don’t know really what they’re going to do next. People who behave in unpredictable ways bother me.’

When asked to suggest how they thought such ‘dangerous places’ could be made safer, solutions such as increased surveillance (including the use of video monitors in public places known to have high crime rates), increased police presence, better lighting and more recreational activities for the young people ‘hanging around’ such places were again suggested. As a Wollongong woman (WF2) noted: ‘People in general feel a lot safer when they can actually see police about’. Here again, Tasmanians mentioned the placing of surveillance cameras and an increased police presence at the city mall (including the presence of a police information booth) as effective steps in reducing their fear of entering this space.
I think that booth in the mall still helped to raise the profile of the mall, and it sort of said, it’s created a sense of police presence even though they’re not there all the time. Yeah, I think it’s working to some extent, but they could do more with it. (Hobart people’s discussion group)

PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND FEAR OF CRIME

The next set of questions specifically addressed the issue of travelling on public transport, given that this activity has been identified in the previous literature as one involving fear of crime for many people. The participants were asked if they ever travelled on public transport, and if not, whether this was due to fear of crime or other reasons. Those who said that they avoided public transport because of their fear of crime were asked to say more about this. Those who said that they did travel on public transport were asked to explain whether they ever felt worried about crime when they travelled and to explain their answers.

For the participants who had access to public transport, trains were singled out as far more problematic than buses. As a Sydney woman (SF6) stated, she had no fear at all of travelling on buses in that city, while she was ‘petrified’ of travelling on trains, especially at night. She explained her feelings thus:

I guess because you know you’re in a close environment with everyone, the bus driver, usually on busy roads. The buses I travel on are on busy roads. I can’t really imagine any crime, you know. Like it could happen anywhere that someone pulls a knife or a gun out, or you know, or hijacks the bus or something like that. But no, not in general, not like a train where it’s spread out. And you know, the crimes do happen on a train, whereas I’ve never really heard of anything happening on a bus.

This woman went on to say that she worried about being attacked on trains, which seem to ‘attract a lot of strange people during the day, I constantly get strange people sitting next to me, you know. One guy thought he was a Russian spy and he wanted me to hold his briefcase for him ‘til the train stopped, and just really strange things like that’. A Wollongong woman (WF13) who sometimes travelled to Sydney on the train also gave an account of people she had encountered on one occasion who had disturbed her:

There was a gang that came on the train and I was with my parents going up to Sydney. And the girl had put on lipstick which made me think she was on drugs — it was all over her face and her eyes and she was just mad. She came prancing up and down the train like this and all the gang were laughing at her. And I felt quite frightened because we thought this group was really dangerous. And then she picked the most vulnerable person in the carriage, this chap in his 20s who obviously had Down syndrome or a mild form of Down syndrome or something like that. And she started sitting next to him and coming on to him sexually, and it was just so awful.
For those participants who felt fearful when on trains, the ‘closed’ environment of the train was a source of fear. As a Sydney man (SM12) noted, his concern about crime on trains was due to his observation that 'you go down in basements and I think if you’re stuck on a train carriage, being the only person there on a train, with a whole lot of hoods you really don’t have a chance'. Similarly, a Sydney woman (SF16) who travelled frequently on trains to commute to work said that what frightened her about trains was the sense of being alone if someone tried to attack her: ‘Because there’s no one else on the train to hear you or help you.’ To deal with this fear, she always made sure that she sat in a carriage with several other passengers. If they left, she moved on to another carriage to avoid being left alone and therefore vulnerable to crime. This concern was also raised by a Wollongong woman (WF11), who said that she avoided using trains whenever possible ‘simply because you are vulnerable if there’s a guy on the train and the train is moving and there’s no where to go if he attacks you with a knife or a gun. There is nowhere you can run or ask for help’.

For the most part, those who used trains were less afraid of using the train during the day than at night — some had no concerns about using trains during the day but would never do this at night. For instance, members of the Sydney western suburbs group were very negative about public transport, saying that they avoided it whenever possible out of peak-hour times because they were worried about crime. As one participant noted

I travel, like, in normal office hours, obviously office people travelling, I travel then. But if I had to travel at 9 or 10 o’clock at night, I’d really consider it. If it was something urgent and I had to get there I could probably do it, but I’d have to sit with the guard.

Young Sydney people were particularly worried about other young people, ‘homies’ and ‘gangs’, who they said often roamed around trains in Sydney, including the North Shore. Several had had personal experiences of being threatened or assaulted by such young people while travelling on a train. The Wollongong young people were also concerned about the threat posed by ‘homies’ on trains, either in Wollongong itself or when they travelled to Sydney. As one argued

In Sydney it’s not safe to travel on the train during the day. Like Liverpool, Cabramatta, like that line, it’s just not safe at all. Yeah, and Guildford, Granville, everywhere. Guildford used to be a nice community, a really nice little community. Now it’s just overrun by ‘homies’.

People in Hobart who caught buses seemed not to be overly concerned about crime, except for those who caught them late at night and found that there were few other passengers, which made some of them a little more apprehensive. As a girl in the Hobart young people’s group commented, the only time she was ever worried when catching buses was when it was late at night and she was the only person on the bus and felt concerned that a male bus driver might try to assault her.
Those who were worried about crime on public transport said that they engaged in such strategies as avoiding trains at night (buses were seen to be safer because the driver was there), travelling only at times when there were many others using the trains, sitting in carriages that had a number of other passengers in them, using the guard's carriage, travelling with a companion and sitting in an end seat with a good view of the carriage. Suggested strategies to further prevent crime on public transport and encourage people to feel safer when travelling included more surveillance (again, the use of video cameras on buses and trains was mentioned here), greater use of police or security guards walking through trains as deterrents and to apprehend criminals, more staff working at train stations at night and better lighting around bus stops and train stations. Most people were positive about previous attempts to make train travel safer, such as the use of the 'blue-light' guard's carriages and police or security guard patrols of the carriages. Several participants in the Wollongong young people's group suggested that the vigilante group the Guardian Angels should be encouraged to patrol trains in Sydney and Wollongong to protect passengers: ‘If you're catching a train by yourself and you see one of these guys, well it does make you feel a lot safer.’

Some women mentioned taxis as a problematic source of public transport for them. Many were wary about male taxi drivers, and avoided sitting in the front seat when alone in a taxi with a male driver. This was noted particularly by the women in the Sydney women's discussion group and the Hobart young people's discussion group. As one girl in the Hobart young people's group commented, she was more afraid of catching taxis than using buses

*I'm definitely not afraid of public transport in general, but for instance I'd be more wary of catching a taxi than going on the bus. Because it's like there's safety in numbers and taxi drivers are usually that male group again. If you hop in the front, you're by yourself. I'd definitely rather catch a bus and it's just something that I know and I do all the time.*

Strategies that girls in that group used to deal with their apprehension about male taxi drivers was to ‘check out’ the driver before they got into the cab, to see if he looked ‘scary’ or not. They preferred using taxi ranks so that they could have a choice of drivers. One Sydney girl (SF22) had actually had an experience, at the age of 14, of being assaulted by a taxi driver when sitting in the front seat of his taxi — he had tried to kiss and touch her. Since then, she said, she made sure never to sit in the front seat of taxis.
The next set of questions addressed the issue of who is responsible for reducing crime rates (and by extension, people's fear of crime), with participants being asked specifically about the role of local government, the state and federal governments, any other group they could think of, and their own role. Some people thought crime issues were beyond the jurisdiction of local government. Others (the majority) thought that local government should have a part to play in reducing crime in the local area, but many seemed at a loss to think of what it could actually do. Some people mentioned the provision of activities for young people as a responsibility of local government which might reduce crime rates, such as the provision of sporting facilities or skateboard ramps. Others thought that local government should be encouraging people to be more watchful of their neighbours' property, supporting programs like Neighbourhood Watch and the Safety House program, arranging to patrol relatively isolated places where people park their cars for a time and leave them (such as at beaches), putting video surveillance cameras in public places and installing better lighting of streets and public places.

People were asked if they knew of any local government initiatives that were 'working' in preventing crime. Responses included mention of the local government funding local leisure centres, putting surveillance cameras in the Hobart city mall (for Tasmanians) and the funding of youth workers to help young people with their problems, find them jobs and develop activities for them. Several Wollongong participants mentioned the introduction of 'alcohol-free zones' in their city as a positive move on the part of local government to reduce crime and fear of crime. Others were uncertain whether the local government could do anything

That's a really difficult question to answer because I don’t know what they can do, apart from increasing police presence where there are maybe high rates of crime. Apart from that, and maybe the issue of dealing with drug-related crime, and lifting the legislation in that regard, I don’t really know that they could do much. (TF5)

When asked what strategies local governments had implemented which were not working, some people mentioned the lack of leisure facilities for young people as a problem that was not addressed by their local government, while others commented that the provision of street-lighting and lighting in parks and car parks could be improved. A member of the Bathurst women's discussion group drew particular attention to the local council's landscaping. She commented that the council should not only take aesthetic considerations into account when deciding on plantings, but also safety issues, in terms of how shrubs and trees act as potential cover for people lurking behind them and therefore exacerbate people's fear of walking in the dark in such places.
The vast majority of the participants saw crime reduction initiatives as primarily the responsibility of state and federal rather than local governments. The federal government, it was argued, should take responsibility for law reform so that criminals were properly penalised for their crimes and other deterred from crime. Both state and federal governments were seen to be responsible for dealing with the problems of unemployment and poverty, associated by many people with crime. The major initiative of the federal government for preventing crime, according to many people, was the gun control legislation brought in by the Howard government following the Port Arthur shootings. Some people mentioned drink-driving laws and greater police surveillance of drivers as steps that had done something to reduce crimes related to driving. Others referred to youth training schemes as a positive step, and the Royal Commission on police corruption as a means of bringing corrupt officers within the police force to justice.

Here again, in relation to people’s fear of crime on public transport, the provision of more guards on trains and other safety measures was mentioned as a positive move. A gay man in Sydney (SM12) thought that the initiatives to bring in gay and lesbian liaison police officers into areas around Oxford Street was a positive step towards reducing assaults against gay men and lesbians in that area. He thought that further steps to encourage people in general to see the police as members of their community and as friendly rather than threatening would do much to give people more confidence in the police and thus reduce their fear of crime.

What was not working, according to some of the participants, was the policing system and the legal system, in terms of criminals not being brought to justice or adequately punished for their crimes. Some mentioned the prison system and lack of reform for rehabilitating and educating prisoners. Reference to the social problems related to unemployment and poverty as an outcome of government inaction or inappropriate policy was made by many participants. Some people, including young people, were very critical of the Howard government’s recent abolition of unemployment benefits for young people under the age of 18, noting that this policy decision would simply force young people to engage in crime to support themselves. For others, reforming the education system so that young people had better access to education and thus to employment opportunities was a means by which alienation and unemployment could be alleviated (people who were themselves school teachers tended to mention this). Education campaigns for drugs were also identified by some as a way of preventing young people from taking illicit drugs and turning to crime to support their habit. Many people referred to what they saw as government inaction on drug reform, and to their belief that if illegal drugs were legalised then the crime rate would go down. Members of the Bathurst women’s discussion group were very critical of the funding for policing in rural areas such as theirs, noting that there were often not enough police officers on duty to respond adequately to calls for help.
In responding to the question ‘Who else do you think is responsible for making your community safe?’, the most common response was along the lines of ‘We all are’, or ‘The whole community is responsible’ and ‘There should be a better sense of community and helping others’. People reiterated the importance of people living near each other taking responsibility for ‘keeping an eye out’ for others’ property and safety, and reporting to the police any incidents that appeared suspicious occurring in the neighbourhood. When talking about the importance of community, people referred to the need to get to know one’s neighbours, so as to be able to help and trust each other.

The participants were asked what they thought their own responsibility was in terms of preventing crime in their community. Again they noted the importance of getting to know their neighbours and helping in local surveillance of homes, reporting crime when they are aware of it. As a Hobart woman said

I guess the closest I could come to that would be, wherever I've lived, I suppose I am aware if I know that a neighbour has gone on holidays, or they are not home. And you just see other people pulling up to their house or whatever. I am conscious of those sorts of things and I expect people to do the same for me. And, you know, I'd be prepared to question people at the fence or something and say, “Can I help you?” or something. I know I've done that before. (TF5)

Some people referred to their own responsibility for protecting themselves from crime, to be cautious so as to avoid becoming a victim

I think every individual has some responsibility, and I suppose the only way we can do that is make sure we take all the precautions for our own safety, and make sure we don’t expose ourselves to situations where crimes can be committed against us. (SF1)

One participant in the Hobart women’s discussion group noted that it was important for there to be a process whereby people could feel that they knew more about what was going on in terms of crime in the community, rather than simply relying on the media for information. She also argued that it was difficult for people to know what to do in terms of addressing the problem of crime, apart from reporting crime to the police. She suggested, therefore, that forums could be set up with experts providing information and advice to other members of the community: ‘We don’t know enough about it, I think, to really contribute... i just think we don’t understand enough about why these problems are there. And then how can you possibly solve them, or get involved in solving them if you don’t understand?’
PARTICULAR INCIDENTS AND THEIR RELATION TO FEAR

The next question asked participants if they could think of a particular incident or set of incidents in the past that made them start to feel worried about crime, and, if yes, whether they provide some details about this. The basis for including this question was drawn from previous literature involving qualitative research which suggested that people may experience some critical incidents or life changes at some point in their lives (not necessarily crimes) which then changed their feelings about crime, making them more fearful.

Several participants could identify such critical incidents in their lives, emerging from rather diverse sources. For instance, a Hobart woman (TF12) mentioned that she had started to worry more about crime after the death of her father, when she was left to care for an elderly mother and a mentally disabled adult brother, taking over, as it were, as ‘head’ of the household. She said that she felt more responsible for others but also felt as if things were ‘going wrong’ at that time, making her feel more anxious about crime. A Sydney man (SM18) described a recent incident when he was out in the evening jogging in the suburb of Darlinghurst and found himself confronted in a ‘back alley’ by a group of men who tried to assault him. A car arrived, shining its headlights on the scene, before they had a chance to hit him, allowing him to run away. This incident had struck him with the ‘randomness of being a victim of violence’.

For some participants, these critical incidents had occurred quite a few years ago but were still resonating. A Wollongong man (WM14), for example, remembered an incident when he was aged about 10 involving his mother’s handbag stolen by a ‘cat burglar’ who had climbed through the window when the family were at home ‘only one room away’. He said that as he has grown older, the memory of this incident reminded him that such crimes do happen and made him more conscious of security issues in the home: ‘I think of that sometimes now. Not sort of consciously, or with fear, but it’s in the back of my mind that these things do happen, they don’t just happen to somebody else. I suppose it’s something I’m aware could quite easily happen again.’

Some people found that something they had seen or heard in the news media had had a jolting effect on them. An elderly Wollongong woman (WF2) noted that she listened to a lot of talk-back radio, and found that hearing other people’s accounts of incidents where their house had been burgled while they were present or of muggings which happened in her local area, made her feel fearful that the same crimes could happen to her: ‘I think it’s instances like that that make me feel very vulnerable’. A man living in rural Tasmania (TM2) similarly noted that he often became more concerned about being the victim of crime after reading the local newspaper’s coverage of local crimes.
You know, reading the paper and reading who’s been burgled around the area and whose been burgled in town and those sorts of things, and who’s been assaulted and whatever, do have an affect on your general wellbeing, your general sort of view from day to day. And ironically there’s nobody’s house been broken into for awhile and that makes me often more worried because I know that they’ll be back fairly soon.

A Wollongong woman (WF11) mentioned the recent media coverage of paedophilia cases in her city, involving allegations against such prominent people as a former city mayor, priests and magistrates. These cases, she said, had made her wonder who one can trust, if such individuals were engaged in these activities, and made her more fearful about her young children’s safety from sexual abuse. A Sydney woman (SF17) spoke of the increasing number of violent crimes and murders reported over the last few years in the news media, and how these reports made her feel that

All rules have been thrown out in some sense... You know it seemed quite rare to hear of murders and things, but now like weekly there’s just really, there’s nowhere safe. Like husbands and wives are murdering each other, people who don’t know each other are brutally just doing fairly senseless murders for very little reward.

For several participants, their sense of safety in their local area was greatly affected when they learnt of a violent crime that had taken place there. A Sydney woman (SF11) noted that when she lived in the suburb of Enmore, she had felt quite safe there until she heard about an incident in which a man who lived at the end of her street was killed when he went out to investigate a brawl happening outside his house. This incident had suddenly made her feel that the area was far more dangerous than she had previously thought: ’That certainly made me worried. I thought “This is unbelievable — this is happening in my street!” Because usually you hear of crime all the time, but it’s always somewhere else. But when it’s happened in your area and your street, then that brings it home.’

Many Tasmanians mentioned the Port Arthur killings by Martin Bryant, which took place in their state (not far from Hobart) a little over a year before the interviews, as a time of loss of naiveté about the risk of such violent crime in their area. This incident, they said, made such crimes far more personally affecting. As one man living in Hobart (TM8) commented

Well, Port Arthur I suppose, just the randomness, that sort of affected pretty much everybody I suppose. Even my sister, because she had two little girls at the same age as the two victims that, you know the two little girls [who were killed there]. Then you think, you know, even in ‘safe old Tassie’, ‘cause I always had the idea that it was ‘safe old Tassie’ as my parents did and my sister and the people that live here obviously. And then it sort of changed a bit then. You think “Well, it’s not really that safe.” Yeah, [that was] probably the most recent, the most shattering I suppose.
A Hobart woman (TF5), while not referring to the Port Arthur killings directly, noted that she tended to feel more worried about violent crimes following a high degree of publicity about such cases in the mass media or through hearing about other people’s experiences. She commented that her fear in response tended to be acute at first, but then usually subsided.

*I suppose, really, whenever there is some very horrific well-publicised incident, no matter what it is, immediately after that I have a sort of heightened perception of crime or feeling worried or whatever. And then as time goes by it sort of plateaus back to not being that conscious of it. So I suppose it’s more when I’m confronted with it, whether that be through the media or personal incidents or whatever. Not that I’ve had a personal incident, but people close to you or whatever.*

Participants in the Hobart young people’s group referred to the Port Arthur shootings as having had a strong effect on them. This was particularly the case, they argued, because the killings seemed so ‘random’, and it was a place that they had all visited, and they could easily imagine themselves as victims in that massacre. They argued, nonetheless, that this increased awareness of the random nature of such crime did not necessarily make them feel that they themselves might be the victims in the future.

*When things like that happen they’re so major and so, well they’re rare at the moment, that I tend to think, “Oh phew, I wasn’t there!” You know, “That happened and it doesn’t make me scared.” Because I suppose it’s that thing again — I just don’t think that it’s going to happen every week or you know. But it still gives you a bit of a —

Yeah it does. It gives you a bit of a jolt and you think these things do happen but it doesn’t make me fearful that it’s going to happen to me.*

People living in New South Wales were also affected by incidents such as Port Arthur, particularly if they could relate them to their own lives in some way, leading them to imagine themselves in such a scenario. This was evident from an interchange between the participants in the Sydney women’s discussion group.

*You can always relate it to something that’s got something to do with you. Like [my husband] and I had been in Tasmania at Port Arthur a year before, you know that sort of stuff. So you can always find some way of relating — ‘There for the grace of God go I’ sort of stuff. You could have actually been in Hoddle Street, or Strathfield, or something like that.*

(Interviewer): Are you saying that these big events make you feel uneasy in your day-to-day life?
If it can happen in a tiny town in Scotland or in Port Arthur, why can’t it happen anywhere?

I think that’s why there was support for the gun debate because everybody realised it could be me.

The participants were asked to describe the last occasion when they felt quite worried about a crime happening to them. A wide variety of incidents were reported in response to this question, ranging from personal experience or fear of physical attack to a worry about being burgled. Such experiences included going away on holiday and having to leave one’s house unattended (and then worrying about whether or not it would be burgled), having ‘petrol hoons’ revving their cars near the participant’s house one night (making the participant worried that they might become violent and assault him), a young woman’s experience of being grabbed and dragged off a street by a strange man and another woman’s experience of having to walk through a university campus to her car late at night, worrying that someone might attack her.

As this suggests, people’s immediate fear was very much related to a specific incident of finding oneself in a situation where a crime has happened or seems imminent, rather than directly in response to media coverage of a crime or knowledge of others’ experiences. These sources, however, may well play an indirect part in people finding a situation worrisome or frightening. The knowledge that rapes and assaults have previously occurred on a university campus at night, for example, may lead to a woman feeling frightened about walking back to her car alone late at night.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT CRIME

The final set of interview questions were developed to explore upon what sources of information people draw when constructing their fear of crime. Based on the literature review, we assumed that the mass media would be important, so included several questions on this source. People were first asked how they have learnt about crime and were then asked why these sources had been particularly influential for them and which sources could be trusted to give reliable information about crime. The participants’ responses revealed that the mass media were indeed a significant information source, but that personal experience and knowledge of others’ experiences of crime were also important.

Most participants noted that crime received a great deal of coverage in the news media. Some people said that as the mass media was so obsessed with crime, they had derived much of their knowledge from this source because the topic was almost impossible to avoid. In contrast, they argued, people in everyday life tended not to talk very much about crime. As a Hobart woman (TF13) commented, her primary information came from the news media. She said that the media had been influential for her ‘because that’s the only thing it addresses specifically,
like the primary focus is crime, whereas it doesn’t really come up that often in
corneration with other people’. Others noted that there are not that many
sources of information about crime around and so they had to rely on the mass
media: ‘I suppose really I’d have to say the media, because I haven’t really had
any personal criminal incidents’ (TF5).

Although the majority of participants readily acknowledged the role played by
the mass media in their own perceptions of and feelings about crime, many also
displayed a highly critical and cynical attitude towards this source. Most said
that the mass media were not reliable in the information they conveyed and
could not be trusted because they tended to exaggerate issues in the quest to
attract audience members’ or readers’ attention

*I don’t think the media is at all reliable when it comes to crime because it’s
just not the nature of the media. It’s a sensational thing which is more likely
to report, it’s more likely to report a triple murder from Dublin than an assault
in a city mall. You know, if you get assaulted or killed in some perverse or
bizarre way you’re more likely to get media coverage because that’s the
nature of the beast. (TM9)*

Some people made distinctions between the reliability of different genres of
news media; noting, for example, that reports in newspapers are often less
sensationalised than television news, and that some newspapers are more
sensational than others (tabloid versus broadsheet)

*As far as the mass media go, talk-back programs on the radio are generally
absolute rubbish. They’re opinionated and slanted and really don’t offer any
information at all. They’re looking for emotive hooks and they’ll babble on
for ages about nothing, but the ABC usually gets into some nitty gritty sort of
stuff on the radio. So I would tend to trust the ABC for information. The
calibre of the people that they interview and the way they interviews are
conducted and they way the material’s presented leads me to believe that the
truth is being told. (SM14)*

*I would imagine there’s a high degree of variability. So I’d trust something
that was probably written down in the Sydney Morning Herald or the
Australian. I’d trust the Channel 2 news more than I would trust the Channel
10 news probably. I think, yeah, anything that you get shown on TV in a sort
of current affairs or news sense is a sort of fairly — even the Channel 2 news,
are fairly sensationalised, grabbing snippets of something. And I’m sure most
of the time you don’t get all the facts and the story’s probably distorted.
Yeah, I’m not very trusting of the TV sources. (TF5)*

As one woman noted, however, the images that were shown on television were
often far more memorable than reading about incidents
There’s so little that they don’t show these days and those images just stick in your head. You know, like the aftermath of Port Arthur. It’s like every time I drive past the Cenotaph [in Hobart] I think of that first TV story of the helicopters landing and police and ambulances everywhere. It’s just so vivid and it doesn’t have the same impact as reading I don’t think. (Hobart women’s discussion group)

So too, a Sydney woman (SF17) commented that because television reports are so ‘visual’ they tend to draw the viewer in

they can sort of document in such a way that you know you’re seeing things that you wouldn’t really necessarily. Like you can be part of something that’s happened as if you were standing right beside it, and so your emotions are really touched and affected.

Another participant noted that she tended to give more credence to television accounts ‘because you actually see people saying things rather than just read what they have said‘ (WF2).

The majority of participants, however, valued personal experience and others’ experiences of crime far above any other sources as reliable sources of information. They described these sources as ‘real’ and as ‘true’ because they are based on people’s own experiences rather than being mediated. As one man in rural Tasmania (TM1) commented: ‘It’s first-hand information. Like, you know, there was just no question about its validity or its interpretation.’ A participant in the Hobart young people’s group said: ‘Getting a personal account is much more — it affects you a lot more deeply than if you hear about someone in Western Australia or somewhere that got mugged, if it’s in an area where you normally walk.’

The difference in impact between seeing or hearing a crime incident in the mass media and actually knowing the victim of the crime was vividly described by a Wollongong woman (WF4). She said that recently she had read about a man in the newspaper who was taken from his car and bashed in a Wollongong suburb. When she had first read about the crime, she said to herself “How awful!”, but had not dwelt further upon it. But when her husband came home that night and told her that the victim was the father of a friend of his, her perception of the crime changed: ‘Immediately it changed from a terrible crime to a much, much worse crime because [the victim] was connected to me. And again it just makes you think, “Wow, that’s someone I know!”.’ Another Wollongong woman (WF11) described a recent incident when she had been at the hairdressers, and one of the women there received a telephone call from her weeping daughter saying that their house had been burgled. Then followed, she said, a discussion amongst the clients and hairdressers there about their own experiences of being burgled. This had made her realise for the first time just how common this crime was in her local area.
The participants were then asked if they had ever seen anything about crime reported in the news media that made them feel worried about their own safety, and if yes, to describe what it was and how it affected them. Several people mentioned stories about people who suddenly go out and kill people as disturbing. A Tasmanian man (TM2) referred to these incidents as making him feel more worried about such apparently unpredictable, random crimes of violence:

*Just reading about people that flip out and go around and shoot their neighbour or their people they work with or kids in a school yard or, whatever, that’s pretty sick. I think whenever I’ve been associated, or seen or been involved with any sort of violence or anything like that I’ve always — it’s affected me. Yes, it has definitely affected me. I’m more adverse to violence, and I try and watch out for the signs, the symptoms that lead to that sort of thing, and try and avoid it.*

Several participants said that watching reports of ‘real-life’ crime on television made them more fearful about the risk of crime to themselves. For instance, a Sydney woman (SF6) said that the continued level of media attention to the Port Arthur shootings had left her in a state of anxiety about public spaces for some time, worrying that some other ‘sickos’ would copy the idea: ‘I was just in constant fear of the same thing.’ This woman said that she refused to watch crime shows on television, particularly programs such as *Australia’s Most Wanted*, because she already had a high level of fear about crime: ‘It really scares me. It just — I’ve got the fear already in me and watching something like that just makes it worse. I don’t really like to do anything to make it worse.’ Another Sydney woman (SF11) commented that hearing about crimes involving people breaking into houses at night and attacking the residents made her feel fearful of the same crime happening to her. She had stopped her nine-year-old daughter from watching *Australia’s Most Wanted* or *CrimeStoppers* because after having done so on one occasion, her daughter had had difficulty sleeping at night because she had become afraid. This woman herself said that she actively avoided watching such programs because she found them very disturbing of her sense of safety.

A Wollongong woman (WF5) said that she deliberately avoided watching such programs as *Australia’s Most Wanted*, or even trailers for them, because for her, they were ‘like horror movies’, making her feel too frightened, and she preferred not to be confronted by the incidents reported in such programs. Another Wollongong woman (WF13) commented that she had recently watched an episode of a television crime thriller, *The Sculptress*, and had found it very difficult to go to sleep afterwards, particularly because her husband was away that night and she was the sole adult in the house. While she did not expect a murderer to enter the house, her sensitivity to the possibility of violence had been heightened by watching this program.
When the participants were asked if they had seen or heard anything about crime in the news media that made them feel safer about the risk of crime to themselves, very few people mentioned said that they had. Those who did referred mainly to reports of legislation such as the gun control laws brought in by the Howard government; as one woman in rural Tasmania (TF5) said, hearing about this made her feel safer because ‘I guess I’m just assuming that there’ll be less guns hanging around’. A Wollongong man (WM1) said that he felt less worried about crime when reading in newspaper reports that crime rates had remained static, rather than rising. A Sydney woman (SF8) noted that sometimes hearing about detectives solving well-known murder or kidnap cases made her feel safer, because the perpetrator was then identified and brought to justice: ‘I guess that there’s this comforting notion, I don’t even know if it’s real, that out there are such clever detectives that can solve crimes’. She mentioned the solving of the infamous Graham Thorne kidnapping case from the 1960s and the more recent backpacker murders in the Belanglo forest as examples. A Sydney man (SM14) noted that when he heard on the media about positive steps being taken to reduce crime, he found that encouraging, as well as stories about former criminals being reformed. Another Sydney man (SM5) found news reports of police taking action on holiday weekends to monitor speeding drivers and drink-drivers reassuring.

In response to a question about whether they enjoyed watching programs about crime on television or on videos (including cop shows, documentaries, *Australia’s Most Wanted* or movies featuring crime), participants were divided. Some vehemently stated that they were not at all interested in crime because it was ‘too depressing’ and they ‘preferred not to be reminded of it’. A Sydney woman (SF13) said, for example, that she avoided such programs not because they made her more fearful or distressed, but because she simply did not want to have to think about such ‘doom and gloom’: ‘I don’t think it’s something worth dwelling on, because all you do, you get so caught up with it that you end up being quite paranoid about it and sure it can happen. It probably will happen, but you can spend a lot of time worrying about what might not happen too.’

Some people were critical of the level of violence on television, particularly in terms of children’s exposure to such violence

> No, I don’t enjoy that whatsoever. And I think that’s one reason why there’s too much violence around at the moment too, because children get to see things like that. Sometimes those shows are on at times when children can be sitting up watching television. So I mean children only naturally copy what’s in front of them so that’s why things like that happen — bad, you know, bad things happen. (TF12)
A Wollongong woman (WF2) noted that she often watched *Australia’s Most Wanted*, and enjoyed seeing people being caught through the information given by viewers of the program. Watching such programs, however, did not make her feel safer, but rather gave her a heightened sense of concern about crime: ‘They certainly don’t make me feel safer, they just makes you more aware of how many awful things are happening’. Members of the Bathurst women’s discussion group, however, were positive about *Australia’s Most Wanted*, saying that they enjoyed watching it. As one member of this group commented: ‘I like to think that the Australian public is doing something to help catch criminals.’ They also supported police efforts to encourage members of the community to report crimes anonymously using telephone hotlines (giving the example of Operation Noah). Nonetheless, they said that nothing they saw on television had ever made them feel safer about the threat of crime. As one said: ‘In fact, the more I watch TV, the less assured I am of being protected.’

Several participants said that they did enjoy watching television drama dealing with crime issues. They gave such reasons as enjoying seeing the anatomy of justice and legal proceedings on such programs and ‘seeing the good guys win’, as one man in rural Tasmania (TM2) put it. He went on to argue that as a father of three daughters, he hated programs that featured scenes of rape — ‘If there’s anything to do with rape on television I have to — I can’t stand it, I turn it over’ — but he enjoyed watching mystery-type programs where detectives hunt down criminals. Participants in the Sydney women’s group and the Sydney older people’s group said that they enjoyed crime television dramas such as the British series *Cracker, Prime Suspect, The Bill* and *Inspector Morse*. They said that they enjoyed the good scripts and acting in such programs, as well as the fact that they present ‘a really good mystery’. Members of the Sydney women’s group argued that it was not the crime itself that interested them in such series, but rather the intricacies of how it was solved

> *I like the way minds work, I think that’s what it is for me.*
> *You get given the clues and you have to work through the clues and find out who did it. The actual crime itself is horrible.*
> *I just want to know of the crime, I want to see how they work it out — It’s a stimulating thing.*
> *I like the challenge of trying to work it out for myself.*

Other participants said that they enjoyed watching television programs about crime or policing for the same reasons — seeing the minutiae of crime solving. For instance, a member of the Sydney older people’s group commented that: ‘The thing I enjoy most about it is that where it’s a clever story and there’s been a clever criminal and a clever detective who finally works out the solution. Like the old Sherlock Holmes stories or something.’ The participants did not relate such programs, however, to their own experiences, noting that they were ‘fictional’ and therefore did not make them consider their own circumstances in the same way as news media coverage of crime sometimes did.
The participants were asked if they had seen or heard anything about crime in the media that made them feel angry, and, if yes, to explain what it was. People’s answers included their anger at the Port Arthur shootings, the backpacker murders in the Belanglo forest, the Anita Cobby murder case and news reports on ‘bent coppers’. The well-publicised murder crimes such as the backpacker murders and the Anita Cobby case made people feel angry because the perpetrators were seen to be particularly nasty to their victims. As one man (WMs) said of the Anita Cobby murder: ‘It was vile, disgusting, it was inhumane, it was unhuman.’

Many people mentioned news reports on attacks on victims they considered to be particularly weak or defenceless, such as older people and children, as making them very angry.

I get particularly frustrated when I read — and it’s all too often unfortunately — where somebody breaks into somebody’s house, particularly an old person’s house, and threatens them, or bashes them or whatever. I think that’s totally unforgivable and that’s absolutely reprehensible, that sort of behaviour, and I think those sort of people should be locked away for a long time. (TM2)

Others also referred to their anger at news reports about criminals who evaded what they saw as ‘proper’ punishment for their crimes, particularly those who committed what they saw as the most repugnant of all crimes: attacks on young children or old people. There was the suggestion in their accounts that the legal system was not operating equitably.

I guess when I see things reported about people committing crimes, usually sort of sexual sort of crimes, and sort of child crimes and things like that. And then they either don’t get sentenced for very long, or don’t seem to get sentenced for a long time, but then seem to emerge back into the community five seconds after they’ve gone in. And I think that usually makes me angry when I see that, that they haven’t served their time for the crime or they don’t get given time for the crime. (TF5)

A few participants mentioned the case, which took place around the time of the interviews, of the French man who was shot and killed on Bondi Beach by police after waving a knife around as making them angry. They said that they did not believe that such extreme measures should have been used on the man. As one participant said of this incident

I don’t think that because police are police they have a licence to kill anybody. If that’s the case then their training is lacking. They should be trained to deal with that, not just turn around and shoot them, doesn’t matter who they are. That’s why we have the justice system that we do in this country, you know, policemen aren’t the law, they’re the officers of it, they don’t make that decision. (BF10)
A Hobart man (TM11) noted that news reports and dramatised television shows such as the ABC’s Blue Murder series about corrupt police officers made him angry because he thought that people should be able to trust the police.

*That’s a worry, you know, when the enforcing agency is — well, through the New South Wales Royal Commission when the enforcing agency is perceived to be in not just peripheral activities, but mainstream crime. That just completely shatters confidence.*

He went on to say that the ABC television series Janus had also made him angry, because it showed how dangerous and violent criminals were able to manipulate the legal system. He went on to say, however, that this did not mean that he felt more worried about coming across such criminals as part of his everyday life.

Other people mentioned their anger at the way that Aboriginal people were portrayed and stereotyped in relation to crime, about generalisations or stereotypical representations of other marginalised groups.

*The way in which the media reports crime is often sensationalist and makes me feel angry because they don’t often explain the situation surrounding why certain people do certain things, particularly less violent crimes. And it’s too easy also to pick on the people who are you know, who commit crimes and they’re in difficult situations, and not pick on the bigger crims. And I hate the racist kind of crime, like the Triad stuff, which has been generated a lot about Asians being criminals, Asians and Aborigines, that racist kind of stuff that goes with some crime reporting. (SF3)*

Many participants were angry at the lack of respect shown by some of the news media in hounding victims of crime and their families to get their stories and images. As a Sydney man (SM5) put it, he hates the way the media engage in ‘the relentless grab for people’s emotional energy — it’s a form of parasitism’.
In this report I have avoided the use of the term ‘irrational’ to describe people’s responses to crime. Like commentators such as Sparks (1992) and Hale (1996), I argue that attempting to define what is a ‘rational’ versus an ‘irrational’ fear of crime is fruitless and ultimately unhelpful conceptually. It also implies that a purely ‘objective’ measure of crime can be compared against the ‘subjective’ assessment of members of the public in determining how ‘rational’ their fears are: that is, that ‘real’ crime rates can be identified and compared against lay perceptions. As Ericson points out, however, any measurement of crime rates is a sociocultural construction, a particular ‘way of seeing’; for example, ‘Police statistics of crime do not mirror the reality of crime, but are cultural, legal, and social constructs produced by police for organizational purposes’ (1991: 220).

The present study has shown that people’s construction of perception of risk, fear and worry about crime — what might be termed ‘lay criminology’ — is founded on a number of concerns that are highly pertinent to their sense of safety and security. There was a strong relationship between individuals’ perception of being at risk from a crime and feelings of worry about this crime happening to oneself. The participants in general assessed their risk of home burglary and car theft as being much higher than crimes against the person, and correspondingly worried more about being a victim of these crimes. The relationship between assessment of risk and levels of worry, however, was not directly correlated. Those participants who considered themselves to be at high or moderate risk of a crime tended not to have commensurate high levels of worry about being a victim. While they assessed their risk of assault as much lower than that of property crimes, many of the participants were more concerned about assaults to their person than about theft because such crimes are more violating of their sense of self. They feared bodily harm in such attacks but also the emotions of vulnerability and terror that such an attack was thought to induce, possibly for some time after the incident. In comparison, having one’s property stolen or damaged, while a distressing experience, was for most people considered to be far less serious.

This term draws upon that of ‘lay epidemiology’, used by writers in the field of sociology of health and illness to refer to lay people’s assessments of the risks related to health and disease (as opposed to those made by medical and public health experts). They argue that ‘lay epidemiology’ is constructed through a complex combination of the routine observation of cases of illness and death in people’s personal networks and in the public arena, the knowledge wrought by their own experiences of illness, media coverage of health and illness, ideas about social networks and support and broader notions of fate and destiny in conjunction with ‘expert’ knowledges on the distribution of illness and disease which are themselves often mediated via the mass media (see, for example, Davison et al., 1991).

These findings support Hale’s (1996:106) speculations that fear of crime depends not only upon an individual’s assessment of her likelihood of victimisation but also upon her or his perception of how serious the impact of victimisation is likely to be.
Personal biography interacts with attributes such as gender, age and physical location in producing ‘lay criminological’ knowledges. Some people displayed a very fearful approach to crime, particularly those who had been the victim of physical or sexual assault. Personal experience of crime, however, did not always lead to a highly fearful response, and some people who had never had a personal experience of crime or knew someone who did were very fearful. In general, however, personal experience was strongly linked to heightened awareness of the risk of crime and often to heightened feelings of worry about being the victim of crime. Many people, although ‘cautious’ about protecting themselves against crime, and taking steps to avoid being a victim of crime, did not wish to position themselves as particularly fearful or as a ‘victim’. This was the case for both men and women.

People's sense of their physical vulnerability in relation to their risk of being a victim of a crime upon the person was clearly structured through gender and age. Individuals' assessments of their own physical strength and agility contributed to their feelings of risk in contexts in which they felt more exposed to attack. The participants assumed that people of lighter or smaller physique, of less physical strength — women, the elderly and younger people — would be more likely to be the target of men seeking to attack them. Women and girls tended to fear sexual or physical assault when alone in public places, and younger women particularly worried about sexual assault. Adolescent males worried about physical assault (but not sexual assault) in public places. Both women and adolescents often felt safer when in public spaces or in their home when accompanied by another person, particularly if that person was an adult man who is perceived to be physically strong enough to deter criminals from attempting physical assault. The presence of another woman, or of children, did not have the same effect of reassurance.

Adult men, who in general considered themselves to be physically stronger than women and children or adolescents and less of a target than women of sexual assault, do not appear to require the presence of another person to feel safer, either in public spaces or at home. Indeed, some felt more at risk of physical assault when walking with someone they feel they should ‘protect’, such as a woman or child, because they are then required to behave in more combative ways, as 'masculine protector of the vulnerable', than they might do if alone. While older age was associated with feelings of physical vulnerability, with elderly people acknowledging that they were less strong or agile than younger people, this did not necessarily mean that older people felt more at risk from assaults to the person (cf. Pain, 1995). Many older people felt that their everyday routines did not place them at high risk of attack, while younger people were placed in more situations in public spaces in which they felt they were at risk from attack.
Parents exhibited a high level of worry about their children, particularly young or adolescent children, seeing themselves as responsible for protecting them from crime. They were particularly worried about the risk of physical or sexual assault in situations where the children were not with their parents. Feelings of lack of control were evident in parents’ worry about their children’s safety. At the same time, however, they were wary of transmitting too much fear to their children, not wanting them to approach the world in too fearful a manner. There was a strong sense in parents’ replies that they struggled with their own fears and concerns for their children’s safety and their beliefs that their children should enjoy autonomy and learn for themselves how to deal with dangers.

Feelings of apprehension about crime, whether related to one's property, one's person or the safety of loved others, were most commonly projected onto the figure of the ‘unpredictable stranger’, a person from outside one's known circle of family, friends or neighbours. The ‘unpredictable stranger’ is positioned as Other to Self: an individual who does not share one's own approach to life, one's principles and sensibilities. The participants’ fear of the ‘unpredictable stranger’ was largely based on uncertainty: they did not know this individual and thus cannot gauge how he (this figure is invariably thought of as a male) might respond or act (cf. Valentine, 1989: 386; Taylor et al., 1996: 262). They were more afraid of this figure when moving in public spaces, because they felt that they had far less control over others in such spaces than when in their own homes, and they are far more likely to encounter strangers in the ‘outside world’ than when they are in their homes. However, the idea of such an individual coming into one's home uninvited — breaching the boundaries of what is seen to be one's own ‘safe’ territory — is also a focus of worry. Even if one is not home when it happens, the event may create feelings of vulnerability and anger at the violation of one's sense of security in the home. The idea of such individuals attacking people seen to be particularly defenceless, such as older people and young children, evoked strong feelings of concern, anger and even outrage. Crime is typically conceptualised as on the move, nomadic, rather than fixed, as constantly shifting, as unpredictable. But yet crime is also constantly located in temporal and spatial matrices (Young, 1996: 7). As part of the strategy of dealing with the risk and uncertainty of crime, each person develops a ‘mental map’ of places, defining some as likely to be ‘safe’ and others as ‘risky’. Certain streets or other places (such as areas outside pubs) are defined as ‘risky’ based on such factors as how well lit-up they are at night, how ‘open’ they appear to be, how well one knows the people who live there, how many others use the space, and whether these others are defined as ‘threatening’ or contributing to one’s...

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1 See Douglas (1972) on the use of the Other to maintain symbolic boundaries and social order, Bauman (1995) on the figure of the ‘stranger’ in the context of uncertainty of late modernity and Young (1996) on the criminal Other.
Most people felt more at risk of crime late at night rather than during the day, because of the lack of certainty that darkness brings with it and because it was assumed that nefarious deeds tend to take place at that time, rather than in ‘broad daylight’ for this reason of lack of visibility.

The ‘dark alley’, the park at night, the river or beach area are archetypal spaces of fear because they are dark and it is difficult to see and make assessments of the others who are using the space. The open-air shopping mall is threatening because it is a passage-way where groups of ‘unpredictable strangers’ gather, forcing people moving through to run the gauntlet. ‘Quiet’ spaces — those that have few people — are generally assessed as safe, but women in particular are often more ambivalent about ‘quietness’, because lack of others in such spaces may make them feel more threatened from an unexpected attack by a stranger who might suddenly appear. Men tended to feel more worried about the risk of physical assault in such situations as drinking in pubs or walking near pubs late at night, where they thought that drunken men might be likely to start a fight.

Other places identified as dangerous are viewed as such for a variety of reasons, some of which are unrelated to personal experience but rather to a set of mythologies about particular places (cf. Taylor, 1995). Places other than that in which one lives and moves about regularly tend to be identified as particularly dangerous. Areas in Sydney such as Kings Cross, Redfern and Cabramatta fall into this category of mythologised or symbolic locations of danger. People ‘know’ that they are dangerous places even if they have never visited these areas because they hear about them constantly in the mass media or from others as sites of crime. Such places are seen to be dangerous because they are associated with ‘unpredictable strangers’ from deviant and marginalised social groups — injecting drug users and drug dealers, sex workers and pimps, unemployed people, impoverished people, desperate people, angry people, drunks, corrupt police officers, Aboriginal people, members of Asian criminal gangs. They also conform to the ambivalent late-modern notion of the city as a place of danger, disorder, alienation, anger, social decay and crowding (as well as excitement and pleasure), and therefore as the archetypal location of crime (Bauman, 1995; Young, 1996). The people who had lived in such areas — and who therefore relied on extensive lived experience of the place rather than on cultural mythologies alone — tended to have a less fearful approach compared with those who had never been there or who only briefly passed through.

Unlike previous research carried out in countries such as the United States (see Hale, 1996 for a review) and the United Kingdom (for example, Taylor et al., 1996), there was little suggestion in the participants’ accounts that such visual aspects of the built environment as the presence of graffiti, litter or piles of rubbish or general decay of buildings contributed to their construction of certain areas of their town or city as ‘unsafe’.
Places where highly publicised murders had taken place on a single occasion by a person who had since been apprehended or killed — such as Port Arthur or Strathfield — were not generally identified as ‘dangerous’, because people tended to acknowledge that these instances were ‘one-offs’, random events that were unlikely to be repeated there. The events that took place at these places were seen to be perpetrated by a single individual who had entered on a single occasion for the purpose of committing the murders. Such events, however, proved unsettling for some people because they demonstrate the continuing existence of what was seen to be the worst type of ‘unpredictable stranger’ — the psychotic, uncontrollable nihilistic killer, intent on violence and murder for their own sake. These events underlined the notion that such crimes may happen anywhere, at any time — they are totally random and unpredictable, and there is nothing one can do to protect oneself against them.

People’s own homes were generally represented as places of safety rather than of danger in terms of crime. The participants felt as if they were more in control of the space and others in their home. They felt that they could take steps to control the entry of others in and out by using various security measures. The home, unlike public space, was conceptualised as a space belonging to oneself and therefore as less threatening. People appeared to feel unsafe in their own houses only if they thought that it was not secure enough in preventing criminals from gaining entry, or if they had recently experienced an episode of burglary or assault which challenged their perception of their home being a well-secured space. Anonymous telephone calls also made some people feel less secure in their homes, if they judged such calls as being instigated by people who were threatening or malicious in some way (as opposed to just being ‘kids’, for example).

Women were more concerned about their safety within the home than men, taking more steps to protect themselves against the entry of uninvited others. Several women indeed, noted that the men they lived with seemed to be much less concerned about securing the house against unwanted entry than they did. There was little suggestion on the part of women who worried about assault that the threat might come from within the home rather than from outside — their major preoccupation was with securing the house against external threats. As Valentine (1989, 1992) suggests, women’s sense of greater danger outside the home compared with inside the home may be explained by the prevailing cultural mythology of the home as a safe, secure place for women and of public places as highly dangerous in terms of abduction or attacks from strangers. Young girls, more than young boys, are acculturated by their parents and others (such as teachers) from earliest childhood to be fearful of attacks by strange men in public spaces. This continues at a far greater level of intensity for women than for most men into adolescence and adulthood. The mass media, as Valentine points out, also tend to represent women as being more vulnerable than men to physical attack, focusing on the danger of public space and strangers rather than those of the domestic environment and people known to victims.
This acculturation of fear and worry, as the present study reveals, continues into adulthood, with women of all ages being positioned as far more vulnerable to attack from strangers than men and constantly being warned by their male partners and parents to be careful when out alone. It may help to explain not only why women generally worry more about the risk of attack in public spaces, but also why many adult men, although acknowledging that they are at risk of physical assault in public spaces (particularly when in such situations as drinking at pubs or walking near pubs), are generally less afraid than women in moving around in such spaces. Women, particularly younger women, also discussed regularly experiencing incidents such as sexual harassment from strange men in public spaces which disquieted them and contributed to their sense that this space was not wholly safe for them. As Douglas has asserted, the discrepancy that is often found between women and older people's fear of crime and their risk of being a victim 'may be precisely the result of their cultivated fortress mentality. Their lower vulnerability (compared with their expectations) is due to the very success of the precautions they take to protect themselves' (1985: 70).

The presence of 'strange' others in public spaces may contribute both to feelings of safety and of danger. People go through a process of assessing others in public spaces, often in very conscious ways (part of 'staying alert' to danger). Strangers who are assessed by the individual as being non-threatening provide a sense of security by their presence in places where otherwise one might be alone: in city streets or open-air malls at night, for example, or in a train carriage. Strangers who are assessed as threatening in some way, however, create feelings of fear and risk. Strangers may be assessed as threatening based on such factors as their age and gender, their demeanour and whether they themselves are alone or with another person or a group. Young people are generally assessed as far more threatening than middle-aged or old people, men are far more threatening than women and people who appear to be together in a 'gang' are more threatening than individuals. The young men in groups who were nominated by many people as dangerous and threatening combine these elements of threat. They were perhaps most threatening to young women (because of their fear of sexual assault) and to other young men themselves, who saw themselves as being particular targets of 'homies' or gang members.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to single out people's fear of crime from their concerns, anxieties and fears about other aspects of modern social life and social relations. The writings of theorists such as Giddens (1991), Beck (1992) and Bauman (1995) have pointed to changes in individuals' sense of selfhood in

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1 Goodey (1994) refers to such incidents as 'sub-legal harassment', involving women being followed, stared at, approached or shouted at by men in public places such as the street and on public transport. See also Taylor et al. (1996: chapter 9) for a discussion on the dominant masculinist meanings of the city spaces of Manchester and Sheffield and female residents' experiences of moving around these spaces.
contemporary western societies, suggesting that people today are far more sensitive to what they define as ‘risks’, or threats to their health, economic security or emotional wellbeing than they were in previous eras. Whether or not life has become more dangerous or uncertain at the end of the twentieth century, it is apparent that many people strongly believe that it has10. For Giddens, Beck and Bauman, this perception is itself an outcome of the late modern era, a product of modernist efforts to control chaos. For people in late modern societies, they argue, the desire to give order to disorder which emerged from the Enlightenment is combined with an acute awareness that the products of modernisation, such as industrialisation and urbanisation, have brought with them not just benefits but also profound problems. As Bauman puts it

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\text{The image of the world generated by life concerns is now devoid of genuine or assumed solidity and continuity which used to be the trade-mark of modern structures. The dominant sentiment is the feeling of uncertainty — as to the future shape of the world, as to the right way of living in it, and of the criteria by which to judge the rights and wrongs of the way of living.}\quad (1995:\text{ 4–5})
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Pratt (1995: 16) has argued that another outcome of modernity is an increasing sensitivity concerning issues of personal safety, including vulnerability to violent crime and (for women) to sexual assault. Where once individuals designated as ‘dangerous’ were viewed as largely posing a threat to one’s property, the major concern today is the threat such individuals pose to one’s person. Fear of crime, therefore, may be understood to be a product of modernity, including the intensification of concern about the control of disorder, an increasing emphasis on human rights and the importance of individual freedom and greater expectations about the role that the state should play in protecting its citizens from harm. The improvements in human health and wellbeing that have emerged over the past two centuries paradoxically produce greater anxiety and concern about physical risk. As Pratt puts it: ‘As life itself becomes something to be cherished and protected, so did the dangers to it seem more abundant and threatening’ (1995: 16). Related to these changes in late modernity is an intensification of privatisation and individualisation. Taylor (1995) argues that life for people in contemporary western societies has become increasingly privatised since World War 2, with individuals withdrawing into their homes and fortifying themselves against intrusion. This has resulted in the intensification of fear about public spaces, which are seen to be far more threatening and hostile.

* Recent empirical research appears to support these theoretical claims. See Taylor et al (1996) for a detailed empirical study of how residents of the English cities of Manchester and Sheffield consider their cities to have become desperate and frightened places and quality of life in general to have deteriorated in recent times. Little such research has been carried out in Australia. However, interim findings from a three-year study conducted to Pusey of middle-class Australian’s attitudes to life suggest that many such individuals are feeling under threat and demoralised by socio-economic changes and feel that their quality of life is declining (although his data also reveal that the majority are mostly satisfied about their life as a whole) (cited in the Sydney Morning Herald, 22 July 1997).
Elements of these broader societal trends were clearly evident in the accounts provided by the participants of their attitudes to and feelings about crime and social life in general. For the participants, crime was not considered to be a separate problem, but rather part of a complex web of interrelated aspects of contemporary urban societies they considered to be evidence of societal breakdown and rapid change, about which they were highly concerned. Most participants expressed the view that Australia, and particularly its big cities, had become more dangerous, violent and despairing. They linked their perception that crime rates had risen in Australia with their perception of Australian society becoming less civil. It was contended that people had become more individualistic, were less interested in others, lacked firm principles by which to live their lives, and that the ‘community spirit’ that supposedly once flourished had largely evaporated. These perceptions were strongly related to understandings of the plight of young people in Australian society. It was generally assumed that young people faced a far bleaker future than they had in previous generations. The notion that family life was breaking down, that many young people had little opportunity to gain employment, faced continuing poverty and lacked a purpose in life, was constantly articulated by the participants, regardless of their gender, age or socio-economic background.

Crime was positioned as forming part of this network of social interrelationships. There was the feeling among many of the participants that anger, despair and frustration were the outcomes of these societal changes, and that these emotions were often expressed via crime and violence on the part of disaffected individuals. They were particularly concerned and angry about their perception that the policing, justice and social welfare systems were not properly operating to contain and control the activities of such people. An association was frequently made by the participants between young people’s alienation and despair, their impoverishment and boredom, and their greater propensity to engage in criminal activities, as a source of property or money, as a source of thrills or as an outlet for feelings of anger and frustration. The use of illicit drugs was also seen as being associated both with feelings of alienation and despair and also as a major cause of crime, in terms of drug users committing crimes while ‘high’ or when desperate to find money for the next fix.

These dangerous others — principally young men — were perceived to be particularly threatening and unpredictable because of their assumed desperation (for money, drugs or thrills) and constantly simmering frustrations and resentments. It was assumed that such individuals lacked self-control or

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“Some researches on ‘fear of crime’ have argued that people of lower socio-economic status tend to identify such social structural factors as unemployment, poverty and lack of recreational facilities as causes of crime, while people who are more socio-economically advantaged tend to propose more individualistic causes (see Hale’s (1996: 123) review). No such difference was evident in the present study.”
empathy for others, and it was therefore difficult to protect oneself against them. As this suggests, the figure of the ‘unpredictable stranger’ acts as a kind of ‘folk devil’ in becoming the target of generalised as well as more specific worries, fears and anxieties about the nature of modern life and modern society, the apparent breakdown of community feeling, the loss of a sense of certainty about life and social relations, growing incivility in people’s interactions with each other and increasing unemployment, poverty and family breakdown (Hay, 1995; Taylor et al, 1996; Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). Taylor et al make the point in relation to the fears and anxieties expressed by elderly people in Manchester and Sheffield that these should be seen as a kind of reflexive social commentary as to the unintended consequences of social change ... rather than being a literal statement of fear. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the popular discussion of crime. The fear of crime is quite clearly to be understood, in part, in literal terms ... It is also to be understood, however, as a form of ‘knowing’ social commentary, in which the elderly are offering their wisdom — in metaphorical and heavily nuanced ways ... about ‘the ways things are nowadays’. (1996: 254).

In the present study, large cities were viewed by most participants as more ‘dangerous’ in terms of the threat to crime than were small towns or rural areas. Crime was seen to be concentrated in urban areas, associated with the dense population in large cities and the lack of social ties between people that was seen as characteristic of city life. Housing Commission estates were singled by several people as places they would avoid if possible, because of the high proportions of ‘dangerous people’ (unemployed, impoverished, angry, disaffected people) who were believed to live there. Open-air shopping malls in cities were frequently singled out as dangerous places in terms of crime. They were seen to be places where groups of young people (particularly young men) gathered to cause trouble by harassing or assaulting passers-by, both during the day and at night. A sense of menace from men drinking in pubs and clubs at night was also evident in both men’s and women’s accounts of places they tried to avoid. People in small towns were viewed as having a greater sense of community, and it was assumed that because people were more likely to know each other, people would be less likely to carry out criminal acts. Small towns were therefore seen by most participants as being safer places to live in terms of the risk of crime than large cities.

There was somewhat of a disjuncture between people’s acknowledgment that the mass media are important in the development of their own feelings and knowledge about crime, and their assertions that often such media cannot be trusted to present the facts about crime in a reliable manner. Personal experience, or that of others who are known and trusted, was overwhelmingly
considered to be more ‘truthful’ and ‘real’. Many people, however, noted that they had few other sources other than the mass media upon which they could draw, and thus were forced to rely upon them for information about crime. Such media representations, which deliberately seek to engage audiences emotively, do appear to achieve this with many audience members. As writers such as Sparks (1992), Hay (1995) and Young (1996) have argued, the spectacle of crime as portrayed in ‘real life’ scenarios of crime ‘confronts us with the frightening recognition of the normality of the settings of the crime’ (Hay 1995: 201), making voyeurs of audiences and seeking to stimulate feelings of anger, fear and outrage.

Many of the participants had clearly been emotionally engaged by mass media portrayals of crime. While some participants said that they took steps to avoid hearing about crime, because this simply exacerbated their feelings of fear and vulnerability, most people demonstrated a desire to know about crime — they found news of crime interesting, important, personally relevant and often fascinating. There was a great deal of variability among the participants in terms of how they said they responded to media accounts. It was clear from several people's accounts that hearing or seeing incidents of crime in the mass media — particularly ‘real’ stories in the news media or on programs like Australia's Most Wanted — did make them fearful of some crimes, at least for a time. Others avoided certain programs because they anticipated being frightened by them. Still others asserted that while media accounts, particularly those of the news media, may contribute to a heightened awareness of crime, particularly its random nature, they did not feel that such accounts had made them more fearful about being a victim. Few participants, however, said that they had seen or heard anything on the media that made them feel less fearful about crime.

Perception of threat to oneself at any given time is based on a number of factors that intertwine with each other. Lay criminology is based upon people’s own experiences and their knowledge of others' experiences interacting with the mass media coverage of crime (particularly news media reports) which they see or hear. Neither of these sources, however, can be identified as more important than the others. For some people at some times, news reports have more currency in their assessment of risk from particular crimes than does personal experience. These sources also often work together synergistically in the construction of fear, so that awareness of crime that starts from one source (for example, knowing someone who has been a victim) may be heightened further by personal experience or hearing about the prevalence of such crime in one’s local area or a particularly horrific murder or assault in the news media.

This privileging of personal experience or that of trusted others such as friends and family members over the mass media and institutional sources of information about risk (such as the government) has regularly been identified in quantitative studies of people’s assessment of risk (see, for example, Marris and Langford, 1996).
Heightened awareness of a particular crime may have a cumulative effect, slowly building up over time, and contributing to a continuing feeling of concern about being a victim of this crime. Alternatively, it may be a relatively brief but acute experience, involving feelings of anxiety or worry for a relatively short time which eventually lessen in their intensity.

In attempting to explain why people may respond in such a way, it would be misguided, however, to attempt to reduce these feelings of fear and anxiety to a specific response to a discrete incident. Individuals may react in particularly fearful ways to a report of an incident of crime because this incident serves as a means of isolating and projecting their inchoate, diffuse and perhaps barely recognised anxieties about other aspects of their life. In other words, what may appear to be a heightened fear of crime may not be specifically about crime at all, but rather a response on the part of people to other aspects of their life that are particularly worrying them. By projecting these anxieties onto a particular knowable and actionable target (crime and criminals), they are removed (split off) from the self. Therefore, it may be argued that a particular incident of crime that appears in the mass media, or is recounted by a friend, rather than ‘causing’ fear may instead serve as a focus for pre-existing anxieties (Sparks, 1992; Hay, 1995; Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). This psychodynamic explanation both recognises that individuals may experience ambivalent, and often contradictory emotions, which are subject to change over the life course, and that different people respond differently to the same incident because of their individual biographies (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). As Hollway and Jefferson argue: ‘how particular individuals identify with fear of crime discourses depends on their unique biographies, especially their histories of anxiety and how they have come to handle the circumstances of their lives in the light of this’ (1997: 265).

There was a strong sense of fatalism in people’s accounts of the risk of crime. Crime may be regarded as ‘predictable’ in that it is assessed as common in one’s area, and therefore likely to happen to oneself some day — ‘if your number comes up, then it comes up’. Alternatively, crime may be regarded as ‘unpredictable’ and random, as striking ‘out of the blue’. This was seen to be particularly the case with extreme and comparatively rare crimes such as murder and violent assault. In both cases, it is assumed that while one may endeavour to take some form of preventive action, the crime will happen anyway. Here again, the notion of the attack by a ‘unpredictable stranger’ rather than a person one knew dominated people’s assumptions. Some people found the random nature of some crimes to be a source of worry because of their very unpredictability and the associated lack of control one can exert over them. Others, however, used this as a reason not to worry, reasoning that as nothing can be done to prevent such crimes and they are uncommon there is no point worrying about them.
In the participants’ accounts of how individuals become victims of crime, they moved between the notion that victims may in some way be held responsible for the crime, by not engaging in proper defensive strategies or having the ‘wrong attitude’, and the fatalistic notion that crime is random and unpredictable, and could happen to anyone, regardless of the efforts they took to prevent it. Crime, therefore, was simultaneously thought of as both preventable and inevitable, and people tended to vacillate ambivalently between these two notions.

**Table 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victimisation/Self-Protection Strategies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• increased security measures in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• programs like Neighbourhood Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• improving lighting in public spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increased presence of police or other security agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• surveillance cameras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• staying alert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• avoiding certain places at certain times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• avoiding contact with certain individuals or groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• walking with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• maintaining a ‘positive attitude’/eschewing the ‘victim role’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• carrying keys or other objects to use as weapons</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Control/Community-Based Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• job provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• improved recreational facilities (particularly for young people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• improving the level of neighbourhood civility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• improving social networks and ‘community spirit’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• drug reform (particularly legalising of heroin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• strengthening families and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• greater discipline for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• law reform for harsher penalties for criminals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because people's fears of crime tended to cohere around the notion of the 'unpredictable stranger' attacking oneself or stealing one's property, the strategies nominated by the participants for alleviating crime and fear of crime tended to address the fear and anxiety aroused by uncertainty. Five different categories of solutions were outlined by participants as means to deal with crime: socio-economic solutions, 'law-and-order' solutions, surveillance solutions, community solutions and activity solutions. Socio-economic solutions involved addressing the underlying causes of crime, such as poverty and unemployment, with social and economic reforms. Most people thought that there was much more that needed to be done by the state and federal governments in addressing these issues. 'Law-and-order' solutions were those proposing various legal reforms, such as introducing harsher penalties for offenders and reforms to drug laws such as legalising heroin and to gun licensing laws, making it more difficult to acquire a gun. Several participants were approving of recent gun reforms following the Port Arthur shootings, but many saw room for improvement in addressing the areas proposed for legal reform.

Surveillance solutions involved a greater police presence in public spaces as well as the use of closed-circuit cameras in public areas such as open-air shopping malls and train stations so that criminal activity might be better monitored. Participants who travelled in trains were supportive of past attempts to improve security on trains, but wanted to see a greater presence of guards or police to make them feel safer. 'Community' solutions were those addressing the perceived lack of ties between people in contemporary society and the need for more 'community spirit' and less individualism. These solutions tended to be somewhat vague, including suggestions that people should be encouraged to be more friendly, to 'look out for each other', to have more 'ownership' of the system and have more of a say in crime prevention activities. Many participants were positive about the idea of Neighbourhood Watch, seeing this as a means by which people could act together to prevent crime and thus encourage greater feelings of community and safety in neighbourhoods. The 'activity' solution was to provide more facilities and leisure activities for young and unemployed people so that they would be less inclined to engage in crime to alleviate boredom and to 'get them off the streets'.
These strategies emerge from two logics\(^\text{13}\). The first is that which attempts to deal with crime and fear of crime by reforming and assimilating marginalised others, to domesticate them and make them more ‘like us’ — respectable, contented, law-abiding, self-controlled, placid. This logic is particularly directed at those criminals (or potential criminals) who are conceptualised as behaving criminally because of social or economic disadvantage, addiction to drugs, lack of worthwhile employment or pastimes, dysfunctional family upbringing or deficient education. It constructs a notion of the criminal as someone who, shaped and disadvantaged by powerful social forces, turns to crime but may yet be redeemed. The second logic is that which seeks to identify and then exclude criminals, through surveillance and policing activities and keeping criminals in prisons, away from other citizens. The former logic dominated in people’s suggestions over the latter, which tends to be reserved for individuals deemed to be beyond reform, such as ‘hardened’ or psychotic criminals or those who attack the defenceless (children and older people). Both logics, however, are directed at the need to impose order and predictability on the ‘unpredictable stranger’.

Personal strategies of crime prevention are also attempts to domesticate the unpredictable, but this time they involve activities requiring self-control and vigilance on the part of the individual. As Young notes, ‘Criminality is taken for granted to exist in a matrix of relational opportunities offered or thwarted; risk averted or ignored’. The citizen is ‘the subject-who-looks, in an ever-present watchfulness’ (1996: 210). Like people’s perception of risk, the personal strategies that people adopt to prevent against crime or deal with their fear of crime (these are frequently intertwined) may be habitual, part of their everyday routines and therefore barely thought about. This type of strategy may not even be perceived by individuals as responses to fear, but rather simply as ‘sensible’ habits of self-protection, in much the same way as buckling one’s seat belt whenever one drives is a habit rather than the result of a constant fear of being killed or injured in a car accident. Alternatively, strategies may suddenly be instituted in response to an acute sense of fear. These may eventually become habitual or may be dropped after a time rather than incorporated into one’s everyday life.

The personal strategies for alleviating fear of crime outlined by the participants included staying alert to others around oneself, constantly assessing them for signs that they might prove to be a threat to oneself and keeping to well-lit streets so as to be better able to assess others. They also involve avoiding contact with people and places in which an individual assessed they might be

\(^\text{13}\) The theorising of these logics draws from Bauman’s (1995) discussion of how the marginalised ‘stranger’ is dealt with by societies. He noted that one strategy is ‘anthropophagic’ or ‘annihilating strangers by devouring them and then metabolically transforming them into a tissue indistinguishable from one’s own’, while the other is ‘anthropoemetric’, involving ‘vomiting the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside’. 
more likely to be a victim of crime: crossing the street if one sees a group of young men walking towards one, averting one’s eyes from an individual assessed as potentially risky so as not to invite trouble, not behaving in ways that draws attention to oneself or threatens other people. People also used the strategy of moving about public spaces with others rather than alone to deal with their fear of an attack. In the home, measures to secure the house such as locks and security systems were strategies used to alleviate concern that the house might be broken into. Another strategy used by the participants to deal with fear of crime was to engage in maintaining a positive attitude that refuses the ‘victim’ role. This was based on the notion that people somehow ‘attract’ crime to themselves by their attitude.

These strategies appeared to work for many people in terms of alleviating their fear of crime. If individuals manage to avoid places or people they find threatening, for example, and take steps to secure their houses and car, they may not worry very much at all about crime. Some people, however, are not always able to avoid places or people they find threatening, or feel that they cannot adequately secure their houses or property. For instance, young people often find themselves in situations in public spaces where they are confronted with ‘homies’ or other threatening people because they have little choice about moving around in such spaces. In contrast, although elderly people may judge themselves to be more vulnerable than younger people to a physical attack because of the frailty wrought by advancing age, many of them have greater control over the extent to which they place themselves in risky situations.
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

As stated above, all interviewees were given codes as identifiers. The first letter in the code represents the location (S — Sydney, W — Wollongong, T — Tasmania, B — Bathurst) and the second letter represents gender (F — female, M — male). The number which makes up the rest of the code is sequential for each site.

Sydney
- SF1: Female, 75, housewife, Sydney (West Pennant Hills), less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SM2: Male, 17, student, Sydney (Redfern), less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SF3: Female, 32, broadcaster, Sydney (Alexandria), completed university degree, de facto relationship, English born, English-speaking background
- SF4: Female, 76, housewife, Sydney (Five Dock), less than final year of high school, married, Italian born, Italian speaker
- SM5: Male, 21, manager, Sydney (Mascot), completed technical qualification, never married, Malaysian born, Malay speaker
- SF6: Female, 23, sales assistant, Sydney (Bondi), completed university degree, de facto relationship, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SF7: Female, 83, retired, Sydney (Woollahra), less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SF8: Female, 50, student, Sydney (Leichhardt), some university education, de facto relationship, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SM9: Male, 37, business proprietor, Sydney (Leichhardt), some university education, de facto relationship, Polish born, English-speaking background
- SF10: Female, 46, teacher, Sydney (Turramurra), completed university degree, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SF11: Female, 41, artist/lecturer, Sydney (Glebe), completed university degree, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SM12: Male, 35, commercial property manager, Sydney (Darlinghurst), completed university degree, de facto relationship, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SF13: Female, 29, student, Sydney (Newport), completed final year of high school, separated from spouse, Australian born, English-speaking background
- SM14: Male, 44, builder's labourer, Sydney (Newport), completed final year of high school, de facto, English born, English-speaking background
- SM15: Male, 27, computer engineer, Sydney (Northmead), completed university degree, married, Vietnamese born, Chinese dialect speaker
SF16: Female, 25, computer specialist, Sydney (Northmead), some university education, married, Fiji born, Cantonese speaker

SF17: Female, 50, artist-receptionist, Sydney (Marrickville), completed technical qualification, married, Australian born, English-speaking background

SM18: Male, 44, technical officer, Sydney (Marrickville), completed university degree, de facto relationship, Australian born, English-speaking background

SM19: Male, 60, journalist, Sydney (Leichhardt), completed final year of high school, separated from spouse, Australian born, English-speaking background

SM20: Male, 26, retail manager, Sydney (Bondi), some university education, de facto relationship, Australian born, English-speaking background

SF21: Female, 16, kitchen hand, Sydney (Rozelle), less than final year of high school, never married, New Zealand born, English-speaking background

SF22: Female, 66, retired, Sydney (Matraville), less than final year of high school, married, Australian born, English-speaking background

SM23: Male, 68, retired, Sydney (Matraville), less than final year of high school, married, Australian born, English-speaking background

SM24: Male, 58, court security officer, Sydney (Tennyson), completed final year of high school, married, Australian born, English-speaking background

SF25: Female, 40, pharmacy assistant, Sydney (Malabar), completed final year of high school, married, Australian born, English-speaking background

Tasmania

TM1: Male, 43, unemployed, rural Tasmania (Sandford), some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background

TM2: Male, 42, teacher, rural Tasmania (Sandford), completed university degree, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background

TM3: Male, 32, builder, rural Tasmania (Sandford), completed technical qualification, married, Australian born, English-speaking background

TF4: Female, 21, records assistant, rural Tasmania (just outside Glenorchy), completed technical qualification, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background

TF5: Female, 35, data manager, rural Tasmania (Huonville/Cygnet), completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background

TF6: Female, 44, personal assistant, rural Tasmania (outside Kingston), completed technical qualification, married, Australian born, English-speaking-background

TF7: Female, 38, registered nurse, rural Tasmania (South Arm), completed final year of high school, married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
TM8: Male, 27, photographer, Hobart, completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
TM9: Male, 37, writer, Hobart, completed university degree, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking background
TM10: Male, 41, teacher, Hobart, completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
TM11: Male, 39, postal sorter, Hobart, some university education, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
TF12: Female, 43, higher education officer, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
TF13: Female, 23, student, Hobart, completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
TF14: Female, 42, manager, Hobart, completed less than final year of high school, married, Hong Kong born, Cantonese speaker
TF15: Female, 23, disability support officer, Hobart, completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background

Wollongong
WM1: Male, 43, teacher, Wollongong, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WF2: Female, 58, retired, Wollongong, completed final year of high school, married, English born, English-speaking background
WM3: Male, 85, retired, Wollongong, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WF4: Female, 55, self-employed, Wollongong, completed university degree, separated from spouse, Australian born, English-speaking background
WF5: Female, 22, student, Wollongong, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WF6: Female, 21, student, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WM7: Male, 24, barman, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WF8: Female, 27, community worker and student, Wollongong, some university education, never married, Australian born, Croatian speaker
WM9: Male, 27, student, Wollongong, completed university degree, never married, Laos born, Lao speaker
WF10: Female, 54, home duties and voluntary worker, Wollongong, completed technical qualification, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking background
WF11: Female, 29, computer analyst, Wollongong, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WM12: Male, 22, student, Wollongong, completed university degree, never married, Indian born, Hindi-speaking background
WF13: Female, 42, teacher, Wollongong, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WM14: Male, 39, teacher, Wollongong, completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
WM15: Male, 33, exercise physiologist, Wollongong, completed university degree, married, English born, English-speaking background

Bathurst
BF1: Female, 30, student/mother, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
BF2: Female, 46, mother/home duties, Bathurst, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
BF3: Female, 40, home duties, Bathurst, completed university degree, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking-background
BM4: Male, 21, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
BM5: Male, 35, electrician, Bathurst, completed technical qualification, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
BF6: Female, 31, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, American born, English-speaking-background
BM7: Male, 18, casual kitchen hand, Bathurst, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
BF8: Female, 28, student, Bathurst, completed university degree, never married, American born, English-speaking-background
BF9: Female, 29, graphic designer, Bathurst, completed technical qualification, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
BF10: Female, 29, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Young people, Sydney
Female, 16, student, Sydney (Balmain), never married, Australian-born, English-speaking background
Female, 16, student, Sydney (Birchgrove), never married, Australian-born, English-speaking background
Female, 16, student, Sydney (Drummoyne), never married, Australian-born, English-speaking background
Female, 16, student, Sydney (Balmain), never married, Australian-born, English-speaking background
Women, Sydney

- Female, 50, psychotherapist, Sydney (Clovelly), completed university degree, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 43, receptionist/secretary, Sydney (Annandale), less than final year of high school, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 43, shoemaker, Sydney (Randwick), some university education, de facto relationship, Australian born, Spanish speaker
- Female, 45, cook, Sydney (Bondi), completed technical qualification, divorced, Australian born, Italian speaker

Family group, Sydney

- Female, 56, teacher, Sydney (Newtown), completed university degree, married, New Zealand born, English-speaking background
- Female, 16, shop assistant, Sydney (Newtown), less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Male, 56, bus driver, Sydney (Newtown), completed technical qualification, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 17, student, Sydney (Newtown), less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background

Women, Hobart

- Female, 30, student, Hobart, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 31, research scientist, Hobart, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 36, production manager, rural Tasmania (Penna), some university education, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 45, secretary, Hobart, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 40, health worker, Hobart, completed technical qualification, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 42, librarian, Hobart, completed university degree, married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 40, scientist, Hobart, completed university degree, never married, Canadian born, English-speaking background

Young people, Hobart

- Female, 18, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 16, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 17, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
Male, 18, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, South African born, English-speaking background
Female, 18, student, Hobart, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 17, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 17, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 19, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 18, personal assistant, Hobart, completed technical qualification, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 18, student, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Scotland born, English-speaking background
Male, 18, student, Hobart, less than final year of high school, never married, Hong Kong born, English-speaking background

Older people, Hobart
Female, 74, retired, Hobart, less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 73, home manager, Hobart, less than final year of high school, widowed, Polish born, Polish speaker
Female, 80, domestic duties, Hobart, completed final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 78, retired, Hobart, education level not specified, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 71, retired, Hobart, completed final year of high school, separated from spouse, French born, French speaker
Male, 83, retired, Hobart, less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 74, retired, Hobart, less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking background
Female, 80, home management, Hobart, completed final year of high school, married, Dutch born, Dutch speaker

Men, Hobart
Male, 30, supporting parent, Hobart, completed technical qualification, separated from spouse, Australian born, English-speaking background
Male, 30, unemployed, Hobart, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
Male, 48, pensioner, Hobart, divorced, New Zealand born, English-speaking background
Male, 43, pensioner, Hobart, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
Women, Wollongong

- Female, 17, student, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 42, student, some university education, never married, English born, English-speaking background
- Female, 44, teacher, completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 65, home duties, Wollongong, completed technical qualification, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 41, teacher, Wollongong, completed university degree, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background

Young people, Wollongong

- Male, 18, student, Wollongong, completed final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Male, 19, unemployed, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 17, unemployed, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Male, 17, unemployed, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 17, unemployed, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 16, student, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background
- Female, 17, unemployed, Wollongong, less than final year of high school, never married, Australian born, English-speaking background

Older people, Wollongong

- Male, 70, retired, Wollongong, completed university degree, married, Australian-born, English-speaking background
- Female, 67, retired, Wollongong, some university education, married, Australian-born, English-speaking background
- Female, 76, retired, Wollongong, completed less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian-born, English-speaking background
- Female, 75, retired, Wollongong, completed less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian-born, English-speaking background
Older women, Bathurst
- Female, 71, retired, Bathurst, less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 65, retired, Bathurst, less than final year of high school, separated from spouse, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 72, retired, Bathurst, completed technical qualification, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 67, pensioner, Bathurst, less than final year of high school, widowed, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 71, retired, Bathurst, less than final year of high school, married, Australian born, English-speaking-background

Young people, Bathurst
- Female, 19, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 20, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 19, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 19, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Male, 20, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Male, 19, student, Bathurst, some university education, never married, Australian born, English-speaking-background

Women, Bathurst
- Female, 48, registered nurse, Bathurst, completed technical qualification, married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 46, home duties, Bathurst, some university education, married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 43, coffee lounge proprietor, Bathurst, completed technical qualification, married,
- Female, 32, home duties, Bathurst, some university education, married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 49, home duties, Bathurst, completed technical education, married, Australian born, English-speaking-background
- Female, 43, mother/waitress, Bathurst, some university education, divorced, Australian born, English-speaking-background
Participants in both the focus groups and the long interviews also completed a written questionnaire. Because of the lack of random sampling it would be unwise to use descriptive statistics to gain a representative view of community attitudes. However, it is useful to consider the interrelationship of variables, particularly when joint consideration of multiple factors allows some control over chance variations e.g. in gender or age distributions between locations. It provides a preliminary basis for comparisons with work from other countries particularly Ferraro's (1995) US findings.

The analysis will focus on predictors of answers to a few specific questions.

Walking the streets at night: feelings of safety and everyday practices

The questions of feeling safe walking the streets alone at night has been one of the most frequently used indicators of fear of crime. As indicated in Figure 1 the main predictor of feelings of safety is the gender of the respondent, males feel safer than females. The only addition factor is ethnicity. Those from an Anglo-Celtic background feel safer than those from a non-English speaking or Aboriginal background. Feeling safe walking the streets at night is the strongest individual predictor of frequency of walking the streets at night. There are several other significant predictors. Younger respondents are more likely to be out alone at night than older respondents. Looking at responses in detail it is clear that quite a lot of young people are out at night despite feeling unsafe, the older respondents tend not to go out alone at night unless they feel safe. The tendency of males to go out on their own more cannot be wholly accounted for by their greater feelings of safety. Finally one of the few locational differences was the greater tendency of Sydney residents to go out alone on the streets at night.

It may be speculated that experience of crime might reduce people's tendency to walk alone at night. In fact the data suggest that those who have greater experience of crime against the person are out on the streets more, suggesting experience of crime relates to exposure to potential criminal attack and does not lead to cessation of walking the streets alone.

Perceived risk of crime against the person and its impact on worry

An index of perceived risk of crimes against the person was compiled from perceived risk of mugging, assault, sexual assault and murder. In line with Ferraro's findings the strongest predictors were age and gender (Figure 2).
Younger and female respondents perceived themselves at greater risk. With these factors controlled, those who had experienced at least one crime against their person saw themselves as at greater risk. As Ferraro found, perceived risk is the major predictor of worry with ethnicity being a small additional predictor. With perceived risk held constant people from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds were more anxious. Direct or indirect experience of assault did not add to the prediction of worry.

Because of the importance attached in the literature to the fear of sexual assault, the sexual assault items were also considered separately (Figure 3). Again age and gender were the primary predictors of perceived risk, with gender in this instance being the more important. Young women perceived themselves at the greatest risk of sexual assault. Worry about sexual assault was strongly predicted by perceived risk and, as Ferraro found, with risk controlled, gender was not a predictor. Experience of sexual assault added some additional weight to the prediction of worry when perceived risk was controlled. When perceived risk of crime against the person was considered with sexual assault removed, gender was no longer a predictor of perceived risk. Males and females perceived themselves at equal level or risk of non-sexual assault. It was perceived risk, and not gender per se, that predicted worry about both sexual and non-sexual assault. It is worth noting that geographical location made no contribution to predicting perceived risk or worry about crimes against the person.

Perceived risk of property crime and its impact on worry

While the relation of age to perceived risk of crimes against the person is linear — perceived risk and fear decline with age — the pattern with property crime is curvilinear (Figure 4). It is the middle-aged subjects who are more fearful of the combined crimes of housebreaking and car theft. Perceived risk of property crime was predicted by being middle-aged, of Anglo-Celtic background and a resident in Sydney. As with crimes against the person perceived risk was the major predictor of worry with gender (being male) and being of non-English speaking or Aboriginal background being additional minor contributors. Unlike crimes against the person gender is a rather minor factor in fear of property crime and it is men who are the more worried at a similar level of perceived risk. As with crimes against the person (other than sexual assault), previous experience of property crime or indirect experience through family and friends did not increase prediction. It is important to note that residence of Sydney is a major predictor of both these factors. It seems, however, that Sydney residents generally perceive themselves at greater risk whether they have personal contact with property crimes or not.
**Figure 1:**
Predictors of (a) feeling safe walking the streets at night; (b) frequency of walking the streets at night

- **Sex (male)**: $R^2 = 0.18$
- **Age (young)**
- **Ethnicity (Anglo-Celtic)**: 
- **Belief in safety**: 
- **Frequency of walking alone at night**: $F(7,140) = 4.24, p < .001$
- **Experience of crime against person**: $F(7,140) = 4.24, p < .001$
- **Resident Sydney**: $F(7,137) = 17.39, p < .001$

**Figure 2:**
Predictors of (a) perceived personal risk; (b) worry about crime to the person

- **Age (young)**: $R^2 = 0.33$
- **Perceived personal risk**: $F(7,137) = 7.67, p < .001$
- **Worry about crime to person**: $F(8,136) = 8.89, p < .001$
- **Experience of crime against person**: 
- **Ethnicity (non-Anglo-Celtic)**: 
- **Sex (female)**: 
- **Sex (male)**:
- **Belief in safety**: 
- **Experience of crime against person**: $F(7,137) = 7.67, p < .001$
Figure 3: Predictors of (a) perceived risk of sexual assault; b) worry about sexual assault

- Age (young)
- Sex (female)
- Experience of sexual assault

Perceived risk of sexual assault: $R^2 = 0.39$, $F(7,125) = 11.92, p < .001$

Worry about sexual assault: $R^2 = 0.45$, $F(9,126) = 11.46, p < .001$

Figure 4: Predictors of (a) perceived risk to property; (b) worry about property crime

- Age (not young)
- Age (not old)
- Residence Sydney
- Ethnicity (non-Anglo-Celtic)
- Ethnicity (Anglo-Celtic)
- Sex (male)

Perceived risk to property: $R^2 = 0.21$, $F(9,127) = 3.83, p < .001$

Worry about property crime: $R^2 = 0.44$, $F(10,125) = 9.68, p < .001$
THE TRANSPORT STUDY

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In our Literature Audit Report we recommended a specific Transport Study to focus on a key ‘fear of crime’ in public space. In our view, fear of crime campaigns which focus on reclaiming public space are as important as ones which focus on redirecting attention from ‘stranger danger’ to threats within the home. Indeed, both directions for fear of crime campaigns are complementary: since we are seeking here a greater sense of ownership and control of space and time, both public and private, in the face of circulating myths which disempower people by stereotyping ‘the other’.

This is not to say that there are no real threats in public spaces, any more than to say that there are no risks (from within or without) in one’s home. What we are suggesting is that they can be blown up out of proportion in people’s minds as a result of the various circulating discourses that constitute people’s lives. These sites of communication include the media (mass and local). But they also include local gossip, narratives of daily events brought home by children after school, outraged discussion between husband and wife while learning to drive, chats among older people over lunch at the Senior Citizens Club or the RSL — and interpersonal narratives of this kind even take place within the focus group discussions of our ‘Fear of Crime’ research project itself.

It is important to take account (as for example Ian Taylor has done in his studies of South Manchester) of all of these circuits of communication as an aspect of our daily practice. So that while the media are undoubtedly major players in representing images of risk and the ‘other’ (and for that reason we have included a Media Study in this fieldwork phase), it is all too easy to focus too much on the media while ignoring the constitution of risk in our daily interpersonal discourse. Qualitative research (using focus groups and long interviews) that examines our situated response to key areas of fear of crime, such as on public transport, can help redress this bias. We share here the concerns of the Left Realists (see Audit Report, chapter 4) that fear of crime does have a material base in people’s daily experience and so does have an intelligible relationship to their day-by-day lives, rather than simply being fantasies and ‘moral panics’ imposed on them by the mass media. One of our tasks in focusing research on fears of public transport is to try to sift through this relationship between ‘fanciful’ and ‘intelligibly related’ experiences, remembering that both are always embedded somewhere in real relations of structure, choice and agency.
In our Audit Report we raised various issues and questions that a transport/public space study should raise.

- We need to ask the question, ‘How safe do you feel travelling on the train by yourself at night?’
- We need to explore what people are afraid of in particular settings (ie if they don't feel safe on trains, what in particular are they afraid of?)
- Does fear or anxiety, in fact, affect how and whether people travel at night? We need to identify whether those who claim not to feel safe actually do travel on trains, choose other transport alternatives, or stay at home (or wouldn't have travelled on trains anyway).
- What is older people's actual concern about children and teenagers on the train about? What are they afraid will happen? Or is it just a general malaise, feeling of powerlessness, ‘it's a young people's world’, etc? How are these issues negotiated?
- Other questions related to fear of crime on trains and buses would be: perceptions of incivilities, victimisation experiences, media messages re train travel, parental concern for their children.

We also emphasised in our Audit Report (chapter 8) key concepts that would be relevant to analysing fear of crime.

- negotiation of meanings as personal/social practices
- place as situational context (landscapes of fear)
- time (biographical, locational, and historical)
- agency/structure
- everyday routine (including the routine management of fear via media, local gossip, etc.)
- judgments (perceptions) of fear
- values (competing priorities)
- emotions (outrage)
- behaviours (constrained/ compensatory/ avoidance/ activism as control)
- circulating rhetorics and hermeneutics (media/local)
- gender/age/class/ethnicity/sexual preference
- knowledgability ('expert/lay')
- reflexive dialogue
These issues, questions and concepts have underpinned our transport field work. This study was deliberately preliminary (given that not all members of the Advisory Group thought it useful for their particular region, while others supported it strongly) and focussed on the undeniably high level of fear of crime on public transport in New South Wales. We chose therefore to take just two areas (Sydney and the Blue Mountains) which represented the ‘city’ and ‘country’ ends of a regular commuter rail link. For reasons elaborated in the Audit Report we focussed here on teenagers, parents of teenagers and older people (between 65 and 79), all of whom are potential users of public transport (thus, for example, we chose our older age group via Senior Citizens organisations rather than via Aged Care Transport services, since these latter are for people who are unable to use public transport). Focus groups and long interviews were conducted with the three age groups in these two regional sites of New South Wales.

In reporting on these generational responses to fear of crime in public transport, we want to make one point strongly. In significant and overlapping ways it is not possible to separate people’s fear of public transport at night from the spaces surrounding it. So, in important respects, this is a case study of fear in public space itself.

The methodology of both the transport and the media fieldwork studies which follow was the same: using focus groups and long interviews. A focus group is traditionally a collection of between six to ten people sharing some common cultural or demographic characteristic (Lewis, 1991). In our case this common characteristic was the combination of age and place of domicile. Thus for the Transport Study we ran three focus groups (teenagers/parents of teenagers/seniors) of six to ten people in both Sydney and the Blue Mountains — at each ‘end’ of an important inter-urban train line. In the Media Study we ran the same three generational focus groups in each of Sydney, the Blue Mountains and Bathurst. Only the Blue Mountains seniors’ focus group numbers (14) was outside the standard 6–10 people. Long interviews generally consist of 8 to 12 interviews in a category (McCracken 1988). Time and resources did not allow for this number of interviews in each generational category; we did, however, interview 6 respondents in each age category in the Media Study, and 4 in each age category (making 12 in all) in the Transport Study. Because no quantitative or survey data was collected by these methods, we did not collect other demographic data.
I begin to feel that this discussion may have touched on a very interesting unconscious fear, almost a Jungian type of thing... None of us can actually recall any media reports about crime, none of us have any experience of it and our kids have had minimal experience of crime on public transport, and yet we all have this fear of trains at night. Is it related to some sort of deep subconscious fear, does a train remind us of the womb or something? (Ian, Blue Mountains father of 16 year-old male teenager).

This statement from a focus group parent is not intended as a representative one, but rather as a good example of reflexive dialogue. The speaker, Ian, is a big man; his son is bigger still. The father does not travel by public transport very much, and takes precautions at night on the train when he does travel (like sitting at the back of the ‘Blue Light’ carriage, from where ‘you can see what’s going on’, and also near the door so that ‘you have a line of retreat’). Ian suggests the same strategies to his son, and (like other parents in the group) says he is prepared to pick him up from the train by car at ‘any time of day or night’. Yet, as the focus group discussion develops, he becomes aware that he, his son, the other parents he is speaking with, and their teenage children really seem to have had very little experience of crime on trains or buses. Moreover, none of them recall media reports of crimes on trains (what they do remember are the ‘negative reports’ about recent train timetable problems). So why then, he begins to ask, do we have this fear of trains at night? Why are we disempowering ourselves to such an extent? It is a question we need to ask with him, and we will do so via the issues and concepts that we highlighted in the Audit Report.

Circulating rhetorics and hermeneutics

Parents of teenagers are surrounded by discourse about public transport more than they actually engage in this kind of travel themselves. Neither the Sydney nor the Blue Mountains parents that we interviewed used public transport a lot, and mainly for leisure when they did (though one Blue Mountains father would be fairly representative of a lot of local commuters in using the train between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on five to six days a week to go to work). By and large the fathers will use trains at night, though with caution, while the mothers tend not to be prepared to travel on the train at night. Most have few worries about bus travel or of trains in the daytime (though one Blue Mountains mother does say that it is a fallacy to think you are safe in daytime on crowded trains, and tells a story of her own sexual harassment as a teenager on the train in Sydney. She had experience of being groped by a ‘sweaty Italian labourer type’ while travelling to school. She ‘was numb’, and she and her friend got off the train without thinking to report it).
The children of these Sydney and Blue Mountains parents do, however, use public transport, varying from local school buses to inter-urban trains in and out of Sydney. Consequently parents of teenagers hear a lot of talk about public transport. The Sydney parents focus group is replete with comments like ‘My kids said something interesting about the bus...’, ‘The other things that my son said...’, ‘Then I heard about another incident at the station...’, ‘They used to tell me funny stories about what they did’, ‘I have heard far more stories about terrible driving and the irrational behaviour of bus drivers’, ‘The kids would come home with all these incredible stories about what had happened’, ‘I’ve no fear about public transport alone, but my children tell me stories’.

Parents of teenagers also respond to media reports: a Sydney father of a GPS teenager has worried since hearing media coverage of a Trinity School boy killed after getting off a train at Lidcombe; one mother keeps her car windows up and door locked since reading about Aboriginal kids in Redfern throwing bricks into cars; a Blue Mountains father says ‘I would never get off the train at Cabramatta, Mount Druit, Blacktown’ after hearing media reports; and the Anita Cobby killing still circulates as a tale of fear associated with stations and their car parks. But these are (apart from the Trinity boy story) rather general worries which do not impinge on daily practice too much — and they can also be challenged.

One Blue Mountains mother, for example, challenges both the man’s fear of Western suburbs stations with ‘I quite often got off at Blacktown. I knew someone there’, and the general racism of the Redfern stories by saying that she is worried much more by the effects of media racism than by any particular crime itself. This kind of challenge can find fertile soil in focus groups, because parents in both Sydney and the Blue Mountains are highly suspicious of media ‘beat-ups’ of crime. In response to the question of what media reports of crimes had outraged them, the Sydney parents, for instance, responded that they were outraged mainly at insensitive and misleading newspaper reporting rather than by any particular crimes reported. A Sydney mother objected to ‘home invasion’ panics beaten-up by the media; and said, ‘It seems to me that people in their 70s are restricting their lifestyles too much because of media reporting’. Both this and the Blue Mountains mother’s response to getting off at Blacktown are part of a concern about people’s agency and sense of empowerment being reduced by media rhetorics.

So media discourses generally impinge on parents in a general rather than daily sense, and can often be resisted. Their children’s stories, however, are harder to resist. This is because fear for their children is so salient and central to parents’ fear of crime. Responding to the ‘biographical time’ question ‘Think back now — was there a time when you became more fearful of crime on public transport?’, a Blue Mountains mother instantly replies (to unanimous endorsement)
Having children, when they start travelling.

Similarly, a Sydney mother quickly responded to this question with

_When the kids got to a certain age when they were going to start using public transport. Not about doing it by myself — my own safety doesn’t come into it._

Interestingly, another Sydney mother immediately rephrased this response with

_Actually, it was when the kids would come home with all these incredible stories about what had happened._

_Stories, then, from their children, are central to parents’ daily practice, and to their fears about public transport in particular. Stories _mark_ their biographical memories: they are the moment for many parents when traumatic anxieties about public transport really began._

Children, of course, negotiate with this parental anxiety. In response to the mother who reported ‘incredible stories’, another mother engaged with this comment too, by saying that her teenagers would say that ‘it is all made up by the media, and that nothing will happen to them in any case’.

In discussion with the interviewer and with each other these parents then recognised that their children could be trying to manipulate them with these stories: the shock/horror stories about public transport, one mother admitted, came from her boys who wanted to use the car; while the ‘media beat-up stories’ came from another mother’s daughters who wanted to go out by train.

Nevertheless, these particular _local_ circulating stories are harder to resist than media ones. The Sydney parents worry about:

- children who come home to talk about ‘totally psychotic school bus drivers who smash into cars and go through red lights’; or,
- the ‘pretty, blond-haired’ son who ‘said something interesting about the bus… “I’m fearful about the ‘homies’ who get on the bus”’; or,
- the daughter who tells her mother how ashamed she is that she and her friends didn’t weigh in and help their girlfriend when attacked on the station by a gang of girls while on their way to sports training; or,
- the teenagers who report attacks on Fort Street girls at the bus stop by the Bombers, a gang of ‘Westie’ girls ‘with a bit of a chip on their shoulder’ and who tend to be ‘sixteen, with a baby on the hip’; or,
- the very sharp, outspoken daughter who gives too much lip (and prejudice) back in these situations of sub-cultural confrontation.

These are all stories which, however ‘incredible’ or ‘beaten up’ parents may sometimes think they seem, are hard to resist. Parents of teenagers have to negotiate the meanings of these stories as part of their own daily practices.
Parents of teenagers do take these stories seriously. They will encourage their daughters to report school bus drivers (or will do so themselves), even though they generally have sympathy for drivers having to deal with a bus load of unruly children after school. A Blue Mountains father speaks of a bus driver who tended to slam the brakes on when the children got too noisy and difficult; a Sydney mother complains of a woman bus driver who would stop the bus with doors shut outside the police station. But overall their concern is not with buses, because they feel safer that there is always a driver in sight of their children (though a number of parents would like to go back to the days of the bus conductor).

It is mainly trains that worry them and effect their own practices. A Sydney mother says she doesn't mind children coming home at midnight on the bus, but 'it's a no-no on the train' because of the isolation. Another Sydney parent does worry, not so much about the bus as the bus stop — and this picks up a general theme among the Sydney parents

I haven't any fear of public transport for the girls at all; my only concern is with the dark and coming home late.

It is nothing to do with public transport. It's actually much more to do with walking the streets.

These parents adopt a number of strategies for negotiating their fear for their teenagers.

A) Constraining strategies: These include,

I advice on conditions of travel ('sit in the “Blue Light” carriage', 'sit near responsible-looking adults', 'travel in a group', etc.); and

I rules as to the minimum age of travel (one Blue Mountains parent did not allow his children to travel even in company of friends on the train until Year 8; another parent did not let her daughter take the train alone until 16; two parents might let their daughter go down with friends to Sydney, and then they would pick her up there in the car for the return journey).
b) Active strategies:

Parents seldom constitute a politically active group, and even community involvement in relation to their children tends to diminish as their teenagers get older and make their own alliances. Moreover, parents are cautious in their advice to their teenagers about constituting their own groups: parents of boys, in particular, worry that even travelling as a group may be a hazard, either that in a group their son might be led to do something ‘silly’, or that being in a group will make him a target of some ‘gang’ of other young people. However, this does not mean that parents are not active in devising strategies for their teenage children when they are out and travelling. These include providing mobile phones, Cabcharge and Homelink among the more affluent Sydney parents; and giving advice about dress by the less well-off Blue Mountains parents. One Katoomba father, for example, advised his son not to buy Nike footwear out of his Austudy to avoid ‘being rolled’ by gangs on the trains. In this father’s view

Katoomba’s the sort of place, I get the impression, that... if you park a really fancy car in the car park you’ll end up with a 2-bob job down the paintwork. If you look like everybody else you’re fine... If you look so like everybody in the street people leave you alone, but if you’re in an area where you’ve got poverty... looking like you’ve got wealth could make you a target.

c) Compensatory defensive strategies:

Unlike the older lady we will encounter in the next section who carries a knife and crochet needle with her on the train, parents do not want their children to carry weapons when travelling. Apart from personal values they might have about societal violence (as we will see in the long interview parents section), they fear that these weapons will be turned on their own children. Rather than promote violence, parents prefer to compensate for the freedom they must give their teenagers (and the fears that come with it, especially when they are out at night) by encouraging them to keep in communication (hence they provide mobile phones where they can afford them, and one Sydney teenager tells of her mother ringing her on the mobile even while travelling in to work in the morning to check that she is O.K.). Communication at night is regarded as crucial, as a tenuous defence against the fear of not knowing where one’s child is as the midnight hour approaches: a Sydney mother has provided her daughter with a Homelink so that ‘she can’t use the excuse of not having money on her’, and her daughter has a curfew time of midnight, otherwise she must ring; another Sydney mother expects her son back at a precise time, otherwise she embarrasses him by immediately phoning around all his friends. Overall, parents like their teenagers to let them know if they have missed the bus, are going to be out an extra hour etc. Some sons tell them basically where they are going and what time they will get home. This is one aspect of the ‘balance’ that parents try to strike between the ‘freedom’ and ‘surveillance’ which jointly construct ‘childhood’ (particularly teenage childhood) in our time.
d) Avoidance strategies:

Parents of teenagers tend to say that in the scale of their other life worries, fear for their teenagers while travelling is fairly minimal. However, at the times when they are actually travelling it is very high. A Blue Mountains father will always pick his son up from the station (or from parties) ‘even if it’s two o’clock in the morning.’ Trains and taxis stop late at night, he says, unless the latter are booked in advance (and then they cost more). So his son always rings up. ‘There is really very little choice if you want to look after your kids’ safety up here, you’re forced to... make some sort of arrangement like that.’ There is general agreement among the Blue Mountains parents that their lives changed when their children reached the age of travelling on public transport.

I’m doing a lot of driving.

Yes, chauffeuring duties.

I would never let the kids do the things up here in terms of moving around that I did in Sydney by myself with a few mates. I’d even get to the stage of saying “I don’t want you coming home from your part-time job by yourself — ring me up and I’ll come and get you — or from a party — whatever time it is”.

Similarly a Sydney mother says (to general agreement) that she tells her son she will pick him up wherever he happens to be in Sydney ‘at four in the morning if necessary’ to avoid him coming home by himself.

These parental behaviours and strategies are always of course a matter of negotiation. Teenagers do not always do what parents want them to do. A Blue Mountains father who has very little money has bought his daughter a noise-maker but has difficulty getting her to carry it. Sydney parents say that their teenagers can refuse to carry mobile phones when they go out because they are ‘too Yuppy’. A Blue Mountains mother says her son will phone home when he is late, but sometimes it is to use the excuse of risk on the trains to stay over at his friend’s place (which he had planned all along). Another Blue Mountains parent says that communication about risk with his daughter can even be difficult. ‘It’s difficult to have these frank discussions because teenagers often don’t want to talk about the same things that parents are worried about. It’s actually quite difficult.’
The temporal co-ordinates of fear of crime are very apparent in relation to public transport. As regards time-of-day of travel, all the age groups we interviewed made a very sharp distinction between public transport as between day and night. Daytime travel is by-and-large ‘safe’, night-time travel ‘unsafe’, to the extent that a very large Blue Mountains (male) parent says that he ‘wouldn’t even consider the train for late night travel’.

Biographical time co-ordinates are also extremely important for parents, as we have seen. Consistently parents in both Sydney and the Blue Mountains say that while personally they may always have been cautious about train travel at night, it was only when their teenage children began to use public transport that their concern became obsessive — to the degree that

It’s not about doing it by myself — my own safety doesn’t come into it.

Parents, then, recall a very particular time in their personal life history when their fear of crime on public transport took off: ‘Having children, when they started travelling.’ This biographical history is then mediated in different ways according to their sense of the history and geography of their locational place.

PLACE AS A SITUATIONAL CONTEXT: ‘LANDSCAPES OF FEAR’

Comparing interview responses of parents situated at the two ends of the regular commuter line between Sydney and Mount Victoria allows us to explore the situational context of place.

The inner city Sydney parents, for example, have teenagers who primarily travel by bus (particularly to school), and they themselves have the same option when they travel into the city to shop. One parent, for example, says that though he has few worries about trains, his wife prefers to travel by bus when they go together to the city in the evening to shop, so he readily complies. One Sydney mother has concerns about her daughter’s train travel mainly when she goes to visit friends in the Western suburbs, and she asks her to travel there always in a group. Another Sydney mother speaks of her son travelling with groups of his mates to the Blue Mountains to bushwalk or to go to Blackheath for a pizza, without any problems. About the city itself there is some agreement in the Sydney group with the parent who says
One of the critical things is how many people are out and about because that's why Newtown feels safe, it's why Balmain feels safe — at midnight there's still people wandering around. I personally would feel much more uncomfortable living out at Epping or god knows where, knowing the kids would have to walk all the way from the public transport.

This geography of the City (fairly safe where cosmopolitan and crowded at all hours), the Western Suburbs (unsafe) and the Blue Mountains (safe) is a fairly common perceptual map among our respondents. The Blue Mountains senior citizens, for example, speak of feeling unsafe on the train between Sydney and Penrith, before breathing a sigh of relief when the train toils its way up into the Mountains. We have seen that a Blue Mountains parent lists his map of 'no-go' Western Suburbs stations. And two parents moved up to the Blue Mountains ten years ago partly because of their poverty and partly because they believed it would be a safer environment (their observation now is that it used to be safer, but that crime is spreading 'up the mountain' — this in itself suggesting a causative geography of crime, spreading up from the Western Suburbs).

This geography of fear of crime also impinges on parents' perception of 'the other'. Sydney parents speak much more of the differentiated groups that threaten their teenagers the Bombers from Western Sydney, the 'homies' nearer-at-hand, the Aboriginal kids at Redfern. The mother, for example, of the boy who is 'fearful about the 'homies' on the bus', has been told by him that it is no use getting off the bus and waiting for the next one because this will be packed with 'homies' too. Blue Mountains parents seem less aware of some of these distinctions. None of them refer to 'homies', except one who says that 'We don't exactly have 'homies' here'. Yet, as we will see from our discussion of Sydney teenagers, 'homies' are a major concern with teenagers — and their parents — in Sydney.
Blue Mountains parents do, however, have their own concerns. There is a sense of the Mountains as under-resourced in terms of both transport and security. One father says that fake phone calls can draw all the police to one end of the Mountains, leaving the other end open to crime. Another father says that since railway staff have been taken away from Faulconbridge station it has become a ‘drug dealing capital’. More generally the Blue Mountains parent group worry about the infrequent service of trains, so that if teenagers miss one at night they have to wait an hour on a lonely platform for the next. One mother compares this with Sydney, saying that she had worried when her daughter stayed in the City with grandparents while doing work experience. But the daughter had told her that Central station in Sydney made her feel secure because well lit and with trains every ten minutes, whereas she might have to wait alone for a long time at a station in the Mountains. This mother spoke of her dilemma that the local Wentworth Falls station is aesthetically pleasing, well lit, and with plenty of telephone booths and taxis; yet when she drives past late at night she sees male teenagers ‘loitering with intent’ at the telephones. This scares her in the context of her daughter returning home from Sydney or Penrith on the train at night. So, whereas Sydney parents worry about their teenagers ‘wandering around the backstreets at night’ or waiting at lonely, exposed bus stops; Blue Mountains parents worry especially over deserted stations at night.

**Agency / Structure**

When considering issues of agency and structure in relation to public transport, a central issue is: what does the public have to do more of as the government pays for less? This is especially the case with parents of teenage train travellers.

Apart from the biographical moment when fear of crime on public transport begins for parents in a major way, the other key ‘memory’ that they have in relation is the period when the stations began to be un-manned. The Sydney parents may debate whether this began with the Wran or the Greiner governments. But all parents (indeed all three age groups) everywhere are unanimous: that lack of rail security staff is their biggest cause for concern.

Overall, they feel that stations are well maintained and reasonably well lit, and even dirt and vandalism on the trains do not make them fear more. This

*doesn’t make me feel unsafe, except for thinking of no-one being about to keep them clean.*
The Sydney mother who tells the story of her daughter’s school group being attacked on the station by another group of girls has one major point to make: there was ‘no-one on the station to help — no staff’. And when she adds, ‘Then I heard about another example… ’ of a fight between groups of teenage boys at a station over insults traded between ‘Westie’ and GPS boys, her main point is the same — there were no staff there to cool the boys down. The Blue Mountains father who complains about Faulconbridge station as a ‘drug dealing capital’ is also making the same point: it has happened since staff numbers were run down, to the extent (in his view) that the stationmaster is at home in the evenings ‘linked to the station by intercom’.

One of the areas of personal concern that both Sydney and Blue Mountains mothers do speak about are tunnels (at Central station) and subways (at Katoomba and Lawson stations); and again they make the point that these need more staff surveillance (as well as more media attention). The same point is made about the trains themselves: there are not enough uniformed security men on the trains, the guard is seldom seen, and probably isn’t trained to be of much help if you are attacked anyway.

Parents’ main fear is that their teenagers (and to a lesser extent themselves) will be physically attacked and/or robbed on (or off) the trains. Consequently, in addition to their own agency in becoming chauffeurs to their children, they look to the ‘structure’ to provide more visible security. All are unanimous that security personnel should be in uniform, one Blue Mountains father saying that ‘Plainclothes is OK for shop detectives, but not for trains’. Most parents are aware of recent safety strategies adopted by State Rail such as the “Blue Light” carriages; and some know about the locking of carriages at night, the two-way communication and the security guards that have been introduced. But none have seen these security guards (partly, probably, because the parents do not travel by train at night very much). What they do see regularly as they go to meet their children are deserted, lonely stations. Not surprisingly, then, their most consistent call is for ‘more staff’.

Parents, of course, are not unaware of the economic factors involved here. But they tend to argue that, at a time of unemployment, there is something wrong about the threat of crime to their children as a result of staff lay-offs. One Sydney father is more specific

*We should be encouraging kids to use public transport and spend more money on that rather than on freeways.*

The issue, he says, is not one of safety on public transport *per se*. ‘You feel safer in Newtown because there are always people around.’
The Sydney parents discuss the ‘cost factor’ of increasing personnel on the rail system in a country with high wages. One parent is not prepared to be fobbed off by the ‘economic’ argument, however.

The Tokyo subway system is magnificent, clean, bright, modern, lovely and the wages are higher than ours. And that encourages people to use it. You have to spend the money to make it a more attractive proposition and stop spending money on the alternative [freeways].

By and large, then, parents have adapted their own behaviour significantly in trying to protect their children. They are agentive: as one Blue Mountains parent says ‘It’s better to be proactive than sit there and be cocky.’ So one Blue Mountains father speaks about being asked to go down to Sydney with his son and other teenagers to a school concert at the Opera House, given that they were due to come back very late on the train, and adds that he might not have been asked to do that ten years ago. ‘That was something I had to do because of a fear.’ He also, when regularly picking his wife up on Saturday nights at Katoomba station, parks close to the Gearin Hotel side of the subway rather than the other side where he has seen more people hanging around. And, as we have seen, parents regularly speak of telling their teenagers that they will pick them up ‘at any time of night’.

In contrast, parents perceive the railway system in particular as providing less of a service. They are perfectly aware that this is a matter of competing priorities and values. But some parents challenge those priorities, while others argue that the structure could be organised both more humanely and efficiently than it is. One parent of two girls (one teenage and one age 11) sought us out to be interviewed, and told us an awful story of how her younger child has been trapped in various structures of authority, making the sexual abuse she has recently been subject to on the train all the more dreadful. The story also tells us a lot about the interweaving of media reports, local gossip, perception of local time and space, and actual experience as parents try to be agentive in relation to their children’s train travel.

Agency and structure: case study

This mother, Vickie, had always felt that the Mountains trains were ‘different’ and safer than suburban trains. When asked whether there was a point in her biography when she began to fear public transport more, Vickie initially said it was after an incident with her children on the train. However, she then paused, recollected, and told a more nuanced tale, with four distinct moments of reported or experienced crime on the trains. It is the accretion of these four moments together which now constitute Vickie’s powerful memory: ‘fear of train travel’.
(i) The first of these was a news report of a man being stabbed on the Blue Mountains train two years ago.

That one stood out in my mind — like normally a stabbing wouldn’t stand out in my mind — but that one did because I thought “That was a Mountains train!” And you somehow feel like — like the day that we got caught up in a brawl that was actually not a Mountains train and you sort of think “Oh well, it wasn’t a Mountains train”. But there’s almost that distinction, like we’re safe because we all come from the Mountains

(ii) This report was followed within a couple of months by a story from a friend about a group of drunks on the Mountains train who were fighting until one cried out he had been stabbed.

The guard came out and he was this puny little man, and the passengers were saying “Have the police been called” — they must have been able to hear him calling on his intercom — and then she said they were all sitting there so absolutely petrified and when they pulled into Springwood she said there was no one there, no police or anything. She said it was just terrible.

(iii) This ‘she said’ story about a brawl was followed within a few months by the personal experience of a terrible fight with chains and knives when Vickie was travelling with her husband and two daughters on the train. In this case two young people got on the train and began to taunt other passengers with ‘I’m a dinkum Aussie. I’m an Aussie. Where are you from?’ A fight began. Her husband intervened, and she pulled him away fearing he would be stabbed.

It was quite traumatic because it involved the whole family and we talked about it for days. You know, “Oh wasn’t it terrible?” and “Oh, what about Dad?” and “What about her” — because the twist in the whole thing was that the most aggressive of the young people who we thought was a bloke wasn’t a bloke at all — so we talked about “what about her, it was a girl doing that!”

(iv) The worst incident of all for Vickie happened recently. As a result of the previous experiences Vickie did not let her daughter travel on the train, even with older friends. However, a school trip to Sydney was arranged, and her 11 year-old daughter was allowed to go. The first problem was that although a carriage was booked for the children, when they got on it was already occupied by adults who refused to move when asked by the teacher, even resisting moving their bags off the seats. One adult responded that ‘Actually, I don’t like children.’ No rail staff were available to help, so the teacher had to fit in the children wherever she could, scattered throughout the carriage. Vickie’s daughter Lucy was fitted in on a single seat at the top of the stairs facing a double seat which had only a bag on it. Once the teacher had returned to her seat, Lucy found herself confronted by a man opposite her. He began to intimidate her by staring at her, then looked at her through his fingers, and finally took his coat off, put it over his shoulder and began to masturbate under his coat.
She’s only eleven and she knew she wasn’t comfortable, but she didn’t know quite how to cope with it, and the teacher had told them all that once they were sitting down they weren’t to get up. So she didn’t want to get up, but she did go to the toilet and she said she tried to make that last as long as she could. But then she went back and sat down and... he had a shirt on with press studs — it must have been a denim shirt with press studs buttons — and she said he popped all the buttons open and he exposed his chest, just sat there with his chest all exposed to her, and then he was undoing and doing up his pants. There was a young girl across from her who could see what was going on and called Lucy over and... took her back to her teacher... This girl felt that he was actually directing it at her, and Lucy felt like he was directing it at her.

The teacher couldn’t get to the guard and finally spoke to the train driver. At a Western Suburbs railway station staff got on and removed the man. However, despite the fact that he was apparently not travelling with a ticket, no documentation was taken, the police were not called, and the only reason that official action was taken was because the school was required, by its own regulations, to inform DOCS. The police were informed not by the rail staff but by DOCS. Vickie followed up herself by ringing the relevant stationmaster.

He was nice, but flippant. You know, like “I don’t know why these people travel on trains”, and... it seemed to be like “Well, that’s part of the culture of travelling on trains”. That was the message I got from him.

Fixed in her seat by the authority of the teacher and the selfishness of adult passengers, sexually harassed by one of these passengers, unprotected by the rail authority, Lucy was then (as a result of school and DOCS regulations) exposed to a series of after-the-event and too-late authority moves, like being asked if she could identify her abuser out of a mass of shouting men at the police station. Her mother Vickie, who had tried to be agentive in preparing her daughter after the earlier incidents by telling her to ‘try and move to somewhere where you feel safer if you see something that you don’t feel is quite right’, now feels trapped by all these authorities and procedures, none of which seem to be catching the culprit. Not only is her agency in preparing her children for train travel now completely compromised, but so too is her timetable for discussing sexual matters with her daughter, since she feels she was forced to talk about what the man was doing and why under duress.

I don’t know in the long run how it’s going to effect her, and I’m going through all this dilemma, like would we have been better just to forget the whole thing and pretend it didn’t happen? But now, because it was a referral and it’s got to go through this process... I’m thinking “Oh, is this really worth it?”

Many interweaving structures — of school, State Rail, NSW police, DOCS — have trapped Vickie and her daughter.
Parents are not overall enamoured by ‘the structure’. Many feel that the media are insensitive, subjective and in many cases adding to the problem of crime and fear of crime. Most object to the ‘big mistake’ of reducing staffing on the railways (and to a lesser extent the buses). Some, even while using their cars a lot more, recognise that the solution (use of cars) is actually making the problem worse. A Blue Mountains father worries a great deal about the recent increase in ‘road rage’ which he believes is out of control and is the ‘most likely for any of us to be involved in’. That, he says, is why he likes public transport: because it takes him off the road. But meanwhile he has been teaching his wife to drive so that she can pick up the kids sometimes — and they argue over road rage even during driving lessons. Another mother listening to him says she is worried by male aggression in driving — and worries about her kids being the aggressors. Quite generally, the parents say that they are far more concerned about their children in cars than in trains at night.

When these parents say that, all in all, their fears in relation to public transport are ‘very minor compared to other things’, it is cars that they are often referring to. An immediate response to this Sydney parent’s comment is that of another mother who says she ‘will worry much more when her daughters go out with boys who drive cars’, and there is a hubbub of agreement from the rest of the group. This gendered parental concern about cars can thus be engaged with by other parents either via what is arguably a media constructed discourse about car risk (‘road rage’) or via a broader socio-structural critique of governments prioritising of private over public transport in terms of funding). As regards their own priorities, though, in the present situation of concern about late night train travel, many parents themselves willingly jump into cars, often leaving their beds to do so. As one busy and successful professional parent (a senior high school teacher) said, ‘whatever time it is’ he will get up — even mid-week and before a full teaching day — to meet his kids off the train.
EMOTIONS (OUTRAGE)

Parents are naturally prone to very deep emotional reactions to issues relating to their children’s safety. Because childhood in our culture is positioned both as a zone of freedom/innocence and as a time of care and surveillance, parents’ negotiation of everyday routines (for themselves and for their children) is embedded in these competing priorities. Indeed, the reason why parents lives have changed significantly (and their fears have increased substantially) since their children have begun to travel is that they want their teenagers to have both space and protection. Our children, says one Sydney father, ‘have to live in this world and learn survival skills’. That is why, in his view, ‘we should be encouraging kids to use public transport and spend more money on that rather than on freeways.’ He personally is outraged at a social system’s priorities that are the other way around. A Blue Mountain father says he is outraged by road rage, and hence he, too, values public transport.

Another Blue Mountains father says he was initially outraged by the apparent emergence of serial and spree killing in response to the Port Arthur massacre. Since then he has done some research and found that the phenomenon is not so new and so his outrage has died away. Still, he does feel a greater sense of vulnerability for his family after Port Arthur — of ‘lurking dangers that we haven’t been aware of’. He thought about Penrith Plaza just after Port Arthur and imagined the massacre happening there. Another father responds, however, that ‘big events’ like the Strathfield and Port Arthur massacres ‘are going to happen if they’re going to happen, so there’s no point worrying about them’. He is therefore more concerned about local bashings, and it is he who scrupulously meets his wife and all his children when they alight from public transport, or finish their part-time work late at night, or ask him to travel to Sydney with them and so on.

REFLEXIVE DIALOGUE AND KNOWLEDGABILITY

We began this account of parents’ fear of crime in public transport with an example of reflexive dialogue arising out of a focus group discussion. We will close this section with another. A focus group which brings people together to discuss fear of crime in relation to public transport itself focuses attention in that area, and elaborates one person’s fears in front of another. Consequently it can potentially increase the scope of an individual’s fears. For example, the Blue Mountains father who said ‘there’s no point worrying about big events’ but was worried about local bashings, said that, after hearing comments in the focus group about the Lawson underpass, he would now worry about picking his wife up on Saturday nights at that location. Perhaps he will advise her to change her station of alighting to Bulaburra, or else always to get off at Katoomba (where he already worries about the underpass)? In this case, then, the research process itself may have caused a self-admittedly ‘very cautious’ family to turn towards even more timid behaviour.
On the other hand, though, as we can see from our quotation at the beginning of this parents’ section, the focus group can lead to respondents beginning to question the ‘myth’ of fear of crime itself. This is, of course, the potential of any group discussion, so the research process is not ‘artificial’ in this sense. It is important, though, always to be reflexive about the way in which ‘expert’ systems of knowledge (such as research) interact with and effect ‘lay’ situated knowledge, as these two examples illustrate.

Two further instances should be mentioned. Vickie, whose story about her daughter’s sexual harassment on the train we mentioned above, was not originally included in our sample of long interview parents. She, however, heard about the research, asked to be included and drove some distance to talk with us. Feeling trapped by the inadequacy of various authority systems, and feeling deeply for her daughters, Vickie thought that talking to us (given that she had heard that the research would lead to policy recommendations) might just cut the knot of her frustrations and lead to better outcomes.

The second example is of two parents in the Blue Mountains focus group who, many days after the interview, were still saying how ‘empowered’ it had made them feel. They had clearly enjoyed the to and fro of the argument a lot, and rarely had the chance to speak with other parents about these concerns (in addition, the father said in the interview that he found it hard to talk with his daughter about them). They emphasised that they rarely found a situation where people wanted to hear what they had to say. It is unlikely, in our view, that they would have responded this way to a questionnaire that they found on the seat of a train.
I think the media could play a major role by having a positive attitude towards using the trains and not avoiding them. Because what the media has done so far is to encourage [people] to avoid the trains and I think it's the wrong attitude. We give up and we hide ourselves and give the space to the intruders, I think the media should reverse this attitude and tell the people to protect themselves but go ahead and not be hiding. We are the many, we are the people who should fight them and if we should go out in masses and show body, not hide.

I think that could bring some people undone. Say you meet in a group at Blacktown station. You all get in the train together, you are all sitting immediately together, and the same coming back. When you get off at the station you become individuals once more. Round Blacktown you would bring yourself undone.

The key is, home before dark.
(Focus group discussion among older people, Sydney)

You know, we are getting to the stage where we are locking ourselves away because of the media and everybody and the way they are going on about it.

Yes, I suppose so, but I don’t want to be out at night anyway — I’d rather be home.

It’s better to be safe than sorry... You feel better...

I refuse to be intimidated. You think of all the millions of people who travel on public transport and then the percentage who get robbed, and that’s the way I think about it... I refuse to live my life fearing... I walk back from Blackheath station in the dark. And I wouldn’t worry about the suburban city trains either... If we give in to this fringe element we might as well lock ourselves in our houses and stay there... I refuse to let it happen to me. I refuse to be locked in my door. I have been to America and seen these enclaves where they have guard dogs and electrified gates and whatever — that’s not living... Let’s take our space back from the undesirables. Just let us do it... say “this is our space, we don’t want you here. If you want to play up, go elsewhere!”.
(Focus group discussion, Senior Citizens, Katoomba)
These extracts from focus group discussions among older people, one in Sydney, the other in the Blue Mountains, illustrate the complexity of making recommendations for safer train travel for this age group. On the one hand, we have speakers adopting (rhetorically and in principle) probably the best strategy of all: reclaiming public space. Their position is akin to feminists' strategies for 'reclaiming the night'. On the other hand, their respondents (one of whom is an Australian male from Blacktown who has twice seen youths 'putting the boot' into travellers in his area) emphasise the individual reality for many older people who feel especially vulnerable. For many 'It's better to be safe than sorry... You feel better'.

A range of responses to fear of travelling at night is evident in these discussions among older people. Following Ferraro's distinctions (see Audit Report chapter 2) of behaviours that people develop to give meaning to situations and locations of risk, these responses can be seen as:

- 'constrained behaviour': 'it's better to be safe than sorry... You feel better.'
- 'community or political activism': as far as we know, there is no 'Grey Power' movement among older people equivalent to the Women's Movement's 'Reclaim the Night' campaigns; however, more informal, small-scale community activism may be growing. We will see among our teenagers an example of particularly fearful young women who travel together at night and then divide up to sit in separate carriages in order to try and control their fear; and among these older people, one or two members of the focus groups are clearly trying to use the research situation itself to generate a feeling of community activism — as the somewhat militaristic language and concept of 'Let's take our space back from the undesirables' indicates.
- 'compensatory defensive actions': not all older people are either activist or totally constrained in their behaviour. One older lady in Katoomba said she always carries an apple, a fruit knife and a steel crochet hook if she travels on her own on the train. In one incident three 16–18 year-olds tormented an old man near her on the train by flicking him with a rolled up newspaper. Then they got bored and turned to her, flicking her three times before she reacted. She got up and stood over them. 'Three times I got it. I got my knife out and I said “one more thing from you and I’ll put this through you because I carry a black belt”’. And they got up and went. I thought I’ve gotta win it. And the old fella said, “have you got a black belt?” and I said “yes, in the wardrobe”’. As well as the gutsy humour of the story, there is also a precise legal logic: the apple is carried to justify her knife, otherwise she could be arrested for carrying an offensive weapon, as happened to one of our Sydney teenage group who defended herself with a knife against male assault on the train.
- 'avoidance behaviours including relocation': not everyone stays at home at night primarily because of fear. As one older lady in Katoomba said, with male partners now gone, they just didn’t feel like partying. Their interests have now relocated to the quieter pleasures of home in the evenings.
All of these are different kinds of behaviour which control the meanings of risk, reducing fear and making ‘you feel better’.

There are even differences of behaviour between the more ‘militant’ speakers. The first one quoted above, Gillian, a Greek woman from Sydney, is not naive or utopian: she, like almost every other member of this focus group would never travel on City Rail at night, and she has noticed a marked reduction of older people in recent years in the Greek community’s use of evening social activities, like the Clubs (despite the best efforts of those organisations) and the Church.

On the other hand, the second of our ‘militant’ older speakers, Ellen from Blackheath in the Blue Mountains, emphasises that she has weekly travelled day and night for nine years to Sydney, and has encountered only one incident in that time, when a young drunk man exposed himself to her. This is the kind of older woman that Rachel Pain speaks about, who draws on a lifetime of experience to be world-wise about women’s sexual harassment. She almost certainly handled the situation then as calmly as she speaks about it now. ‘It was Christmas three years ago, and the young man was so drunk he wasn’t with it you know, and the guard took him off the train.’

Her major trauma over train travel has nothing to do with this incident of sexual harassment, but rather with the fact that her mother, now nearly ninety, has suddenly stopped a lifetime policy of getting out and about by herself, as a result of a friend recently being bashed. So, like the older man, Ross, from Blacktown, Ellen is perfectly aware that attacks happen (and she ‘touches wood’ on the table we are sitting around that her independent policy of travelling by herself night and day won’t get her into trouble). But she is not prepared to let that knowledge make her ‘lock ourselves in our houses and stay there.’ Rather, she draws on the statistical unlikeliness of being assaulted on the train to liberate her from fear — and one can hear the outrage in her voice when she speaks of her regret that her mother no longer feels able to do that.

Other older people (but not the majority) do travel on the train at night. Most say ‘not the evening’; ‘too risky’; ‘wouldn’t feel safe’. Yet none we spoke too (other than Ellen and Ross) had encountered any serious incidents on the train, and most used buses and trains quite regularly in the daytime. As the Katoomba group put it.

I’ve never had a bad experience though. I’ve never had a bad experience.

No.

No.

It’s just that I feel insecure... because you often see people drunk, loud voiced.
Yes.
And this sort of...
Puts you off.
Puts you off, makes you feel unsafe.
The things we see on television, the knife attacks and general bashings.
It would be, I suppose you’d be more frightened coming from Central to
Penrith.
Yes.
After that you feel a little bit more relaxed.
Int: ‘Why Central to Penrith?
Everything seems to be that area.
Well everything seems to be that area...
Yes, yes.
And they can get off quickly, there’s more stops. Now coming up the
Mountains anyone that did attack anybody would be caught on the train,
unless they are going to jump out while it’s going.’
Marie, I’ve been travelling once a week for nine years on that train and I’ve
only ever had that one experience, and I come home at night, I go down at all
different hours of the day.

Ellen’s frustrated response at the end of this excerpt of focus group discussion
illustrates Rachel Pain’s ‘postmodern’ point (Audit Report, chapter 8) that

Age is only one dimension by which people situate themselves and are
situated by others in relation to the risk of crime. Local contexts, life course
experiences and other social identities are involved in the constitution of fear
for each individual.

Indeed, the debate here between Ellen and Marie is one between Ellen’s ‘life
course experiences’ of train travelling and Marie’s ‘local context’ perception (of
the difference between train travel Sydney-to-Penrith and in the Blue Mountains).

Nevertheless, age is a determining condition for many older people because
it increases bodily frailty, and with it psychological insecurity. One Sydney
senior said

We’re very vulnerable, very easy prey, old people, frail people, very
easy prey.
And a Blue Mountains resident said

As you get older you are not as strong. And they only have to look at your hair and say “I'll knock her over”.

Ferraro notes (and Marie indicates this in her comments) that incivilities

- of a physical kind — the drink can and chocolate paper litter that Gillian itemises in detail on two separate occasions in the interview, the graffiti, the slashed seats, the locked toilets that all the older people worry about; and

- of a social kind — the drunks, loud voices, rowdy children racing ‘up and down the aisles yahooring’, and teenagers ‘using pretty crook language’;

...can heighten fear of crime.

Gillian says that she feels more nervous if trains are littered, but for most older people the effects of incivility (as Ferraro says) work indirectly to heighten fear of crime. As one of the Blue Mountains group says, well maintained stations make them feel safer to the extent that it makes them think there must be somebody there looking after them.

Incivility does not cause fear only among older people. One of the Blue Mountains parents (who said he was a ‘cautious’ person) also felt threatened by drunks and loud voices on the train. But with older people incivilities can cause real bodily threat, and therefore fear. This is evident, for example, in the fact that both the Sydney and the Blue Mountains groups of seniors avoided, not only the train at night, but also the trains carrying lots of schoolchildren.

Individuals in other age groups might mention this too: one Sydney teenager was driven mad by crowds of ‘chattering, giggling’ schoolgirls; another Sydney boy has been harassed on buses crowded with schoolkids ‘since I’ve come out’. And adults on the train often express dismay when they see masses of schoolchildren waiting on the platform to get on the train (we have already seen how adults’ hostility to giving way to children helped create the situation where Vickie’s young daughter Lucy was sexually harassed).

But none of this is like the response of the older people.

Coming from Penrith we try to avoid the 3.10 because all the schoolkids are on it...

They carry those packs and they swing around and they’ll knock your head off.

That’s true — on the buses too. I don’t know what they have those huge packs for.

These comments from the Blue Mountains focus group were matched by the Sydney seniors. Some of these avoided trains at school travelling times because of the kids’ bags littering the aisles. Older people find it hard to navigate these, and therefore risk life-threatening falls. The Blue Mountains group agreed
They drop their bags down in the foyer and the passageway.
They just drop them — I worry about the kids as well.
There’s a notice there telling them to leave the aisle clear but they just fling them down...
The high school group are the worst. They’re bigger than us, stronger than us.
I have a friend who’d just had her hair done and they squirted green stuff all over her freshly permed hair on the train coming from Springwood.

Some of the older people laugh about this last item of harassment; but about bodily threat they are — and have to be — deadly serious. For example, a major worry for the Blue Mountains group is the gap between the train and the platform when they get off at some of the curved Mountains stations. This, some say, is particularly bad for the last carriage at Katoomba station; which causes them a ‘fear’ dilemma. They like to travel (some of them even in the daytime) on the last carriage near the guard for safety reasons. But when they get off there is more risk of their falling, particularly as there are no longer the porters available to carry their bags as there once used to be. One older lady resolves the dilemma by knocking on the guard’s door and asking him to carry her luggage off the train at Katoomba.

A similar problem is the first thing discussed by the Sydney seniors’ group: the difficulty getting off buses in the city, and the ‘refusal’ of some bus drivers in Sydney to operate the mechanism that lowers the bus, thus making it easier for them to get down the front steps (the Mountains older people do not have the luxury of these buses, and worry about getting off in the many places where there are no pavements). One senior talks of the hazards of the ‘parachute jump’ off the bus.

So whereas Gillian, the Greek woman in the Sydney group, speaks boldly of fighting back and reclaiming public transport at night, the remainder of her group’s discourse about travel indicates why it is not in the hands of older people alone to implement her rather heroic strategy.

Her language is almost militant: she speaks of ‘not giving the space to the intruders’, of ‘fighting them in masses’, and of ‘showing body, not hiding’. But the seniors’ actual bodies are what often betray them: as we saw,
- one speaks of avoiding not only night travel on the trains but also day travel when schoolchildren are crowding the trains with their schoolbags strewn on the floor, risking serious falls to older people;
- another speaks of his friend with a stick who cannot visit him at Newtown because of the station’s very steep steps;
another says his emphysema prevents him using the same steps at Newtown station and so he gets a bus from the city;

another talks of the problems of closed (or scarce) public toilets at stations in the context of her husband’s prostate condition; and

others talk about the difficulty of getting on and off buses because of stiff joints or infirmity.

What is clearly evident in the focus group discussion are the broad and interrelated contexts of difficulty for public travel by older people, only some of which are due to fear of crime.

NEGOTIATIONS OF MEANINGS AS PERSONAL / SOCIAL PRACTICES

Older people do not feel old until their bodies seriously betray them. Other research that the Cultural Risk Centre is conducting with older people in retirement villages indicates that these people get worried, even outraged, when physically or mentally ‘handicapped’ people (for example suffering from Alzheimers) are brought into their retirement environment because of government subsidies. ‘Handicapped’ older people remind them, they say, of the ‘next stage’ for themselves, and this reminder can be very depressing.

Consequently, Gillian’s and Ellen’s very active discourse about taking

our space back from the undesirables. Just let us do it.

does hit a chord with the other older people. Marie, for example responds to Ellen by emphasising her choice, not her fear, in not travelling on the trains at night.

I don’t like being out at night anyway, I’d rather be home. Not because I’m frightened or anything. I just think a whole day out is enough and you’re home at night-time.

Marie emphasises her own ‘strong’ position throughout the focus group discussion: that she doesn’t disagree with Ellen’s view, but that she knows even young people in Sydney who are careful when travelling on the trains at night

Everybody now is on their guard not just old people.

And later in the discussion, after Ellen has left

It does happen, it’s not just media talk, it does happen, not a lot but it does happen. You must be on your guard.

By emphasising that young people — ‘everybody now’ — are also on their guard, Marie persistently negotiates the meaning of her behaviour away from her fear being just a matter of declining age.
This tension is the main fulcrum of the older people's discourse: balanced between being still active and lively (one older woman says 'Oh don't ask them about that' when the interviewer asks what two women travel to Sydney for), and the physical betrayal of older bodies.

**PLACE AS SITUATIONAL CONTEXT**

As we have seen, the Blue Mountains group tend to feel safer once their train has got back to the Mountains.

> There's not much crime though in the Mountains trains. Most things happen in Sydney.

And in particular, it is the Western Suburbs area, with its frequent suburban stops, which scares them. One speaks of friends from Ireland visiting Sydney where the man was slashed with a knife (which elicits Marie's 'See, it does happen, it's not just media talk').

For some there is a distinct racist element in their Sydney-to-Penrith map of fear. When asked what news stories had outraged them, there was immediate discussion of 'foreigners murdering people.'

> Send them back to their own country.

> That's why I worry between Central and Penrith. That's where the crime is, we can't ignore it, that it's down there in Sydney, and we have to come for at least an hour through that area before we can sit and think “oh, we're really home”.

Asian crimes make them feel more nervous because crime was 'never so bad' before. One old lady mutters that she knows some Japanese in Katoomba and they are the nicest people you would want to know. And another woman says there's been no rise in the crime rate over the last 20/30 years. But this meets strong disagreement. Another senior complains about the drugs that Asians are bringing in.

> Every time there’s a crime in Sydney it’s not usually an Australian name.

This kind of racism is fairly evident in the Sydney seniors focus group as well. One man comments on the majority of migrants on the Bankstown line: that they feed their kids on the train and leave rubbish, which was not a problem in 'the old red rattler' days. The Greek woman agrees that trains are dirty, and says that young people from the Pacific Islands tend to do it and are rude. Another man, even while trying to be sympathetic, talks of migrants (who are 'terrific breeders') having difficulties with prams on station stairs, and at being at risk from 'perverts' who offer to help with the pram. A woman, asking for more security men on the train, talks of the train guard being helpless when 'there were a couple of big Maoris having a blue.'
Among these older people discussion of local ethnicity often blurs with the ‘otherness’ of age. Gillian, the Greek woman, says she worries about people in ‘hippy’ clothes, but another older lady says that some of her own family are hippy dressers and they are the nicest people. Another woman agrees: she has grandchildren like that. One says how when she tripped in Paddington she was helped when a Maori or Islander with an Afro hairdo lifted her to her feet, even though she probably would normally avoid people who did look ‘creepy like that’. Another woman replies that she has a son with long hair and an earring, even though he is over 40 — and you couldn’t get anybody kinder. The Greek lady also has a long-haired relative, but it is ‘clean and tidy hair that counts’. What frightens her is dirty nails, too many ‘gipsy style’ bangles on legs, very short hair in too many colours. Her fear is that these people ‘can kill to get what they want.’ Another older woman replies ‘you better not come and live in Newtown.’

This is a generation of people who are slowly becoming accustomed to the variable mix of ethnicities, ages and classes in Sydney; and they recognise that their locational experiences are therefore becoming different. One woman says it is the people who have come into the country who make it impossible to leave your door open any more or travel around safely by yourself. Another woman doesn’t agree — her friend at Little Bay knows exactly when the buses leave and she uses them. Gillian, the Greek woman says things are different in different regions of Sydney — like Lakemba where, as one of the older men in the group says, the private buses stop early ‘because they run for profit and want a bus load each time’. So you cannot move around safely and freely at night. Another older woman says she worries that the government will use all this talk of fear on public transport as an excuse to get rid of the pensioner’s ticket.

*It is one of the most important things we’ve got because it gets people out of their homes.*

Like Ellen in Katoomba, this woman emphasises the disparity between the statistics for crimes and the seniors’ expressed fear; though she admits that even she was nervous on the long train trip at night to Liverpool. In fact, the Western Suburbs are as much a ‘no-go’ area to this Sydney group of older people as to the Blue Mountains group.

*No fear, no way — I live out at Blacktown, and I’ve been on the train when they’ve actually been giving people a kicking.*

Ross from Blacktown also talks of youth there kicking the train windows in; of his wife and himself being driven out of the carriage by young people hitting them on the head with blown-up condoms; and of his feelings of fear once he has got off the train at Blacktown station: ‘coming from the train at Blacktown after dark is a no-no.’ Having enough money to run a car would not help him either, because, parked at Blacktown, ‘you wouldn’t be avoiding crime, you would be inviting yourself to a different kind of crime.’
Nevertheless, Sydney, too, is a landscape of fear in certain key areas. Ross used to be a keen concert goer, but after a various people he knows were mugged near Circular Quay he let his subscription run out. Gillian likes to go out in the evening in the summer to stroll at Circular Quay or Darling Harbour, but would never do it with less than five or six other people.

**TIME**

(BIOMETRICAL, LOCATIONAL AND HISTORICAL)

Older people tend to contextualise their current fears via their longer memories. One Sydney woman, for example, says that she doesn't worry about the trains because she has lived in Paddington since the days of the slasher gangs. She encountered no trouble then because women were respected. 'That's not the case today, unfortunately.' A man from the Western Suburbs who used to do night shift work says he 'never had problems in the old days' with safety on trains. Ross from Blacktown says something similar.

*In the old red rattler days we had lots of problems. The current problem is the fear of who is sitting next to you.*

Some of this, they recognise, is a problem of biographical time: as they get older, weaker and less confident in controlling their immediate environment. As Ross says, he dislikes people fighting on the train and 'using pretty crook language'. When younger he would have told them to shut up, but now he is afraid of 'a smack in the mouth'.

Other older people remember nostalgically the days when there were porters to carry your cases at the station and prefects controlling children on the school buses and trains. But by no means all is nostalgia. These older people are also acutely aware of the structural conditions of today's crime. Most of the Sydney focus group accept one member's comment that the decline in safety is due to two things: greater unemployment, and drugs. The economy of these two situations, he adds, leads to people looking for money every day, and hence to greater risk, especially for vulnerable people. One older lady constantly gives out a dollar to street people in Newtown because she genuinely feels 'they can't help it': there is no work, and city rents are high.
Older people are, of course, particularly sensitive to high rents and low income. At the beginning of the Sydney interview some minutes are spent on a discussion led by a man who says it is not fair that some people had been able to get to the interview for one dollar whereas he had to pay two, because it was deemed that he had made two journeys (even though another woman had travelled by both bus and train for a total of one dollar). This is not pettiness, but the reality of people trying to live on the pension, and choosing their priorities for travelling carefully.

Asked the question, ‘If you had more money, do you think you could deal better with your worries and concerns about transport?’, older people tend say ‘Yes, of course, you could use taxis… It would be like having your own driver’. Gillian said she would use her car more: at the moment she uses public transport in the daytime in order to be able to afford using her car in the ‘more risky’ evening. An older man responded to the question by saying ‘savings don’t go as far as the old days’: he used to be able to pay his bills out of the interest on his $10,000 invested. The spending power of the pension is down 30%, another man says. And as for taxis, ‘Them bastards rob you.’ Gillian talks of insurance companies requiring expensive deadlocks which you can’t afford on the pension. Discussion followed about raising the pension — ‘that is the key for the pensioners’. There was also some general discontent about government policy on giving up your house if you want to go into a nursing home. Gillian said

_They break the families. The parents and kids become neighbours and even strangers… It breaks the family values. Only the rich can inherit the mansions._

It was hard for the interviewer to get off this topic, even after several minutes of discussion. But for older people, structural (economic) factors of decline can be as real as the bodily ones.

**EVERYDAY ROUTINE (THE ROUTINE MANAGEMENT OF FEAR VIA MEDIA, LOCAL GOSSIP ETC)**

Unlike teenagers, who tend to use daily travel gossip strategically with their parents, and as a source of shock/horror pleasure and display with each other, older people do not spend a lot of focus group time telling stories about travel incidents. They have encountered few incidents; and consequently the story by one older woman about her apple, her knife and her crochet hook caused considerable interest, amusement and satisfaction with her Blue Mountains group. Partly this was because of its in-built hermeneutic: ‘what was the apple for?’, partly because of its humour (the ‘black belt in the wardrobe’); and partly because of its successful narrative closure (the older woman who’s ‘gotta win’ did in fact, by her own account, win: three teenage boys were driven off).
By and large, though, transport ‘incidents’ were used generically rather than as extended narratives by seniors:

- e.g. ‘there were a couple of big Maoris having a blue’ — to illustrate the need for more security guards;
- Gillian’s remark about older people being burned to death recently because they couldn’t be got out past their barred windows — to illustrate her point that they should regain public space, not lock themselves away in their homes;
- another woman’s story about her husband’s prostate operation — to illustrate the need for older people having handy access to toilets when travelling.

Similarly, the older people do not remember transport incidents much from the media except generically and functionally: giving them clues as to where ‘bashings’ might take place, and other handy hints. One older woman, for example, recalled the news story of a woman who had a ring on a train and lost it to a man with a knife. Since then she always turns her rings around when travelling.

Some of the older people, like Gillian and Ellen, think that the media is positively dysfunctional in making older people afraid to go out and claim the public space which is rightfully theirs. Others believe that much crime goes unreported on the media. A Sydney man talks of ‘people who go on trains just to rape’, in relation to Anita Cobby: ‘that wasn’t reported in the media’. The Blue Mountains group are unable to recall any media stories about transport crime at all: just that ‘it comes in waves’, and ‘it’s not up here — mostly from Penrith down’.

And sometimes it is not the media but other people’s gossip which imposes itself on older people’s behaviour. For example, Rose, a senior who gave us a long interview in Sydney, told us

> Fear?... Well... at one stage I was going to dancing lessons in the city after work — this was a few years ago — and I used to get home late, and everybody used to say “Rose you shouldn’t do that, somebody will do something.” But it didn’t worry me. I used to walk through the city and get on the bus and go home and that never worried me... My husband used to say the same thing and I used to look at him and say, “Oh?”... They’d read about it in the paper and they’d think that it could happen... You might read about people being held up... and sometimes hit... on the trains... And I always would say to my family, “Who would want to look at this old lady?”... The media blows it out... quite a bit.

Since her husband retired at the beginning of the year, however, the power of gender has become a constraining reality for Rose.
But now my husband seems to get behind me all the time, he won’t let me go out... He probably thought that “Oh, he’s got time now”... We had to go to St Vincents on the other side of the city — so whether he thought that, you know, something might happen to me, I don’t know... And I’ve been used to doing all these things by myself.

JUDGMENTS, VALUES, EMOTIONS, BEHAVIOURS

Overall, older people tend to think that the crime rate generally, including on public transport, is high and rising. Some give structural reasons like unemployment for this, others racist reasons, focussing on foreigners bringing murders and drugs into the country. Judgments of risk (perceived crime rates) are quite clearly related to values: in that it is Ellen, Gillian and the other Sydney woman who resists the talk of unsafe train travel that point also to the statistics indicating how many people travel, how few are assaulted, and therefore to the importance of a) reclaiming this public space, and b) ensuring that older people’s travel concessions are maintained by the government. These same people tend to blame the media, too, for ‘beating up’ crime stories, while others who are more fearful of travel think that much crime goes unreported (and appeal to stories like the killing of Anita Cobby which have assumed almost mythical status). One of the older women who feels that trains are by and large safe also thinks that the media puts emphasis on crime on the trains deliberately to take attention away from the refusal of the government to employ more security people. In his long interview, Jack (an older Sydney resident) also blamed the media for irresponsibility.

Things are no worse than they have ever been, but we hear so much more about it because bad news sells newspapers. The media accentuates the negative things.

Like the others who strongly criticise the media, Jack says his experience of public transport has been excellent, particularly since he has retired and can travel for one dollar. And he emphasises that there is a big gap between his experience of public transport and what he sees and hears from the media.

Thus some older people (the ‘trains are safe’ people) are more outraged by the media’s reporting of crime stories, while others are outraged by substantive stories about young girls being assaulted on the train, men threatening travellers with syringes, and the Anita Cobby story (both focus groups of seniors raised this one). These same differences relate closely, as we have seen, to older people’s varying (‘constrained’, ‘compensatory’, ‘avoidance’ and ‘activist’) behaviours.
KNOWLEDGABILITY (EXPERT/LAY)

As just discussed, the more 'activist' train travellers among older people do not accept 'expert' opinion (from the media and government) except 'with a grain of salt'. Others, who have very little to report in the way of 'bad experiences' on the train, do tend to rely on the geographical maps of crime they get from the media, and the (sometimes) racist gossip that they glean from both 'expert' and 'lay' sources.

On one aspect of 'situated' knowledge they are all, however, in agreement. They never see the security guards (and sometimes the station staff too) that they feel they should see in and around the trains. The comment by one of the Sydney older men is typical that he had complained to State Rail and was told that there were security staff: 'but I have never seen one.' A woman in the group said that she wanted to see security people on the train all the time, 'and that would make jobs too.' They all feel these people should be uniformed. The Blue Mountains group say the same: that it is the unmanned stations that are covered in graffiti, have windows smashed, and platform toilets barred with gates. They would like to see security men regularly walking through the trains, and everybody agrees that 'Somebody in a uniform is much better than a plainclothes person'. Jack, an older Sydney resident, said in his long interview with us that he was aware that extra security had been introduced, but people were not generally aware of it. It needs, he said, to be more obvious and effective; and this might include arming the security guards.

In the absence (as the seniors see it) of this 'expert' surveillance, those who travel on the trains adopt their own strategies: some carry whistles in their pocket, another a can of hair spray in her bag, one older lady carries her knife and apple, another Sydney woman carries a 'fake' empty bag over her shoulder in the winter (while her money, photographs etc are in a handbag strapped under her coat), and most sit in the last carriage because 'it makes you feel safer'. But most agree that they would travel on the trains more at night if there were more uniformed security guards, more staffed stations, more open toilets and so on. Face-to-face interaction with uniformed railway and security personnel is what they are all looking for. And Ellen reaches back into her biographical time to make suggestions for a better future.
If we give in to this fringe element we might as well lock ourselves in our houses and stay there. We need more police on the beat... When we grew up we could walk from Strathfield station to my place at midnight and think nothing of it. If we missed the last bus nobody would molest you because of that sergeant in that area who knew all the ne’er-do-wells and would kick them in the backside. The media must stop making everything into a sensation and get back to the basics when news was news... In this last ten years all of my friends say they don’t go out at night, and I think it absolutely ludicrous... We’ve got to get back and put police on the streets and stop this fear-mongering... What is the real percentage of the crime? I refuse to let it happen to me. I refuse to be locked in my door. I have been to America and seen these enclaves where they have guard dogs and electrified gates and whatever — that’s not living... Let’s take our space back from the undesirables. Just let us do it... say “this is our space, we don’t want you here. If you want to play up, go elsewhere”.

There was unanimous agreement in this age group that this solution from the ‘past’ was also the best way forward.
It’s getting worse with teenage kids who will nick females’ bags because they need the money because they can’t get a job… They pin a lot of the crimes on teenagers making generalised comments that all teenagers are like that, when there’s teenagers that are scared of teenagers.

Other teenagers are the worst. They’re getting worse. (Blue Mountains teenage focus group)

Young people are the most likely victims of crime. While older people may fear teenagers generally, and feel that much of the crime and the vandalism stems from them, teenagers themselves are acutely aware of both the reality and the stigma of teenage aggression.

Like older people, they (especially girls) often fear to travel by train at night.

You feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable on the train at night.

I think weird people are at train stations more.

But as the last speaker indicates, unlike older people young people still tend to travel anyway. They are more mobile. Given the lack of facilities outside the centre of Sydney, young people regularly travel by train to the City for concerts, live television recordings, and sports events; and they frequently travel back late at night.

This means that, unlike older people, they must devise more strategies for making themselves feel safer at night (like seniors, teenagers feel quite safe travelling in the daytime). Girls in particular speak of these strategies:

- avoiding eye contact with males in the carriage;
- keeping alert at all times in the train, on the platform, in the street at night;
- discouraging conversation with people who sit next to them;
- surveying the carriage by looking at the reflection of the people around them in the darkened train windows;
- travelling always in groups;
- sitting in the ‘Blue Light’ compartment.
At the same time, teenagers are acutely aware of deficiencies in the strategies that have been adopted by State Rail. While some speak of the greater feeling of security in the brightly lit Tangaras with their help buttons, virtually all the teenagers we spoke with felt that there is far too little visibility of people who are supposedly there to help them: guards who never appear in the carriages; security personnel, who if they really exist, are not in uniform, so that they provide neither deterrent nor comfort; station help buttons that do not work. Whether or not these criticisms are always fair is not the whole point. Rather, these are the views that circulate by word of mouth because, individually and collectively, that is what enough teenagers experience for them, as an age group, not to feel comfortable in trains at night.

Teenagers say that things have got much worse recently, and, like older people, can theorise about the reasons: particularly unemployment and drugs. But, unlike older people, they are able to make cultural distinctions within their age group: for example about the relationship between risk, public transport and particular groups of young people.

They’re getting worse. They are, they’re getting worse. I mean the more conservative teenagers are threatened more by the ‘homies’. Because the ‘homies’, they mightn’t even want to do anything, but they look it... I really don’t like ‘homies’.

In my year they’re the main bullies and so on.

Yeah.

Yeah.

It’s because they’re trying to copy this culture that crime is part of, because it’s trendy.

And to be more American.

And you get like little girls that say like I want to go over to America and hang out with the ‘homies’, and it’s like they’re little blond white girls — if they went there they’d get killed. And they don’t realise what they’re sort of joining when they get into that sort of thing, I think.

It’s like you get groups of Year 7s and 8s and 9s and whatever, and we know some of these people [laughter] and they’ll say, “Yeah, Nazis are cool”. I know one that’s carved a Swastika into the back of his hand a while ago, and they don’t know what it’s about, they don’t understand it, they’re just doing it because they think that’s cool, it’s violent.

They’re just ignorant.

I hate getting “Heiled”. I get “Heiled” a lot. They’ll go “Heil” to me and call me a Nazi. And I hate that.
It’s more the image of what they’re trying to be.
Some of them are [a real threat], and because the rest of them are copying the one’s that are, you can’t tell who is and who isn’t.
Peer pressure comes into it a lot, you know.
They seem to stand on stations a lot.
Yeah. [laughter]
They just seem to stand on stations. (Blue Mountains teenage focus group)

Steve, one of our Blue Mountains focus group who travels to Sydney quite a bit says he has been hassled by ‘homies’ when in Sydney, ‘but they never really bother me that much, I just laugh at them.’ Maybe Steve, a very big boy, does laugh, and maybe he doesn’t. But at any rate, he has the luxury of not living with them day by day. Most of the Blue Mountains teenagers say that the ‘homies’ they encounter nearer to home are aping the Sydney ‘homies’ and are not really dangerous like them. People who live, travel and go to school in areas where ‘homies’ congregate, however, have a very different account.

MARK AND THE NORTH SHORE GPS TEENAGERS

Mark encounters ‘homies’ every day at Chatswood. Like the Blue Mountains teenagers, he emphasises that ‘homies’ congregate at train stations. The ‘homies’ from one northern suburb of Sydney, where Mark goes to school, hang around the train station in their cars. The ‘homies’ at Chatswood station, he says, are on the platform when he goes to school in the morning, and they are still there when he gets back after school in the afternoon. If he stays at school for sports training, and gets back to Chatswood at 6 p.m. they are still there, and pose a real threat to him because there are far less people getting off the train; consequently he arranges to be picked up from school by his mother.

Mark avoids travelling by train whenever possible, though he feels relatively safe in the daytime (apart from one incident when a man went berserk on a bus, he does not feel bus travel is particularly risky, and sometimes catches buses at night). He will not go on the train in the evening in any circumstances by himself; and even in the company of six other boys recently he (and they) felt scared taking a train home after going to a pub in the evening. They travel by car whenever possible, making sure there is always one person who doesn’t drink. And there are always a couple of them carrying mobile phones (he borrows his parents’ mobile for security).
The homeboys are the centre of his fear. They are all, he says, ethnic Australians ('Wogs') who spend their time hanging around the train stations, on the platforms and in their cars, throughout the day. His mother who used to worry about 'weirdoes' now worries about Homeboys, and says she would prefer to pick him up at 4 a.m. than that he risk train travel. His younger brother is also fearful of travel, and both have experience of violent assault on friends while in their company.

Mark talks of a particular series of assaults outside a party at a house close to Chatswood station, and argues that the Homeboys (who have emerged with the basketball cult) pick out the white drill trousers and polo top gear of GPS types as a sign of whom to bash. At the same time, he says they can also be fairly indiscriminate, with attacks outside Chatswood High as well as outside GPS schools.

His description of these attacks, outside his school and at parties is graphic: in one, he describes the largest boy in his school being beaten by a group of 'homies' and being covered with a big blood-covered towel; in another of a party where he was outraged by 'the worst things personally' (friends' being knocked half-unconscious, with split lips and eyes all bruised up, seeing a friend kicked in the head, and a girl who got slashed).

He has also been subjected to attempted theft on the train, but it is the areas around the stations that worry him most. He argues that the police do nothing, and that the media doesn't cover the real crime on the trains (which in one sense he approves of, because more reporting would give the Homeboys more prestige). Tougher penalties not more media coverage is what he believes is needed. His increase in fear has been fairly recent, stemming particularly from a very violent assault which put some of his friends in hospital (he was not attacked, he thinks, because he happened to be wearing more baggy clothes — closer to the Homeboys' gear).

Mark says that he and his friends' outrage and anger is sufficiently strong sometimes to want to kill Homeboys, but he recognises that things would escalate if they did.

_They chase you and beat the crap out of you; and if you stand there they do the same... That's why people hate them so much. And I personally, after some parties where my friends have got their faces smashed in, just wanted to jump into a car with a gun and shoot them, because for them logic doesn't exist._

But despite his continual fear of the Homeboys, he feels his community is lucky compared with friends in the Annandale area who are threatened by organised gangs. In contrast, the Homeboys are ethnic 'amateurs', bored, 'with a chip on their shoulders', and looking for someone to bash.
Perhaps above all other categories, teenagers are constructed as ‘the other’ by people who fear travelling on public transport — except by parents of teenagers, who then tend to see other teenagers as ‘the other’. Even teenagers themselves will say that it is other teenagers that they most fear on the train.

For this reason we decided to take a self-designated group of teenage ‘others’ in Sydney, to hear from them their own experience of travel on public transport. These were teenagers from a gay refuge in Glebe. Coming from a wide range of class and ethnic backgrounds, with varying contact with their parents, and in an important sense ‘determined’ by their relative poverty, this group were (now at least) self-chosen ‘outsiders’: one had been a street kid, another girl self-presented so strongly as a male that she was regularly thrown out of female toilets, another self-presented as a Queen, another (‘Mission Girl’) was a boy even though the interviewer initially though that by dress, hair and voice she was a ‘feral lesbian’. An extract of discussion between ‘Orchid’, ‘Minister’, ‘Sharon Stone’, ‘Dexter’, ‘Jake’, ‘Mission Girl’ and ‘Christy’ (the names they chose for the focus group interview) will illustrate both how this group of teenagers self-presents as ‘other’ and some of the travel problems they encounter.

_We have a great Bronte story. We went to the beach... and it was about 1 o’clock and it was a Friday night, and there were all these little Homie shits._

_Homie drunks, fuckwits._

_Homie fuckwits. But they hopped on the bus._

_And sharkfuckers._

_The Homie culture’s pretty pathetic in general._

_Well anyway, they were looking at me and Dexter._

_Cause they [the guys] were wearing dresses... pretty-punce style._

_Like Mission Girl hopped on the bus and they looked at “her”. And I hopped on the bus behind Mission Girl._

_I was wearing a gorgeous dress too._

_So was I. (male) And they looked at us and they go, “Oh my God, it’s a guy dressed up as a chick”._

_This is the Homie._

_And there was like, we were at the front and there was the whole back of the bus packed with these drunken twits..._
Screaming and going off like fuckwits. And they started throwing...

Think about it but. You two guys got on in dresses, and this one gets on with just a towel and a pair of boots...

I had a huge dog collar... I looked like the guy from The Prodigy.

He had a dog collar on and I looked like a Homie male but I was really a female.

The similarity between ‘Orchid’, ‘Minister’, ‘Mission Girl’ and their friends on the one hand, and Mark’s much more affluent GPS boys (with their cars and mobile phones) on the other, seems to reside in one thing only (apart from their age): their dislike and fear of the Homeboys. In both cases they are picked on by the ‘homies’ because of the way they look, even though the gap between the GPS boys’ drill trousers and polo shirts, and ‘Orchid’ et al’s dog collars, boys in dresses, and girls dressed like Home Boys, is considerable. For these reasons of visibility two group of teenagers at either end of the social spectrum harbour considerable anger and fear as a result of their experiences with ‘homies’ on public transport.

However, by no means all teenagers do emphasise either ‘clan’ or ‘other’ visibility when they travel by bus or train. Many teenagers (like a number in our Blue Mountains group) deliberately dress down on the train in order not to attract attention. As Phil, a Blue Mountains teenager told us in a long interview, his strategy on the trains is

not to draw attention to myself in any way, not to interfere in anyone’s business, not to insult anyone. Not to show intimidation, but not to be cocky either.

A number of girls in the Blue Mountains focus group, only too aware of the unfairness in the legal system of judges pointing to the way women dress as a ‘cause’ for assault, spoke of being cautious about dress on public transport at all times, and especially after parties and social gatherings. Given that our group of Sydney teenage ‘others’ frequently do quite the opposite: dress to outrage, and do take pleasure in drawing attention to themselves by word as much as image, we felt it would be useful to compare the experiences, strategies and behaviours of these two groups on public transport.
Our group of Glebe teenage ‘others’ are, of course, negotiating personal as social meanings every time they engage with the ‘public’. They enjoy public transport travel for this reason as much as they are sometimes hurt by it. In the focus group discussion, there is a lot of laughter as they narrate many of their stories: of the bus ride from Bronte with ‘homies’ which ended with the bus breaking down and them all having to push; and of the abuse metered out to one of them by an elderly lady when he was ‘minding his own business sitting having a smoke at a Sydney station’. Of course, for the older lady he was not minding his own business. She was offended in particular by his ‘Goth’ black painted fingernails; and according to this boy the ‘cracked lady’ (accompanied by a pair of ‘yuppies’) followed him on and off the train, abusing him still. There was much humour both in the telling of this tale and in the receiving of it, particularly when the interviewer said he would be the only teenager who had been assaulted by an old woman in the ‘Fear of Crime’ report.

On the other hand, some of their stories were told in almost complete silence: such as the girl who was hassled by the ‘homies’ — ‘I hate homies!’ — because they thought she was a boy; and the girl who was severely punched in the eyes on the train from Liverpool to Redfern by males (after a platform argument with her girlfriend) who thought she was a guy. This was in the ‘Blue Light’ carriage at night, no guard appeared, she pulled out a knife to protect herself, and ended up in the police station as a result.

Buses, too, can be dangerous for this group (although by and large most of their trouble relates to railways). One girl won’t catch buses at night anymore after a very recent experience.

Last week on the bus there were some boys down the back and they were all calling me like “slut” and “whore”, and I was like stressed by it, sickened in myself, and then an older man came up to me and made a proposition. He wanted me to go back to his house and “suck his dick” and buy him drugs, and I said I didn’t go home with strangers. Anyway, he said “alright”; he stood up and said “this girl’s a harlot” and I just stood up and said “this guy’s a pervert”. So that was fine until I got up to get off at my stop and he pushed me down the stairs. I fell across the road and I got quite hurt because I had been hit by a car the night before. And that was fairly late at night in Balmain and there was quite a few people on the bus, but because nobody did anything, they just didn’t dare, I haven’t got any faith in people on the bus. I haven’t caught a bus at night since then.
Another girl avoids the NightRide bus and would prefer to stay over at her friends’ till 4 a.m. to catch the first train (‘unless I’m drunk’). On the NightRide bus ‘everyone is drunk — ‘homies’, sleazy men, ‘yuppies’. This listing of distinct types of male threat is common in this group. So that on one hand they emphasise their own distinctness when on public transport in contrast to the ‘general public’ whom they don’t believe need to be scared on trains.

_We’re targeted because, you know, she has short hair, we wear black, Jake’s a Queen, you know we have all these different things that people pick us out of a crowd and that targets us. Old people get robbed, suits get robbed, but they only get robbed whereas we get hassled._

But on the other hand, they are also very precise in their geography of threatening types. Asked how to improve the situation for them, they reply

_Eliminate Rednecks, ‘yuppies’, ‘homies’... Wipe out Sutherland and Penrith to Mount Druitt._

Blue Mountains teenagers, as we have seen, do not emphasise their own personal and social distinctiveness so much on the train. For them, the journey to Penrith, Paramatta or Sydney is slow, long and tedious and something to be endured as the price of their living in the upper Blue Mountains. Trying to be invisible, however, does not spare them (especially the girls) from other people’s attention.

The Blue Mountains group were divided broadly along gender lines over their level of anxiety at train travel (buses were seen as less of a threat because of the compact space and presence of a driver). One male indicated some concern particularly about stations and their environs (eg the Katoomba underpass) and would avoid night travel because he ‘feels much safer during the day’. This is because there are more people then, and he doesn’t know whether anyone would intervene to help him if he was in trouble. So he avoids night travel ‘if easy’ when returning from Sydney, but would travel at night if he needed to. This boy, in his big black brimmed hat and long coat is, however, much more visible as a ‘loner’ than another, much bigger boy who makes it his business to get on with all the different groups at school, and deliberately dresses neutrally. In contrast to the other boy, he travels regularly to Sydney by train at night by himself, and though occasionally hassled by ‘homies’, he laughs it off.
The Blue Mountains girls’ major concern was about travel at night. They varied in the extent to which they did this: one travelled quite a lot at night alone, others never did. The issue was not seen as a debilitating worry by teenage girls, but came to the fore when they were in uncomfortable situations. We will look at girls’ detailed worries more closely in the next chapter. But it is important here to emphasise the pervading effect of what Ferraro calls ‘social incivilities’ on teenage girls who travel at night: from men who stare at them in the carriage to seeing males masturbating in the train or in the next telephone booth on a station platform; from the man in the next seat who vibrates his knee close to yours to actual offers of money for ‘a head job’. Teenage girls commonly adopt a range of surveillance strategies if they are on the train after dark, while at the same time pretending not to be looking around — in case it draws attention to them or makes them seem nervous.

Boys, too, can encounter situations that scare them even when trying to keep out of trouble. One Blue Mountains teenager, aware that his brother had been beaten up and robbed after getting off the train at Wollongong, supposedly for ‘looking’ at two other teenagers on the train, tends to travel quietly, in company when he catches the train at night. Phil was travelling late with two friends (one male, one female) from a concert in Sydney when a tough-looking middle-aged man, ‘scruffy clothes, some teeth missing, covered in tattoos and excited in a weird sort of way’, approached them on the platform and began to talk. He then sat with the three teenagers, saying he’d just been released from Long Bay Gaol. When asked, he said he was imprisoned for murdering a guy with a Bowie knife in the back during a drunken brawl. He told them how tough life had been in gaol, but he had now made it out of ‘sixteen years in Hell’. While he went for a smoke, the teenage girl spoke to another man that she knew in the carriage, who confirmed that he had met men out of prison on their day of release on three occasions before, and they were a lot like this one: ‘I don’t know if he’s a murderer, but I think he’s been released from gaol today.’ After the man returned from his smoke, he sat with the teenagers again and unnerved them by continuously slamming an old-fashioned can opener into his case. He spoke with them about going to see if his parents still had property at Lithgow, then suddenly changed his mind and got off the train, thinking he had reached Parramatta. This incident has made Phil ‘a bit more nervous’ of travelling by himself on the train because he doesn’t know how he would ‘have handled it if alone.’
Phil and the other Mountains teenagers do most of their daily travelling by school bus (unlike the Fort Street teenagers, there are no reported ‘gang’ confrontations at the quiet Mountains bus stops — though one teenager did gain her first fear of public transport from a boy choking her from behind on a school bus). When these Mountains teenagers do travel further afield, to Penrith and Sydney for shopping and shows, the distance is tedious only because of the slow speed of the train winding along the Blue Mountains escarpments. So the journey is functional and necessary to reach the better facilities of the city. It is not a particularly pleasurable (or fearful) aspect of lifestyle, as it can be for our Sydney teenagers.

Like the Blue Mountains seniors, these teenagers have no worries about train travel in the daytime and generally have concern at night ‘only from Penrith on to Sydney’. Like some of the Blue Mountains parents, a main worry is falling asleep on the long journey from Sydney and having one’s bag stolen — for boys as well as girls.

The locational map of fear is quite different for the Sydney teenage ‘others’. One girl wouldn’t travel ‘out West’ in the train day or night — in fact, most of the group say they won’t catch a train ‘in the West’; another girl won’t go to Redfern; another boy who worked at Kings Cross and has been a street kid says he is not prepared to travel there even in the day because they ‘hate him’, but is happy to go West because of lots of friends at Paramatta and Bankstown.

There are more young people in the city and I’ve got a phobia for young people... I especially hate it when young people come up to you and it’s like “what are you doing? where are you going? have you got any money?” And it’s like if you say “no” they end up bashing you and taking your money, and if you say “yes” they end up taking your money and bashing you anyway.

Another boy says he won’t travel West since he ‘came out’, but nor will he catch buses in the city at school time. The situated and differentiated nature of their city travel fear was very evident, even though as a group there was strong camaraderie and mutual recognition.
Unlike the older groups, teenagers do not have long ‘historical’ memories. They don’t, for example, compare the old ‘slasher gangs’ of Paddington when ‘women were respected’ with today. On the other hand, memories can be profound and with lasting effect. Stacey, a working-class teenager from Riverwood is — like virtually all the other female teenagers and many of the males — fearful of travelling on the train at night. But her fear is more than some of these others. She says ‘I won’t even walk to the corner shop’ after dark; and she says this has been the case ever since she was thirteen when a young girlfriend (who had been like a sister to her) was seriously brain-damaged after being attacked while walking with her in a park.

Now Stacey carries that trauma in a continuous effort to control her fear of train travel. Recently, when she set off for work at 4 a.m. a drunk put his arms around her and wouldn’t desist even when another passenger intervened, and finally the guard put her in his compartment. Stacey controlled her fear after that occasion by asking her sympathetic employer for a job starting later in the morning. But even morning daylight travel on the train can worry her: for a time she caught a bus first in order to have a shorter train trip to work, but that proved too expensive. Now, travelling on the train to work at morning peak time, she feels safer because of all the business people travelling. But she also carries a mobile phone on which her mother always rings while she is still on the train: ‘It makes me feel secure because I know if I get into trouble I only have to touch one button.’

Stacey is especially frightened of travelling on the train at night, after work in the winter. She says she only feels safe if her head is buried in a book, because she thinks that if she looks around and catches anybody’s glance, she may become a victim. She is afraid of being stabbed from behind (which is why, she says, she is always looking out of the side of her eyes even when reading on the train); and at night she sits near the window because she can then see the whole carriage reflected in it. She is also scared of dark stations and walking to her car; but is not worried about the carpark itself because there is a security guard.
Stacey believes that the media hides the truth of violent attacks on trains; and she has her own stories of female friends who have been harassed on public transport: one woman was followed to and fro from home to work on the train until she finally changed her job. But, scared though she is, Stacey is determined to control her fear. She believes that the media should be more open about crime on public transport, and argues that people will still use the trains if told the truth. She herself feels she ‘has to get over’ her fear, and adopts with friends strategies to control it. For example, on three evenings a week she will meet other friends outside their different workplaces in order to travel together; and on one occasion these women have experimented on the train at night by moving out of their group to each sit in a separate carriage for a while, in order to learn to manage their fears. Stacey said that two women wouldn’t do it, and she herself felt very scared but felt she had to do it get over her fear. When she does sit alone at night like this, it is with a wall behind her so that she can see everyone in the carriage ahead of her.

Stacey’s fears are not asymptomatic: one of the boys in the Sydney teenage focus group says ‘everyone’s afraid of night travel’; and a Blue Mountains girl said ‘At night you feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable by yourself on the train’. But Stacey’s particularly continuous fears do indicate the power of biographical time, and the various locational and work-related strategies she uses to manage her fear, whether in the early morning, peak-time, or night-time train travel.

**AGENCY / STRUCTURE**

As with the older people and parents, teenagers tend to be unanimous about the need for security on the trains (and by and large worry much less about buses). The Blue Mountains teenagers, for example, were all aware of the ‘Blue Light’ carriages but not of any official presence. ‘I’ve never seen any guards’, ‘Where is it?’, ‘There’s no security to make you feel safe’. They said they had not seen the guard or any uniformed security

*If they haven’t got a uniform who cares?*

*If they’ve got a uniform it’s visual, it says OK there are cops on here.*

Non-uniformed security was not seen as a deterrent. They could not help the teenagers feel safe because you would not know if they were there. The teenagers doubted in fact whether they were there (‘it could just be to cover their backs, not afford security just put the notice up for reassurance’). One teenager’s statement ‘You know they’ve got un-uniformed police. I’d prefer if they did have uniforms’ met with a chorus of agreement.
The technology was also criticised: help points that didn't work (teenagers seem confused as to what it is for: two girls on an empty station platform wanted to inquire about the time of the next train and got no response — ‘that was not very helpful.’) The group questioned whether help point work; and another major issue was surveillance cameras so fuzzy that they were no use to the police in identifying culprits in the Katoomba Station underpass mugging.

Overall, the Blue Mountains teenagers called for the ‘greater physical pressure’ of uniformed security; and for a technology that can be trusted to gain help and catch offenders (so that potential offenders will feel that they’ll actually be caught). Another important view of this group of teenagers was the need for greater perceived reliability in the rail service. This, they believed, would encourage greater usage and thereby make people feel more safe. Especially in the Mountains there is a need, they said, to trust the train service timewise (and in terms of breakdowns), because of the already infrequent service. Like the two girls who tried to find out the time of the next train, there was a general feeling of a lack of communication about train times; and this is especially pressing given that they could have to wait up to an hour on a lonely station for another train. Moreover, the last train down the Mountains leaves at 11 pm, and is, they say, packed with young people.

The group of Sydney teenagers also emphasise the importance of uniformed security on the trains, arguing for security men in every carriage at night. This request for ‘24-hour security’ is not surprising in a group with such a high record of harassment and theft against them on and around trains. Apart from the incidents already described, in this Sydney teenage group:

- a girl was asked while waiting for a country train at Central for a ‘head job’ for $20, then for $100 when she refused. The man followed her on to the train and harassed her till Hornsby, where she got off;
- a girl living on the streets near Central Station was accosted there by a guy who couldn’t communicate except by gesture. He gave visual signs that he wanted money, then followed her through Centrepoint Tower, Hyde Park toilets, and then back to Enmore, where she hid in her neighbour’s house until he was gone;
- a boy was asked if he was cool by a guy on the train, who then started rubbing his crotch;
- a boy was threatened for his money at a train station, but escaped because the ‘gang’ became more interested in the crowd he was with;
- a boy was robbed of his money by a ‘gang’ who also searched his bag on the train;
- a girl allowed a bum on the train that she felt sorry for to chat to her — then he asked to have sex with her;
a boy kept meeting an Aboriginal boy who offered him money for sex;
a number of the group had been ‘rolled’ on the train for money, clothes, 
shoes, cigarettes, jackets, knives, wallets — though, the group also said
‘They don’t bother us because we don’t wear Nikes’; and the two ‘Goths’ said
that wearing black and a pentagram around their neck could scare people and
prevent them robbing them.

Nevertheless, there was a distinct difference in the request for uniformed
security between this and every other group. Only this group of Sydney teenage
‘others’ emphasised the difference between uniformed police and security
guards. A number of them had had trouble with police interrogation. One girl said
that she is ‘as scared of cops as much as anything’. Cops, she says, pick on a girl
who looks like a boy and interrogate her. Another boy claimed he got beaten up,
his ticket ripped up by a policeman, and dragged off the train at Lidcombe
because he was a street kid — then he was fined for not having a ticket. Another
teenager who was attacked at Paramatta station by someone who thought she
was a prostitute told the police, but, she said, got no help. Another girl said she
had been dragged by men halfway out of the train at Guildford, but no-one had
helped and she only got away when the train moved. Yet, they argue, in contrast
they have all have had the experience of surveillance cameras on trains ‘telling
you to stop smoking’.

Men can fully harass you and then get violent as well and there’s supposed
to be cameras everywhere but no one comes and helps.

This group wants more security guards on trains, whereas police interrogate and
scare you. With security guards ‘they’ll just tell you to put drinks away... As long
as you’re not making trouble, that’s all they care about.’ As for more lights at
stations, this group found them ‘too bright... especially when you’re tripping’.

But one boy in this Sydney group said, to some general agreement, ‘If we really
want to solve the problem we have to get back to the main source — the family,
the media. People need to be educated that violence isn’t the way.’ These refuge
teenagers knew enough about ‘the structure’ — not least through their ‘rich-
bitch’ parents — to know that their ‘otherness’ was only partly self-determined.
As we have seen, the Sydney teenage group told many stories, both fearful and humorous. Ejected from their parents homes, they are also separated from their parents’ travel support. Not for them, the Blue Mountains-style parents (or the North Shore parents of Mark) who would pick them up at any time ‘night or day’ in the car. A couple of the Sydney group spoke of their ‘rich bitch’ parents who thought public transport was beneath them; for the rest parents didn't figure in the lifestyle. One boy who couldn't go on buses at schooltime and who's friends who had given him lifts had moved on to university, sounded desperately isolated. This group of teenagers had to use public transport to move around at all: as the isolated boy kept saying, 'I've got a life too', but nobody he had appealed to for helping him get it — parents, police, magistrate — had listened.

Not surprisingly, these teenagers’ talk was replete with public transport stories. They didn’t need to turn to the media to circulate narratives that were full of action, colour, detail, humour and violence. Their view of the media was that the news was ‘mostly about people being robbed’. This doesn't make them more fearful because they know it happens anyway. In their view the media causes fear of trains just to fill newspapers. If there is a brawl on a train at Sydenham, the media make up a story about gangs at Sydenham and people are scared to go on trains. Where this does happen, the media make it sound worse for commercial reasons. As we saw, this group doesn't think crime happens to the general public too much on public transport. Crime with harassment is what happens to them, because of how they look.

Yet the media does also establish its own geography. For example, a number of girls in the group say they won’t go to Redfern, while not giving personalised experiences as to why. But if this is a media-driven constraint on their travel, it is also mixed with other personal experiences which they narrate and discuss. A boy says that Redfern station is where you can bludge cigarettes, because that is what the locals do. While another boy says he gives out lots of cigarettes there to Aboriginal youths, presumably in a comradeship of ‘others’.

The Blue Mountains teenagers are much more cosseted by their ‘chauffeur’ parents when they return to their home station. Consequently, most of their circulating gossip is about the train trip itself or about the stations at the other end of their journey.

* I’ve actually been more worried about train stations.

* Central Station is freaky there are a lot of weirdoes in Central Station.

* I hate waiting there.

* Penrith station I’ve heard a lot of nasty stories about.
As regards media stories of transport crime, they say that they are aware of some coverage of this, but generally they only feel involved with media issues in the local area (like the Katoomba underpass bashing) or in an area they go to.

The Glebe and Blue Mountains teenagers do, however, have an identical area of ‘outrage’ in relation to media reports: drugs. The Sydney group discuss their outrage over the media beat up of ‘Cabramatta heroin’. While Phil, one of the Blue Mountains teenagers, is especially enraged by media coverage of the Anna Woods ecstasy story (the same story that brought fear to Liam, the North Shore Sydney parent). In Phil’s view, the only reason that the media liked the Anna Woods story was that it was about a middle-class white girl dying from her first exposure to the drug; ‘whereas ecstasy is a much less dangerous drug than others not reported.’

JUDGMENTS / VALUES / BEHAVIOURS

The Sydney group of teenage ‘others’ rate their likelihood of being subject to public transport harassment and violence as high (in contrast to the general public); and when asked whether ‘compared to other things in your life at the moment, these concerns or worries are all that important to you?’ a number of the group say they are, but as much because of the police as anyone else. In contrast, the Blue Mountains teenagers rate the level of their concern about crime on public transport as ‘minimal’ compared with other things in their lives (most of these students are currently studying for their HSC), even though they judge that there is a real risk to girls on the train at night. Only one of this group of girls, however, prioritises her interests in Sydney (such as visiting her girlfriend in the Western Suburbs) sufficiently highly to travel on the train regularly by herself at night.

I wouldn’t travel alone at night. I’ll never travel by myself — I always have to have someone there with me.

I do. I have quite a few times — gone down to Sydney fairly late at night, and I’ve had a few experiences and sit there and think I really don’t want to be here right now. It’s scary.

In fact, though, only one girl in each of the Sydney and Blue Mountains groups was prepared to say that she travelled alone at night, come what may. The behavioural strategies of these two groups of teenage girls might vary from the self-ostending to the self-effacing (though one of the Sydney girls did say that she would dress like a Homie boy in places like Auburn); but foundationally the issue of gender exploitation underpins these cosmetic differences. One feels that all the sexual invitations (and ensuing violence) encountered by the Glebe group, lies waiting for the Blue Mountains girls just beyond the slightest of visual cues. Their strategy of surveying their train carriages not eye to eye but through a glass darkly may be a sad indictment of male/female relations (as Liam, the Sydney parent noted). But it is soundly practical as fear-reducing behaviour.
The limited size of this small qualitative study did not let us go far into this field of cultural difference, especially as regards ethnicity. We can, though, make some observations even from this study:

- **GENDER**: undoubtedly females of all ages fear train travel at night; and, in the present circumstances of minimal rail staff on stations at night and limited uniformed security, many (particularly the young) may have good reason to. They are not, however, passive and whimpering victims. Some girls judge the chances of crime against them as not too high to forgo their valued activities. Others constrain their activities in various ways, trying to get back from Sydney in the daylight, or travelling only in groups, or burying their heads in books (even while being constantly alert). But the young, particularly, still travel by public transport (boosted, where economically possible) by helpful parents with cars;

- **AGE**: the young are by and large most fearful of their own age group (or even younger); and are likely to say that train travel, although getting better in terms of speed and efficiency, in other respects is ‘getting worse, with teenage kids nicking females’ bags — a problem with the whole society’. Girls, however, fear the eyes of older men, too; and as we saw from Phil’s story of the ‘released murderer’, boys can also be made anxious by their comparative physical weakness — in this incident, Phil said that they all felt more comfortable having another man in his twenties (whom one of them knew) in the carriage at the same time;

- **CLASS**: class difference can be a potent cause of violence in and around train travel. The fear of Mark, the large, good-looking and economically well-situated GPS boy from the North Shore of Sydney was perhaps greater than any of the others we interviewed. For him and his schoolfriends, the threat that their class uniform (whether school or leisure-time) carried for them was at least as serious and as continuous and prevailing as our group of Sydney teenage ‘others’ who brought attention to themselves via a very different visual style. On the other hand, where middle-class affluence happens to equate with teenagers still being at home, then parents cars can be an important source of reducing fear of crime — whether when driven by Mark’s mother after his sports training at 6 p.m. or by his friends after an evening out at the pub.
In terms of public transport travel, and fears for safety, our young people have considerable lay knowledge. It is Mark’s group who can map out for us in detail the times and locations of the various groups of North Shore ‘homies’. It is the group of teenagers from the refuge at Glebe who articulate for us the difference between uniformed security personnel and police on the trains. It is Stacey, the working-class secretary who, with her friends, contrives strategies for young women to manage their fear on the evening Sydney trains. It is Phil and his friends from the Blue Mountains who point to the fraud at the heart of media ‘expertise’ in the reporting of teenagers and drugs.

As a result of our focus group discussions with teenagers, parents of teenagers, and seniors we can already begin to answer some of the questions we set ourselves in the Audit Report (listed at the beginning of this chapter).

I How safe do people feel travelling on the train at night? The vast majority, in all age groups, do not feel safe on the train at night. As we will see in another chapter, this is true of State Rail personnel also.

I What in particular are they afraid of? Seniors have a rather generalised fear (but it includes assault, having possessions stolen, etc). Parents fear primarily for their children. Teenagers fear assault (especially sexual among girls) and robbery. Teenage boys have a significant fear of ‘homies’. The ‘landscape of fear’ for most groups is the Western Suburbs, but also includes certain suburban parts of the City. In the Mountains, isolated, unmanned stations are a setting of fear, especially for parents.

I Does fear or anxiety effect how and whether people travel at night? Older people tend to avoid travelling at night altogether. Parents prefer their children to catch the bus at night (if available); and like to pick them up in cars: in the City so that they don’t have to come back on the train; in the Mountains from the railway station. Teenage boys still tend to travel at night; girls much less so, and usually in company when they do.

I What is older people’s actual concern about children and teenagers on the train about? Older people worry about children coming from school and knocking them over or tripping them with big schoolbags, thus risking dangerous falls. Their worry about teenagers relates to their sense of a ‘decline’ in social and moral standards: drugs and unemployment in particular leading to an escalation in assaults and robbery with violence. Many older people think that the decline in face-to-face policing has exacerbated this problem.

I Incivilities: Most people are irritated rather than frightened by physical and social incivilities. However, they relate incivilities to a run-down of staffing of trains and stations at night, and this causes them fear.
Victimisation experiences: Very few respondents had direct experience of assault. In the case of those few teenage girls where they had experienced it, some still travelled at night, some did not. Boys who had experienced violent assault by ‘homies’, however, tended to avoid train travel at night completely. Others, who had encountered ‘homies’ but had talked their way out of trouble still travel at night, but cautiously. **Lower-level victimisation**, however, such as sexual harassment, physical intimidation, etc are the main cause of (especially young) people’s fear of train travel. This level of victimisation is part of a spectrum of fear, and should not be discounted when statistics suggesting the relative safety of train travel are offered.

Media messages about risks of train travel: Few people can remember any direct media reports. As the case of Vickie illustrates, however, we should be aware of the way in which media reports (both individual and generic) can feed into other circuits of discourse, as well as direct experience, to make people more fearful.

Parental concern for their children: This is very high indeed, especially on trains at night. Parents adopt a whole range of constraining, active, compensatory and avoidance strategies to try and deal with these fears.
LONG INTERVIEWS

As well as the focus groups, we conducted long one-to-one interviews with at least two people in each age category — teenagers, parents of teenagers, seniors — in both Sydney and the Blue Mountains. The transport study was a preliminary one: preferably there would have been eight to ten long interviews in each age category, rather than four.

Why long interviews in addition to conducting focus groups? Basically, while both share the advantage of the ‘fine-grained’ and ‘thick’ description that qualitative has over quantitative research, each methodology has different advantages. Focus groups are as close as one gets in research conditions to the small-scale discursive interaction that is common in our daily lives. Here we can see various positions put, debated and then negotiated under the pressure of contrary opinion. Of course, this is not the same as the ‘natural’ conversation about fear of crime that we occasionally overhear from train passengers while travelling between Sydney and the Blue Mountains. But clearly, that kind of ‘fly-on-the-wall’ access to discursive interaction is sporadic and uncertain, and is some way from the focussed and systematic recording of conversation required in a research project. On the other hand, a focus group, while having the latter advantage, may be argued to have the disadvantage of the researcher’s interference in the observation process. This concern can be addressed at various levels.

a) At one level the worry can be answered epistemologically: i.e. that only a thoroughgoing and outmoded empiricism would believe in the possibility of the fully objective and neutral observer revealing the ‘truth’ via ‘scientific’ observation. In our Audit Report we examined critiques of this empiricist position in the fear of crime field. We suggested our own position as empirical (but not empiricist), realist (in so far as underlying material conditions — as in the case of our Sydney group of refuge gay teenagers — are important in understanding fear of crime), and poststructuralist (in that human identity is fragmentary, with both ‘rationality’ and ‘emotion’ constituted through the discourses of various ‘collectives’ constructed by age, gender, etc.).

b) At a theoretical level, this worry about researcher influence needs to be addressed by our being reflexive about the focus group process itself: not only does the focus group situation intensify discussion of one topic but, by doing so, it may in fact cause some members of the group to worry about things that they did not think about before. However, this does not make the focus group discussion ‘artificial’ in the broader social context. All of us are often faced with ‘expert’ input (from various specialists who impinge on our lives, sometimes via the media) which may cause new worries and fears: the focus group is different only in its context, which needs therefore to be articulated and specified.
c) At a more practical and strategic level, this worry about focus group ‘influence’ by the researcher can be turned to an advantage. As the research process develops, the interviewer can begin to introduce discourse from other groups, either of the same age and area (in the case of our transport study), or from different ones. This has the advantage of increasing the range and influence of ‘respondent’ discourse within the interview itself; and also can tease out discussion, agreement, debate and negotiation which may not otherwise occur in the crowded 45 minutes or so of a focus group interview. In addition, it enables the researcher to gain an age- or area-specific ‘lay’ set of distinctions in topics which begin to reveal themselves as important. Given, for example, the major significance attached to ‘Homies’ by our early Sydney respondents, and their contrast by the Sydney teenage focus group with ‘Westies’, ‘Rednecks’, ‘Yuppies’, etc, these common sense sets of distinctions on which significant aspects of the ‘meaning’ of travel for many young people depend, could then be explored further, could be compared with other young people’s experience, could be fleshed out into clearer focus in terms of clothing styles and culture, and could be weighed up for their overall significance. Clearly, these advantages are not available to the ‘neutral’ fly-on-the-wall observer sitting listening on the train.

If focus groups hold the advantage of giving us access to the to-and-fro interaction and negotiation of differently situated respondents (as for example between girls and boys discussing their fears of train travel), long one-to-one interviews have a different advantage in allowing the interviewer to look for an often ‘deep structural’ emotional context which the respondent wouldn’t have the time or perhaps the wish to reveal in the hurly-burly of a focus group. It is here that the fragmentary constitution through discourse of both ‘rationality’ and ‘emotion’ can be looked at more closely, without having to worry about what this extended probing may do to the dynamics of a focus group discussion.

For example, it was only after over an hour of the long interview with the Sydney parent Claudine that we began to hear of the deeper and longer-term anxieties for her now 18 year-old daughter. It was her daughter’s current life-threatening relationship, after many years of difficulty (and even abuse) with her parents, which brought a deep fear to this confident French woman who had experienced the May ’68 barricades and the dangers of the Paris Metro. Similarly, it was not until nearly at the end of the long interview with Rose, the Sydney senior citizen, that her talk of listening to her now adult schizophrenic son pacing all night through her house put into a context of personal priorities and values her relaxed, almost throw-away comments about travelling alone by herself at night. Her much valued ‘independence’ as a woman who went out by herself (which was now being threatened as a result of her husband’s retirement) was carved out in the context of her emotional attachment to two children who were mentally disabled. Again with Stacey, the teenager from Sydney, it was not until nearly the end of the long interview that we heard of the attack on her girl friend some years before which clearly underpinned the ‘excessive’ fear Stacey had in so ‘rationally’ managing her train travel.
In the case of Mark, the GPS schoolboy from Chatswood, his profound emotional and physical response to the threat of the Homies was revealed (in a way it could not have been in a focus group) not in this case by way of a late 'deep-structural' comment, but rather via his continuous references to the Homies during almost every minute from beginning, through the middle, to the end of his long interview: a narrative ‘obsession’ which we needed then to explore with other teenagers. Was this a personal obsession. Or, as in Stacey's case, was what may have appeared as a personal and idiosyncratically 'over-the-top' fear of crime while travelling, in fact embedded in deep structures of power and cultural difference? In the case of Vickie, who sought us out to talk about the sexual harassment of her eleven year-old daughter, the long interview allowed us to hear the extended two/three year narrative logic of her warring emotions and rationalities. Here circulating discourses of fear, as well as a series of personal experiences, impinged on her socialisation of her daughters' travel (and sexual) understandings.
What outrages me is the power one can wield over another with a gun... I am outraged by a community that allows that. I am outraged by a National Rifle Association... I am the father of sons, and men die by their own hands more than any other way. There is something in the souls of men that is deeply crook ... I think about how do I as a father induce in them some hope about life, how can I offer them something valuable enough not to want to do that?... This is a big major journey for me in my self-knowledge: who am I and what can I pass on to my males at this time?... The fact that people think it is all right to own a gun outrages me, just outrages me. (Liam)

The thing I really would like to explain is about the brawl that happened on the train. There was just that feeling there that everybody wanted to fight, because there was... a young man sitting further up the carriage who literally jumped over the seats to get down to be part of it. And also the young guy who they came up to pick on. I was sitting there thinking “Why is he looking down there when they’re obviously trying to be as aggressive and belligerent as possible?” And finally he caught their eye and then he was wrapping the chain round his fist. It was just that was really scary, that there were all these people on the train who actually just wanted to get in and have a fight... That incident was quite traumatic because it involved the whole family, and we talked about it for days. (Vicki)

I have no fears about public transport, I have fears about him [her 18 year-old daughter’s bikie boyfriend]. He’s violent. He’s tried already to kill her with a knife. I have to go through all that... And I’m also scared to death that she’s going on his bike, so I’ve enough reasons to worry... It’s lucky that by character I’m not a nervous person, otherwise I’d have shot myself or had three nervous breakdowns. But there’s nothing I can do... I started to worry when she was age of 13 and began to be a difficult teenager and to run away. So I’ve been worried, worried, worried and I try to overcome that, otherwise life would be unbearable for my husband, my daughter, myself. There is a constant worry in the back of my mind obviously, and I guess I’ve aged in the last two years incredibly, but I overcome that by doing all kinds of things: a course at university or... by not thinking constantly that those things can happen. Otherwise you just don’t live — and you don’t take public transport because there are accidents or crimes happening. That’s not the way I want to live. (Claudine)
Parents of teenagers in the 1990s have to engage with a society of risk. Even the most privileged and best resourced (financially, intellectually or emotionally) find this an extraordinarily difficult and identity-threatening task, as the quotations above indicate. Claudine worries that it was her own strictness as a parent (she still controls her eight year-old daughter's TV viewing as far as she can) that drove her older daughter from home. Liam agonises that his own ignorance of drugs (his experimentation in the 1960s/1970s not having got past ‘the Bill Clinton level’) leaves him ‘freaked out’ rather than certain how to act when he finds that his teenage son has been attending the same dance parties where Anna Woods died. ‘People his age are particularly vulnerable to death’. Vickie agonises over the effect on her daughter of both the violent and the sexual incidents, whether she was right to pull her husband away (in front of her daughters) when he tried to mediate the brawl, and whether any action at all should have been taken in her daughter’s case of sexual harassment.

Liam and Claudine are privileged North Shore parents of teenagers and younger children. They are experienced and articulate. Liam is a successful professional actor (is friends with internationally recognised actors) and is now in his second marriage (with one teenage son by his first marriage and younger children by his second marriage). Claudine lives in some affluence in St Ives, is from Paris, participated on the barricades in May ‘68 (‘in love with the leader’) and brings to her view of Sydney transport her experience of the Metro which she regards as much more dangerous than Sydney when she knew it, and even more dangerous (because of Islamic fundamentalist bombers) nowadays.

Both Liam and Claudine are cosmopolitan, caring parents. Neither worries for themselves about travelling on public transport. Neither worries obsessively about their children travelling, though they are cautious: ‘I'm not consciously thinking there's a risk, but if I can pick up my daughter I will do it.’ (Claudine) But they do worry about very specific, localised issues in relation to their children travelling: both recently responded to pederasty stories circulating in relation to their ten and eight year-olds’ bus trips to school. Overall, though, both parents contextualise their worry about their children travelling within much broader ‘life value’ parameters of risk and concern.
Liam, for example, is ‘outraged’ at societies (like the US) which allow guns. Having wanted daughters so that he could bring them up to be tough and independent, he is faced with having two boys (plus a very little girl) and therefore having to think through what he can impart to them in a violent culture. He is pleased that his oldest son also loves theatre, and speaks to him (during his driving lesson!) via their shared liking for *Romeo and Juliet* about the irresponsible beauty of youth and the risks attached (when driving cars).

Claudine, while not frightened personally (she tends to leave her outside doors open at home until bedtime despite living in an affluent neighbourhood), does fear for her eighteen-year old daughter whom she sees as ‘a survivor’ but whose bikie partner has threatened her with a knife. Claudine worries about her daughter every day (she has been to the police about the knife incident), and forces herself to think of other things (university courses etc) in order to be able to operate effectively at all. Liam is pleased that his son is ‘focussed’, popular, good looking, without too many hangups, and he will encourage him to take time out after school, perhaps to go to theatre school in Paris. Both parents construct a significant part of their identity around the well-being of their children in a risk-filled social context (significantly both Liam and Claudine say that it is media stories about crime against children and teenagers, or about their own children’s environment that most upsets them). It is in this much broader social context that parents of teenagers think about their children’s use of public transport.

Neither of these parents normally gives a second thought to their own personal safety on public transport. Claudine’s stories of threat and harassment are entirely from the Metro in Paris, which has got much more dangerous since the time when she as a student used to get the ‘derniere Metro’ home. Liam, when probed by the interviewer, does recall that when he was playing at the Q Theatre in Penrith, the train ride back to Sydney could feel rather long and isolated, and that the empty platforms could feel a little scary. But his strongest memory was of the threats that as a male he posed; of not being able to chat with single women in his carriage because of the fears they might have of him; and also of gay actor friends who were frightened for their safety when travelling.

As Liam puts it, a world where his gay actor friends are bashed and where women are too fearful to speak with men in the train is a world where ‘horror comes in all sorts of forms and thankfully I have been protected.’ Both Liam and Claudine are aware of their good fortune (Claudine, too, speaks of having led a ‘protected life’). Yet each parent is deeply concerned with the kind of world their children are growing up into. Claudine says that she would be concerned for her daughter’s safety at night on the train only because everywhere (internationally speaking) night is becoming a more dangerous time; and Liam is outraged about guns and violence. Yet Claudine would still think it ‘fun’ herself to use the New York subway as ‘part of the culture’; and Liam is more concerned for women’s personal space in trains at night than for his own.
These are articulate middle-class people who have far greater fears for their children than for themselves: Claudine because she has a daughter whom she believes to be at risk; while Liam is surprised and relieved at how unproblematic his teenage son seems to be (drugs and cars are Liam's main concern as potential threats). Theirs is a world of risk: racist violence against Arabs on the Paris Metro, homophobic attacks on friends in Kings Cross, drugs, cars, guns, youth suicide, bikies. They like to think that teenage time is a time of beauty; but Claudine's daughter began running away from her affluent home at age 13 after parental sexual abuse, and Claudine's best hope now is that 'she is a survivor'; while Liam counts himself terribly lucky to have the 'focussed' teenage son he has, though he still 'freaks out' over drugs and cars and the fact that 'there are boogie men there that will encourage them to do that'. As he told his son during his driving lesson

you're sixteen and your passions are not yet controlled and that's the time when they oughtn't to be and that's what makes youth beautiful... But the Romeo in charge of a machine... that doesn't belong to him... can be quite dangerous... and... the punishment for that crime which oftentimes is death... seems an incredibly harsh punishment for pinching a car.

Angela, one of our Blue Mountains long-interviewees, has few of Claudine's or Liam's economic advantages. As a single parent she works part-time and has done so for years since she left her husband (after some years of domestic violence). Like Claudine, she has done university courses since then, but has been unable to find well-paid employment; and her own son's physical sickness in the interim years has also interfered with her ability to look for secure work.

Consequently, her life is penurious, and continues to be financially difficult as her son now finds himself still at home after leaving school without the HSC marks to get into the university course of his choosing. Angela's commitment to her son's well-being before her own is evident in every part of her fifteen years since leaving her husband. And like Liam and Claudine, her outrage is primarily reserved for people who are reported using their adult power to harm children, as in the pederasty accounts or the Dunblane shootings. Yet her experience has not left her obsessive about her son travelling on the train at night, which he does fairly regularly to Penrith and Sydney. She is cautious — advising him to use the 'Blue Light' compartment at night and staying in lighted areas, especially since an incident when he was attacked on the train by an Aboriginal who was drunk. But, she is just as concerned with media beat-ups of Aboriginal and other 'ethnic' crime incidents.
Sometimes I’ve felt there’s been media drama over nothing. I’m often irritated by ethnic labelling — a group of Pacific Islander youths you tend to associate with violence because of media reports, Asian youths you tend to associate with drugs around Cabramatta etc because of media reporting. That irritates me because we don’t read of a group of Caucasian youths in that respect. So the ethnic labelling I find irritating in the way that reports are made.

Like Claudine, her experience of other countries where public transport was less safe, makes her relaxed (but cautiously surveillant) about train travel in Australia; and she has often got off the train at night at Penrith, Blacktown and Sydney without fear or particular incident (one incident when teenagers stood over her and sat around her at Penrith station in order to frighten her, she dealt with by ‘not taking too seriously’ emotionally and by telling them to behave or she would tell the guard). Her experience of Glasgow in the 1950s has given her inbuilt strategies when travelling (staying in lighted areas, holding on to her handbag carefully, travelling in ‘Blue Light’ carriages) without making a fuss about them or feeling Stacey’s fears while implementing them. ‘I’m not really fearful of crime. I’m aware of the possibility — I always have been. I’m aware that there is a possibility and you have to take certain precautions, but I’m not really terribly frightened.’

That experience in Glasgow has, at the same time, given her a different slant on stereotyped media accounts of trouble at Redfern. She says now that she would no more ‘invade’ Aboriginal territory (which she respects) in Redfern than Glasgow Celtic or Rangers football ‘tribes’ would have dreamed of entering each other’s Catholic or Protestant territory.

Like Liam, she is especially concerned about the kind of world of violence her son is growing up into; and she values as role models for him the kind of television persona who ‘probe’ the surface of both media and gender media appearances.

I like any role models which encourage young people to probe and look beyond the superficial... The probing by Four Corners, even Media Watch and Stuart Littlemore... and that comedy group Good News Week I think can often be regarded as good role models, and also the send up of the tabloid television show in Frontline... any of those which are using humour to capture the interest especially of young people... and encouraging them to probe, to look behind the superficial... And there are comic females on the radio who encourage the girls to reject sexist society and female roles, encourage the girls to explore more areas... These are all good role models, much better than the Arnold Schwarzenegger sort of stuff.
Typically, her concern with the bashings in Katoomba station underpass which worried other Blue Mountains respondents was mainly to do with the fact that while the media sometimes make ‘drama over nothing’ in relation to ethnic labelling, in this case the local media seems not to have reported the incident at all in its mainline stories. Rather she learnt of the events from letters written into the local paper; and given her concern for ‘young people in the area’ in relation to the underpass, she feels that the local media is not probing this enough. Like Liam, too, Angela is particularly concerned about teenagers driving cars; and for that reason would like to see the public transport system improved (by increasing the numbers of personnel at night on stations and trains) so that more people can be encouraged to travel.

Although she does not feel that she is active enough, Angela does involve herself more than many other parents we interviewed.

I would like to see the general public reacting more to incidents rather than turning off. So I possibly do more — I intervened in the train when there was an Asian boy from one of the local schools suffering racist attacks, no-one else wanted to intervene; a car being attacked in the carpark with the occupant in it and the children crying, no-one wanted to intervene; and there was a boy came to us on the train in Rooty Hill and asked us if he could stay with us for protection... because he was being harassed by other boys. It worries me that there’s a tendency now in society for people to pretend they don’t see, pretend things aren’t happening and often it just needs another presence there. So in that case I tend to be fairly active, but I don’t do enough in a structured way — I don’t write letters to the editor, I’m not a member of Neighbourhood Watch and I certainly wouldn’t be part of any vigilante type group... if a situation occurs, then I react, but I’ve noticed lots of other people don’t — so I’m active in a reactive way but not in a structured way. I really despise the holy willy type attitude, “Oh Lord look after me and mine”, people who look after themselves, their family, their own cars and retreat to themselves, and that worries me a bit — I think it’s an attitude in society pregnant at the moment.

Like other parents in our long interviews then, Angela on the one hand indicated a (measured) concern for her teenager travelling on trains at night while displaying no real fear for herself, and on the other hand put these fears into the perspective of much larger concerns about the imbalance of power and violence in current ‘risk societies’. Typically, when interviewed, she and her son had just returned from a concert of trade union choirs in the Blue Mountains, including the Polish Solidarity Choir which she said was challenging (with its staged sexual preferences) the traditional macho working-class male image of some of the local trade union choirs. It was a leisure moment — reached by train — that combined her economic status with the kind of role models for her son which humorously offered gender alternatives. Clearly it was that set of values which were exercising her mind rather than any consideration of putative risks that she and her son may have been exposed to returning on the train at night.
Angela, like Liam, Claudine, Vickie and all the other parents is a multiple identity: neither simply ‘poor’, nor simply ‘female’, nor simply ‘immigrant’, nor simply ‘middle-aged, but a mix of these and other discursive ‘collectives’. Symptomatically, when she heard of her son being attacked on the train by an Aboriginal group her ‘emotions’ and ‘rationalities’ were complex: fear for her son, pleasure that the incident ended by an Aboriginal recognising him as a ‘brother’, concern as to what the media might do with the incident if reported, advice to her son about strategies for further night-time train travel, and so on. Angela is agentive in Bronwyn Davies’ sense (see Audit Report, ch. 6), which is

never autonomy in the sense of being an individual standing outside social structure and process... The model of the person being developed here is of an embodied speaker who at the same time constitutes and is constituted by the discursive practices of the collectives of which they are a member. Each person speaks from the positions made available from within those collectives through the recognised discourses used by that collective, and has desires made relevant by those discourses. (Davies, 1991: 50–1)

Using long interviews helps us to recognise the ‘multiple readings’ that people make of their lives.
We perhaps haven’t quite got to the age where we’re sort of elderly-frail.
(Rita, Wentworth Falls)

In the focus group discussion, we have described a tension among seniors between a psychological urge not to be written off as passive and ‘elderly’ on the one hand, and a recognition of a more frail physicality on the other. So on the one hand, the focus groups revealed some older people using quite militant language and determined to ‘reclaim’ the public space of train travel; but on the other hand we saw more seniors focussing on their increasing frailty as they constrained their travel. Again, of course, each older person has a multiple identity, and will position herself or himself across a spectrum between these pole positions of highly active retirement or highly constrained frailty.

So, as a ‘fragmented identity’, it can be very important for people who have retired to still feel active (behind either of these kinds of rhetoric). As one of the focus group seniors said, retirement is the time to travel because that is when you have the time to do so. Yet train travel (as compared with say plane travel) is often distinctly frowned upon by this age category.

To examine the strategies, emotions and psychologies of travel among retired folk, we conducted long interviews with a Blue Mountains husband and wife, Rita and Tom. Rita had worked in the city and used trains ‘all the time’; and this would include coming home on public transport late at night. Now she and Tom have reduced their train travel a lot, only using it to go to the city now and again for leisure activities and for going on holiday. Nevertheless, Rita has acquired a lifetime of train travelling confidence, and strategic skills with which to continue to claim this public space whenever she wants to.

Rita had worked at David Jones in the City, where she found that many of the female employees avoided travelling by train (but not bus) at night. In particular, this was because their local station, St James (prior to its restoration), was ‘dark and depressing’ and ‘eerie’ at night.

You felt if anything’s going to happen this is the place where it will happen — and it never did! I tended then to tuck my handbag in front of me.

This is indeed a station where things happened: Megan a Blue Mountains parent reported to us an incident when she was making a phone call there, and turned around to find the man in the next phone box masturbating at her. St James’ station’s long corridors and tunnels are the kind of railway architecture which makes seniors, parents, and some teenagers very nervous; but it is clear that Rita felt far more nervous for her ‘young and pretty’ daughter-in-law there than for herself.
Tom used to travel from Liverpool to the City twenty years ago, and believes that whatever the stations were like, the trains were much more old and decrepit then. ‘Things are better now, certainly here in the Mountains’. Rita, also, ‘never felt quite as happy travelling on the suburban as the Mountain lines... You would look along the [Mountains train] carriage and see people dozing, and I don’t think you’d see that on the suburban line.’

In many years of train travel, Rita had not encountered any aggression or unnerving incidents, beyond people being a bit rowdy. Consequently, Tom says, ‘Personally it’s not a thing that bothers me much, the fear of violence... It just never enters my mind.’ Even when travelling at night Rita did not feel particularly more nervous. Travelling regularly on the Mountains train, Rita got to know the same people day after day, and consequently a community feeling was established. The only place she felt nervous at night was getting off the train and walking through Lawson station subway; consequently Tom met her on the platform. As passengers began to get out in the higher Mountains she would feel slightly more anxious, but until Springwood at least she felt entirely comfortable.

Rita and Tom are not naive about potential risks of violence: they have a friend who was held up by a shotgun on the train and forced to go to a bank to take money out; two of their sons have been beaten up in City streets; and one of their son’s university friends told them about running home every day from Merrylands station to avoid gangs of youths. But this does not make them especially nervous while on public transport. Rita always took basic precautions at night, like sitting near the guard’s compartment and she always preferred carriages with lots of other women in them. The harassment Rita has encountered in all these years of travel has been virtually nil, apart from a drunk talking to her; while a son lost a favourite great coat which he had propped his feet up with while asleep. Like many other people, Rita and Tom think it is

unfortunate now that there isn’t staff on in quiet stations where people get off. There’s no place you could get into. When we used to travel years ago you could always get in somewhere, but now of course the station’s locked up early, so there’s just no-one you could turn to... That I think is one way it has gone backwards.
Like Angela, our other Blue Mountains interviewee who originally hails from Glasgow, Tom feels that this Scottish city experience has made him less anxious than some locals about public transport. Indeed, in their quite long memories of safe train travel, there is only one time that they recall being especially anxious. This, as with the parents we spoke to, was when their own sons were teenagers. Then they would drive to the city to pick them up from rock concerts and shows (even hanging around the Queen Victoria Building at one o’clock in the morning ‘with the cleaners’), so that their teenagers would not have to take the trains home late at night.

Their memories of this period when they had teenage children, their longer memories of their own safe travel, and their current feelings (psychologically and physically) as ‘young’ retirees, together constructed their own ‘fear of crime’ scenario.

For my husband and I travelling now I really don’t think we’re going to have any problem. But to generalise about travelling later at night, I’m not sure. I think I would feel uneasy if I would travel late at night. And I think if we were in the position of having a young daughter or a young son coming home at night I think I’d maybe be a bit more worried. We used to be worried enough over ten years ago. I think it must be unpleasant some nights for a young woman on her own. I’m sure there must be some who get harassed and find travelling very unpleasant. And we just don’t travel at these times — we pick our times when we travel... So I’m sure for some young people... it must be a worry... and not just young people, for older people too — we perhaps haven’t quite just got to the age when we’re elderly-frail. But on the Mountain trains when we travel, and when I travelled, I really didn’t see much sign of trouble at all.

Rita’s current response to train travel is composed of these different temporalities, memories and identities: the *longue durée* of her own train travel over many years; the more concentrated memory of greater anxiety when her children were teenagers; the prospect of becoming ‘elderly-frail’ in the future. At the moment, though, in her current moment of active retirement, she can control time and movement — ‘we pick our times when we travel’ — and consequently her long-term confidence on the trains continues.
Homies, I suppose, are the real worry because they sort of love that black American gangster culture — and robbing and stealing and assault — they look out for it. A lot of them go out at night, on a Friday or Saturday night, I think, to do that. You know that’s what they do, they go out just to do that...

It’s a sort of a cultural thing I suppose… Westies and Rednecks don’t go out and look to rob and assault someone. They’ll definitely enjoy a pub brawl or something… A lot of them’ll see their Friday or Saturday night as “go out, have a fight, get pissed and get a girl” — they love it. And I’ve encountered what you’d call Westies on public transport a bit, but I’ve never had any trouble with them. They’re just drunken, noisy yobs… Like the Rednecks, they’ll enjoy having a fight… But it’s a different culture. Rednecks — it’s a generalisation, but they’re often into footy and the whole culture that surrounds footy and love a barbie and whatnot. The Westies are into cars… and… Heavy Metal music, sort of seventies rock music or eighties rock music. And in appearance they all look pretty different: I mean the Homies with their big clothes and hats and what not; the Rednecks often wear... “K-Mart smart”, shirts with collars; and the Westies will often wear tight metallica shirts and flannelette shirts as well and long greasy hair… But these guys don’t travel around like the Homies do. (Paul, Blue Mountains teenager)

A recurrent and in some cases dominant motif in teenagers’ discussion of fear of crime was the Homies. In both the focus groups and the long interview with Mark, we hear the refrain: ‘I hate Homies’. But Mark could have been obsessive. To what extent are Homies a material daily reality for teenagers who travel on public transport? To find out more (in addition to our focus group discussions with teenagers), we conducted a long interview with an 18 year-old boy from very different material circumstances to Mark. Paul is unemployed, having left school; and is from a single parent family. He has travelled by himself (as well as in groups of other boys) for several years now on the train from Katoomba to Sydney, so he is an experienced public transport traveller. He is also brown skinned, the son of a Mauritian father, and is sensitive to racial prejudice. He is not white like Mark, not affluent like Mark, not from a GPS school like Mark, and he does not dress like Mark when he travels on the train. So what is his experience of the Home Boys?

Paul uses trains both day and night about three times per week. Sometimes he catches the train just a few stops to Blackheath for music lessons, and sometimes to Penrith or Sydney to ‘catch bands’ or see friends. He knows a number of young people who

just won’t travel when it’s dark — they’re scared of packs of people coming along and hassling them… They’ll just completely avoid public transport at night.
Although he continues to travel and thinks train travel is fairly safe for him, Paul sometimes is worried.

I actually would dodge places like Penrith station at night and keep away because that can get pretty hairy at night... Often at Penrith you’ll see packs of Homies walking around — you’ll see them in packs and it tends to be a really violent place... It’s just a place to avoid — I don’t feel safe walking around there.

Although he has not had any bad experiences there himself, a number of his friends have told him about trouble at Penrith. He feels that there are not enough railway staff at Penrith, St Marys, Mount Druitt and other Western Suburbs stations.

Homies are the real worry... The ones I’ve heard of in Penrith are just from around the Penrith area... What makes them Homies? [laughs] Well, they’re into all the American basketball stuff and they’re heavily into that American culture, and they’re often identified by big jackets, big basketball or baseball jackets and big shorts, big baggy clothes and basketball shoes and stuff...

It’s a reason I’d be a bit wary of travelling alone. But, then, if you’re in a group you tend to be a more obvious target as well, so numbers doesn’t mean much... If you have to get off at Penrith you just sort of do it as quickly as possible and get to where you want to go as fast as possible. You don’t go out of your way to dodge people, you just keep your head down... Homies, some will tend to look for people to rob and assault, some will just have fun beating someone up, they just enjoy it... On the trains it can be a matter of luck whether they get on your carriage or whether you get on a bad carriage...

A friend of mine was once at Paramatta and there were no seats, and he was standing in the little compartment where the doors are, and there were some Homie guys on the station and he happened to pull up in line with them, and these guys saw my friend and they got on and robbed him, like took his bag and some CDs and a Walkman or something and some money — he had a fairly substantial amount of money because he was shopping. And they pushed him around a little bit, you know “Give us your money” — they were pretty straightforward from what I heard... It all took place at the station — they got on, did everything and then got off.

Paul says Blue Mountains stations can be a worry too because of their isolation and lack of security or rail staff. ‘But you often find there's no-one really threatening on Mountain stations... You won’t find Homies at night when you are by yourself on Blackheath station or Wentworth Falls station.’
Sometimes Paul will prefer to stay at someone's house in Sydney or Penrith on a Friday or Saturday night to avoid coming back on public transport, because 'these guys will travel in packs just for the reason to earn the money' for their own night out. 'Keeping to myself basically' is his strategy if he sees a pack of Homies, and

if there's a group on the train I'll just try and ignore them. Sometimes if you move from one carriage to another that can aggravate them and they think they've got a target... if they're causing a row... and you get up and move where there's no station for a while... it's obvious, so that can make you more of a target.

Paul does not over-rate the problem of Homies. He says he would only see them two or three times out of every ten times travelling; and 'it doesn't happen to me often — maybe I'm lucky or else maybe I have some strategy that I don't know about — keep my head down.' Nevertheless, he has been subject to harassment from Homies a few times, in which case

I just tried to calm things down as much as possible. You never try to physically defend yourself and don’t try and be a smartarse at all. You just try and calm it down and say “sorry, I haven’t got a problem with you, let’s just move on”.

He has had three significant public transport problems in the last two or three years.

One was on Petersham station. I was with a couple of friends. We went to the station to catch the train, but there was track work... and then we saw a bus so we ran up the station, up the stairs and across the bridge and missed the bus... So we stood on top of the bridge for a while. But we’d happened to run past on the station a group of a few girls and two guys — and these guys were what you’d call Homies. They might have been Tongan, I'm not sure. But they seemed to think that we’d said something about their girlfriends, which we’d said nothing, we’d just run past trying to catch the bus... And it took us a while to calm them down and say “No look man, we didn’t, we were just trying to catch the bus.” But they just kept saying “No you said something”. I think they knew we didn’t say something, they were just trying to aggravate us and they were threatening us with “Yeah, we’ll roll you” and this and that... We calmed them down in the end and got away with it, but they were getting aggressive and they were threatening us with robbery and assault and all that.
Then there was one other time in Sydney... when we were catching a bus — this was probably one of the only times I caught a bus. But we were just at the bus stop and these guys again — there was a larger group and they were Homies but they were mixed, there was an Australian and there may have been an Italian. They seemed to think we said something again. Like that seems to be their big excuse, like “You said something about me”, or “You said something to me then, didn’t you?”, and they threatened to beat us up and steal our money and all that. Then we calmed them down again, but that was in broad daylight at a crowded bus-stop.

The only occasion when Paul was actually the victim of physical assault, however, was not at the hands of Homies.

About a couple of months ago, on the train actually the 6.30 from Blackheath to Katoomba, this is one of the only times I’ve been hassled in the Mountains. On the station there was three guys, they were Aboriginal fellas, and I knew one of them vaguely, and there was another guy who was much quieter and I don’t think he approved of the whole incident throughout. But there was another guy who was just too drunk and he obviously just wanted a fight. He was hassling the whole station, everyone on the station for cigarettes and what not and “Are you looking at me?” But his friend that I know, when that guy started hassling me was telling him to shut up — they were all drunk but he was saying “No, shut up, shut up”. I got on the train, but they got on my carriage and then sat next to me, and this guy was getting worse and worse... They had a big didgeridoo and the guy got that and was swinging it around a bit at me, and if I hadn’t of ducked I probably would’ve copped it in the head and unconscious. He was just carrying on and pushing and throwing punches and stuff, and I was trying to calm him down, but he was beyond it. And I was sort of dodging them and at the same time his friend was calmly telling him to shut up... In the end I did get punched in the face and had a cut lip and everything was a bit swollen. And he threatened to hit me with the flagon, their big glass bottle... But they were going further down the line, and this guy in the end said “Oh look man, it’s your stop”, this was just after Medlow Bath so I still had five minutes to go. He said “Your stop’s coming up, you’d better get off”, and that was my way out, so I got up and walked up the carriage and got off... There seemed to be a definite [racial] element like his friend was telling him to shut up “No, don’t hassle him, he’s a brother”, and he said “You’re... looking up to the white fellas again. We got to stick together and fight against the white fellas.” And he was asking me, “Do you fear us, do you fear us black fellas?” and I wasn’t too sure what to say. If I’d said “yes” it might aggravate him, so I sort of said “no” and then he says “Well, you bloody well should”, so it was a no-win situation. But there was definitely an aspect there of the Aboriginals fighting back against whites, and I think that’s stirred up because of the racism debate that’s going on [with Pauline Hanson].
Since this incident Paul has been more aware of risk on the trains, and like all of the teenagers we talked to, he argues for more uniformed security guards who should visibly walk up and down the train. None of this, though, has prevented him travelling: ‘If I have to catch a train anywhere I’ll do it.’ He feels that train travel is relatively safe for him (despite his various incidents) ‘but I know some people cop it an awful lot… I just seem to get away with it somehow.’

While Paul does not have the same daily experience as Mark with the Homies, and consequently is a bit more laid back about encountering them, his recent history and geography of train travel is significantly populated with Homies. Teenagers, unlike their parents or the seniors, can offer you a detailed anthropology of the various risk-threatening cultures, how and when you are likely to meet them, how you will recognise them, and what to do if you do meet them. Indeed, it is because of their definition of the particular Homie culture — the mix of ‘black American’ basketball/robbery/violence culture with travelling around on or at public transport venues — that teenagers highlight the Homies as the main problem. One of the teenagers’ major strategies in mastering their fear of crime is in being cultural anthropologists. While for Paul the physical hurt of being attacked on the train by Homies or by Aboriginals may be similar, and while his main strategy of trying to ‘calm things down as much as possible’ may be the same, the sub-cultural differences of meaning he ascribes to these different groups — the Aboriginals, the Rednecks, the Westies and the Homies — give him different expectations of their behaviour, different emotions in recounting his narratives about them, different identity positions in his memories of them. Some he will continue to keep his head down and avoid when he sees them (Homies), others he will continue to ‘know’ (he is reasonably close through family connections to a number of Aboriginal young people), others he will view with amusement (‘Rednecks love a barbie’) or vague contempt (‘drunken, noisy yobs,long greasy hair’). These, we found, were familiar discursive practices among teenagers as they constructed their perceptions and emotions relating to train travel out of the other ‘collectives’ of teenagers that they encountered.

We have focussed in this long interview chapter on a male teenager, because the extent of fear among boys of assault from Homies came as a surprise to us, and we wanted to draw attention to it. However, the much greater (and more pervasive) spectrum of anxiety and fear among teenage girls and young women when travelling on trains must not thereby be underestimated. We will turn back to this issue in the next section, drawing on both focus group and long interview material.
It has frequently been suggested that women's greater fear of crime is irrational given that crime statistics indicate males are at greater overall risk. The focus groups and long interviews in the train study enabled us to look in detail at women's fears in a specific location and to explore the hypothesis that an important contributor to women's fear is low level harassment. The underlying theme of potential threat is a dominating discourse of the young women who use the train frequently. The types of incident about which they talk vary considerably in seriousness. No women reported direct experience of assault leading to serious injury although reports of knife attacks, sexual assaults and murder of young women were salient in women's understanding of the risks of travel on public transport. Rita, a recently retired experienced traveller, had few concerns for her own safety but was disturbed by the idea of her daughter-in-law walking across a large station car park at night. It brought to mind stories of attacks on young women in similar situations. A couple of women recalled stories from the media about knife attacks on trains and in addition to those specific train-related occurrences was the more general unease generated by major acts of apparently unmotivated violence such as Port Arthur, Dunblane and Strathfield which create a sense of the irrational 'other' that may be lurking in any stranger.

Despite an absence of accounts of serious physical or sexual assault several incidents were reported that made a significant impact on those who recounted them: the girl who at age ten was nearly forced back into the toilet by a man waiting outside, the young woman who had a drunk put his arm around her on her trip to work, the man whose masturbation was seen as a threat both to the 11 year old sitting opposite him and to the older girl across the aisle who felt his actions were aimed at her. For some, experiences in other contexts or occurring to significant others were a backdrop for their own fear. One girl recounted an attempt by a boy to put a choke chain round her neck on the school bus, another talked of a boy who got off the bus at the same stop and harassed her. Although buses in general were seen as much safer than trains, these incidents formed a context in which to be fearful of males. In one long interview with a young Sydney woman who had clearly a high fear of crime including train travel, it was not until near the end of the interview that she revealed that at the age of thirteen her best friend was assaulted and brain damaged by a strange man. Her own fear and that of her mother who would contact her on the train by mobile phone needs to be understood in this context. A major significant incident can set a lifetime context for fear of crime. It was this young woman who was harassed by the drunk on her way to work. This was one of the few incidents described where another passenger intervened and the incident was reported to a railway official. In fact the guard took her to the protection of his van, a response which she found reassuring. Yet the incident was sufficient for her to change both her time and, for a period, her mode of travel (to bus).
Yet while some women and girls have experienced serious harassment, many have not, but are still apprehensive. What these women, particularly the adolescents describe is an experience of chronic low level harassment or in some cases behaviour that they themselves are not prepared to label as harassment but which makes them uncomfortable.

It appears that the breaking of even minor taboos in relation to physical proximity or conversation with strangers makes these young women uneasy because of the unlikely but ever present possibility that this is the 'weirdo' who will attempt to harm them, 'just a tiny bit of doubt that this person could hurt me'. The teenage boy's story of his sister being verbally abused simply because she wouldn't admire a man's socks illustrates how easily trivial interactions can escalate into intimidatory situations. Young women report frequent minor harassment: unwanted attempts at conversations and unwelcome proximity, even 'funny looks' from men. Quite often the men appear drunk or stoned or just weird. These accounts illustrate what Burt and Estep (1981) have described as a process during adolescence in which girls are socialised into a fear of sexual assault through the heightened experience of harassment that leads in turn to self imposed behavioural constraints. As one young women described it 'I read because a lot of people stare. I don't know whether it's meant to be intimidating but it gets on my nerves.' Although she reads, she also carefully monitors carriage activity through watching reflections in the window.

An important feature of these minor incidents is that they are not reported to authorities. (In many cases this is also true of more clearcut assaults. ‘She just wanted to get home’ said one girl of her sister after she had been robbed, knocked over and kicked by a group of teenagers on the train). Given the reaction of the station master to the sexual harassment of a young girl, this is not surprising. From her mother's viewpoint his message was 'This is part of the culture of travelling on trains'. State Rail appeared to have no record of the incident. Certainly the station master at the station where the man was removed from the train claimed to be unaware of what had occurred. Male intimidation becomes something that women and girls must learn to deal with and not expect assistance. Instead therefore, threats are dealt with by a level of constant vigilance: monitoring who is in the carriage, placing bags on the seat to avoid some unwanted person sitting next to them, choosing seats carefully, and moving from possible threats, avoiding eye contact and avoiding or limiting any unwelcome attempts at conversation, yet aiming to appear confident so that no-one suspects they are fearful. These young women's behaviour are clear illustrations of 'women feeling that they have to be constantly aware of their environment, watching and checking the behaviour of men they may encounter, trying to predict their motives and actions' (Kelly 1996, p. 192).
An important feature of the discourse of several of the young women is the tension between anxiety over safety and a desire not to be constrained and limited in their everyday practices. A desire for safety competes in their system of values with a desire for control and independence (just as their parents juggle their desire to protect with a desire not to over restrict and make their children fearful). Hence the attempt by one group of young women to overcome their fears by each going to sit in a separate carriage during one evening trip on the train. For two of the girls this task proved beyond them, they were too afraid. As one of the Blue Mountains' teenagers stated, she had to travel by train alone although she had had unpleasant experiences. Yet her situation did not seem very different from the other girls who chose never to travel alone at night; she also saw the risks but her balance of priorities was different, her rejection of constraints that much stronger.

What is it women are afraid of? The answer they gave was fear of attack 'being punched or stabbed' as well as fear of sexual assault. One contrasted the theft of a credit card that could be cancelled, with an attack on the person: ‘if they hit you or touch you, you're not going to be able to cancel that out.’ Although fear of sexual assault was clearly an underlying fear, these women were also afraid of violent attacks particularly with knives. In most cases women feel unable to resist an assault except by screaming, arguing that fighting back or carrying a weapon is likely to make the situation worse. The value of self defence courses was also questioned by one group who did not feel it was likely that they could execute carefully trained moves in a situation of stress. In acting assertively the stakes can be very high. The older woman who threatened her teenage tormentors with a knife knew the stakes were high ‘I thought I've gotta win it’. As other groups pointed out very strongly, weapons can also put you at risk.

One of the questions that is frequently asked about women's fear (Pain, 1997) is why women claim to be so fearful of public space when statistically they are more at risk in their own home. For many women home is the place where they feel safe (‘you always feel safest in your own home’) and it is important to recognise that women assess their risks at home not on the basis of statistics nor even on media portrayals but on their knowledge of the people there. As one focus group member, recognising the statistics, pointed out ironically to his wife she was at greatest risk when she bolted all the doors with him inside. While Pain (1997) found 30% of women had experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence (not harassment) during their life time, this still implies 70% have not. Of those assaulted a significant proportion had been victims of assault by known men, three times as many as by strangers but this does not mean that most women see themselves at a particular point in their life to be at risk. A quarter of Pain's sample did see themselves at risk in their home from someone they knew. The majority, however, do feel safe, some of these misguided so. The devastating nature of some assaults by intimates is their unexpected nature. Yet some of those who have experienced assault may feel they can avoid it in the future in dealing with people they know.
Pain (1997) documents among many women a sense of competence in the evaluation of potential risk. The problem with strangers is that one has not chosen the contact and has minimal information on which to make an assessment. Thus the danger on trains or other public space is the potential threat from the unknown 'others', a threat which seems much harder to calculate. One women who regularly caught the same late evening train home each Thursday night talked of how when the train was emptying of people she was reassured by the presence of a familiar face. She recognised as she talked that she knew nothing about the man, he could have been a murderer. When information is so limited even the familiarity of a regular traveller imparts a feeling of security. Even when women are living in fear at home, it does not mean they feel safe outside. A Queensland study (1994) demonstrated that women who had been victims of crimes within the home were also the most fearful outside. For the girl assaulted on the school bus by a fellow student the message was clear ‘if he can do that, what could a stranger do?’ It is likely that the majority of women at any point in time see the risks within their home as predictable, the fear engendered outside and particularly in locations such as trains, stations and bus stops is the forced proximity to unpredictable and potentially violent individuals or groups.

The train, especially, is a location in which one is shut up with disparate members of society without ready escape or authority surveillance. The presence of a driver on the bus shifts that balance in an important way. When the world outside the train is dark and the number of passengers few, the potential threat of the irrational or out of control increases.

The findings about harassment and fear suggest two important policy recommendations. As with respondents generally there is a vocal plea for greater visibility of authority figures on trains and stations. Secondly there is a need for those in these roles to have a greater insight into the perspective of women, especially young women, travellers. The contribution of an incident to making individuals fearful of crime can not be measured in terms of physical harm suffered. Any act of harassment carries messages of relative power and vulnerability.
We will conclude this chapter by responding to the eight questions (drawn from the ‘Fear of Crime’ brief) that we discussed in the Audit Report (particularly chapter 5). We will do this in the light of our overall Transport Study findings.

**QUESTION 1:** Which groups in the community are afraid of crime, what are they afraid of, and from whom?

**ANSWER 1:** All three of our age groups are afraid of crime on public transport, but especially trains rather than buses.

- The seniors have a more generalised fear than either the parents or the teenagers, and by and large they manage their fear by not going on public transport after dark (many of them don’t want to anyway, having lost the partners that they used to go out in the evenings with). Older people have a specific **geographical** fear as well as a night-time fear: of the area the train travels through between Sydney and Penrith. But overall, the seniors are not over-exercised by worrying about public transport, and in the day-time are fairly relaxed about it. Their main fears are of assault and robbery when travelling.

- The parents fear specifically for their teenage children rather than for themselves when travelling or out at night. However, these fears tend to be contextualised within issues much broader than public transport per se: so that the Sydney parents say that public transport at night is not the centre of the problem. These broader issues include the increase in societal violence generally, the greater risk associated with night-time in the city, worries about violent partners of teenage daughters, the role of the media, issues of drugs, homophobia and so on. At the same time, parents are influenced by media reports of ‘unsafe’ areas, such as Redfern or the Western Suburbs, without being anything like as specific as their teenagers about whom they are afraid of. Their main fears are of sexual assault or abuse of their daughters, and of violent assault of both sons and daughters.

- The teenagers are the most precise about which groups they are afraid of: above all for boys this is the Homies, whom they associate with a culture of robbery and violence **in and around the public transport system itself**. Girls are fearful of sexual assault and harassment, and while saying that other teenagers are the greatest threat, are also harassed by older men on trains. Vickie’s young daughter’s sexual harassment is more concentrated and alarming to her mother because of her age (an older teenager would not have felt impelled to sit opposite her abuser for so long), but the incident is indicative of the kinds of problems teenage girls are aware of (Megan’s experience in a phone box at St James station indicates that females of all ages are subject to this kind of sexual harassment). For girls and women in particular, the degree of unreported sexual harassment of this and more minor (but still personally disturbing) kinds like males staring at them on the train, and their legs being nudged by the legs of men on the next seat, is probably high.
QUESTION 2: Are all types of people equally afraid of transport crime?

ANSWER 2: Most people have some anxieties about travelling on the train at night, but (apart from older people) they still travel, though with caution at night (teenage girls tend to travel in groups at night, or not catch the train). Overall, people do not rate worries about public transport very high in the scale of things, though when they are travelling teenagers in particular (and especially girls) are very aware of the risks. Given that specific sub-cultures of violence and crime exist among teenagers themselves which focus on the rail system, teenagers are right to be afraid, and are most at risk.

QUESTION 3: In what context are they afraid of crime?

ANSWER 3: Seniors are most afraid of crime on public transport in trains, at night, in the Western Suburbs. Parents are most afraid for their children out and about at night generally. Teenagers are most afraid of specific teenage groups (Homies), at specific places (like Chatswood and Penrith stations). Women and teenage girls worry about men at night on trains at stations and surrounds.

QUESTION 4: What is the relationship between being fearful in general and fear of crime?

ANSWER 4: Most people are not over fearful of crime on public transport, but fear crime more generally, especially at night (they also argue that other people are generally fearful about trains at night). However, none of the people interviewed could be described as personally ‘being fearful in general’ except Stacey, who traced this to a very specific and serious bashing of her girlfriend when aged thirteen. She nowadays adopts quite precise and ‘rational’ strategies to master this general fear. Some older people, however, feel outraged at the ‘general fear’ about travelling at night among their age group.

QUESTION 5: What is the relationship between being fearful and becoming a victim on public transport?

ANSWER 5: This relationship is undoubtedly the greatest among teenagers. Many of our respondents have themselves been victimised, or have seen friends assaulted, or have heard of close friends being robbed and terrorised in various ways in and around the trains. Nevertheless, young people continue to use public transport, though with a range of strategies in place for managing risk at night.

QUESTION 6: What do we know about the range of concepts relevant to the fear of crime debate, in particular worry, outrage, risk evaluation and fear in general?
ANSWER 6: Worry is a general emotion held by all age groups in relation to train travel at night. Older people tend to deal with it by simply not travelling then; younger people do not worry too much unless faced by a particular incident (or place) at night, and then have various strategies which may (or may not) contain the risk; parents tend to deal with their worry by asking their teenagers to communicate with them by telephone at night (if they are late, have missed the bus, etc). Parents also manage their worry by being prepared to pick their teenagers up by car from the station or bus stop at all times of night.

Outrage is a more specific emotion, directed particularly by parents at others who use their power to harm children and young people. It is an emotion often directed at institutions (like the media) or groups of people (such as men in the case of ‘road rage’) who are deemed to be acting irresponsibly in relation to situations of risk. Some parents broaden this to the irresponsibility of entire social systems (e.g. American tolerance of guns, Australian tolerance of racism) or to systemic priorities as regards travel (e.g. privileging private cars over better public transport systems). While all age groups argue that the public transport system is failing its public in having far too few rail and security staff visible (particularly at night), no-one says they are outraged by this, recognising the economic costs involved. However, broader societal priorities may be seen as outrageous, as mentioned above. As regards older people, outrage tends to be mainly focussed on their economic circumstances if they are on the pension, and sometimes on ‘foreigners’ (who some older people see as the cause of the greater risk of crime they perceive today compared to a more golden past). Like parents, they too are outraged by crimes against children, even though they often feel angered (and physically threatened) by young people when they are travelling. Teenagers tend to be outraged according to their subcultural position and experience: Mark, the GPS teenager feels outraged by Homies who hang around doing nothing all day while he works hard at school, and then beat his friends up when they are enjoying their leisure afterwards; the Sydney group of gay teenagers from a refuge also ‘hate Homies’, but they reserve most of their outrage for police who interrogate them, tear up their tickets, and take them to the police station if they protect themselves with knives against attack.

Teenagers across these sub-cultures, however, share an outrage with institutions like the media which are ‘hypocritical’ in reporting of aspects of youth subcultures like drugs.

Risk evaluation is most precise among teenagers, who not only are clearly aware of their risks when travelling (particularly by train), but who is most likely to cause them risk, and where. They therefore have the clearest range of strategies for dealing with risk (rather than avoiding it by giving up travelling on trains, etc). So while teenagers do not have ‘fear in general’, they do evaluate and modify their behaviour in relation to specific risks and their contexts. Parents tend to the
opposite: worrying about risks in general (eg the increasingly violent, racist or drug-ridden society), while never quite knowing the precise risks their teenagers face — even though they are subject to a (carefully filtered and sometimes manipulated) plethora of teenage gossip about risk. Older people have a number of fears in general, many of which relate to their declining bodily (but also economic) circumstances. Overall they do not over-rate the risks to them on public transport, even though they tend to avoid what they regard as its more fearful times (trains at night), and worry through what they perceive its more fearful places (the Western Suburbs).

QUESTION 7: What crime prevention methods have been used to prevent, reduce or manage fear of crime?

ANSWER 7: We saw in the Audit Report (chapter 6) the kinds of actions taken by rail authorities to prevent, reduce and manage fear of crime. Of these, the ‘Blue Light’ carriages are seen as the most successful by all age groups, though plenty of people doubt whether the guard is either sufficiently trained or physically capable of protecting passengers against determined assault. Where harassment is minor, as in the case of Stacey’s drunk, the guard can be helpful (though even there he wasn’t able to stop the drunk’s behaviour against Stacey except by placing her in his own compartment). Where the assault is major, as in the case of one of our Sydney teenage girls being attacked in the ‘Blue Light’ carriage by two males, or in the major brawl described by Vickie, the guards seem helpless or invisible. For this reason all members of all age groups interviewed argue for significantly increased staffing (including far more uniformed security guards) on public transport. As many respondents said, better lighting is only useful if there are live personnel on the station or in the train to back it up.

QUESTION 8: What is known about the tools that measure fear of crime and the effectiveness of these tools in terms of reliability?

ANSWER 8: In this preliminary Transport Study we have used only qualitative methods at this stage. Some things can clearly be generalised from these findings: for example, the virtually unanimous view of all respondents that staffing on the railway needs to be increased at night. Other issues can be focussed more precisely by qualitative methods: such as the ‘anthropology’ of fear of crime among young people, especially in relation to the Homies. Other advantages of qualitative research of this kind include its ability to expose the multiple identities operating in relation to fear of crime both within individuals and within social and age categories. It can expose the difference (as well as similarities) between refuge kids and GPS boys in relation to the Homies, and their different rhetorics, priorities, values and behaviours in managing that relationship. It can expose the distinction made by some teenagers (the refuge/gay teenagers) but not others between security guards and police on the
trains. It is fine-grained enough to draw our attention to those older people who are determined to fight back in order to reclaim public space. It can explore the different economic, gender, ethnic and age identities of a single parent when dealing with her fears of crime against her son on public transport. It can focus on the power of teenage stories and gossip in sharpening or ameliorating their parents’ fear of crime on public transport. It can draw attention to very specific issues of time and space in relation to fear of crime. This is not to suggest that further research of a more generalised kind in the area of public transport should not be based on this preliminary research. Meanwhile, we will find more generalised findings in relation to fear of crime in general in a later chapter of this report.
Section 3: The Transport Industry

The Transport Study
STAFF FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW

The methodology for this study carried an implicit commitment to draw on all of the community’s knowledge of fear of crime on public transport. The idea of soliciting the views of transport staff was central to this commitment. While the staff can be regarded as experts in their field, they are also members of the travelling public who share the same concerns as many of the lay people who participated in the earlier focus groups and interviews. This dual expert/lay insight of public transport helps to elucidate many of the unanswered questions raised during the earlier focus groups and interviews. While many of those questions will remain unanswered, this study provides an opportunity to explore the extremely complicated nature of why travelling on public transport can be a source of fear to many people.

Specifically, the rationale for discussing aspects of fear of crime with transport staff was driven by three main issues:

- the notion that if the travelling public are fearful, these fears need to be placed in the context of organisational goals and constraints;
- if the travelling public are fearful, given that most people will only travel on public transport two or three times per day, then the transport staff who travel continually during their working shift may be more fearful; and
- to assess the impact on staff of media reports of crime on public transport, particularly regarding the veracity of media reporting.

This phase of the Transport Study comprised three parts, a focus group made up of media relations staff and representatives of management including Station Masters, an interview with a NightRide bus-driver and another focus group of operational City Rail staff including a guard, train driver and station hand. The final composition of the groups was left up to the Department of Transport, City Rail and Sydney Transit executives with whom the consultancy group had liaised. While the participants can be regarded as representative of Sydney’s public transport staff it would be dangerous to accept the information provided as being totally reliable without further inquiry. The views expressed by the participants are obviously valid to the extent that they represent the views of some people who work for public transport authorities, but in some cases facts and matters of policy may have been misinterpreted or misrepresented unintentionally by the participants. Therefore, because of the difficulty in verifying any statements regarding policy made during the course of the focus groups and interview in the time available, these results should be interpreted as the personal views of the participants who, none-the-less, were representing the Authorities concerned.
Fear of crime is a reality for the thousands of people who use public transport each day in Sydney. As revealed by participants in the earlier focus groups conducted with the public, in many cases this fear is founded in real incidents which have left the victims, and those in whom they confided, affected to varying degrees ranging from refusing to travel by public transport at all to refusing to allow the incident to affect their quality of life. In the case of staff, the time they spend on public transport must necessarily expose them to a significantly greater number of incidents likely to induce fear. From this perspective, this research identifies areas which may prompt further research while providing the context required for a fuller understanding of the views expressed in the focus groups and interviews conducted with members of the public.

Requirements for anonymity in this part of the study become problematic due to the small groups involved and the fact that management was involved in selecting the groups represented and to an extent, the individuals concerned, therefore the only identifiers used will be fg1 for focus group 1 (media relations and management), fg2 for focus group 2 (operational staff) and i1 for the interview with the Nightride bus driver.
A recurring theme in the earlier focus groups was the perception that staff reductions had taken place in public transport. This matter was raised in both these focus groups with an interesting result. The views expressed in fg1 regarding staffing issues contrast markedly with those expressed in fg2. Managers tend to view staff levels in terms of efficiency and costs (resources) while passengers are sources of revenue to be coaxed onto public transport. Operational staff, understandably, have a closer and more personal relationship with their colleagues and supervisors and to a certain extent with their passengers, whom they genuinely care about. For example, the move to security staff to patrol trains was based on the exorbitant costs of getting Transit Police (who previously performed these duties and to some extent still do), to provide the desired level of service. While the security staff are generally endorsed, the operational staff voiced concerns about aspects of the way they carried out their duties and generally agreed that more Transit Police Officers were needed and would have been a better option from their position. Transit police were recognised by both groups as ‘railway people’ while security guards are outsiders. The additional powers held by police and their dispute resolution skills are valued by the guards and drivers who are exposed to real threats. Security guards are viewed as being impotent to a large degree, doing a good job until someone actually challenges their authority.

While management emphasise installation of Help Points, video telephones and other technology at stations, the operational staff agree with the travelling public and see the genuine need for staff to be available. Guards and station staff are able to act before trouble starts not necessarily to intervene but to call for help or to take a potential victim into their compartment or office, as one of the earlier focus group members remarked had happened to her. The Nightride bus driver spoke of carrying concerned passengers beyond their fare zone to a safer stop on request and City Rail operational staff spoke of providing a haven to worried passengers until their train arrived or during the journey if necessary. Help points and other measures like Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) are not viewed as preventive measures by staff at the ‘coalface’, but sources of evidence after the incident (fg2). There was considerable discussion in both focus groups about the utility of CCTV and its limitations, particular emphasis was placed on the practice of CCTVs being fed to video cassette recorders rather than a monitored receiver. These points appear to be valid criticisms. In fact, common sense dictates that a help point is of minimal use if the victim is the only person apart from the attackers present and is busy defending him or herself. As these issues were explored with fg2, it became apparent that there may be considerable common
ground with fg2 behind the organisational rhetoric. This in no way devalues the views of fg1, it simply illustrates the complexity of the issues involved when one explores the public/private divide. Despite their access to statistics which show how safe public transport is and their deserved pride in the improvements being made, these people used the same standards as other members of the public when it came to making decisions about members of their family.

Further aspects of help points raised by operational staff were a lack of maintenance making them inoperable and the frequency of false alarms when they do work: several instances of the intercom systems not working, including one in which a man had a heart attack and died on a train, were voiced. The train communication systems in general were criticised as being a serious problem. At best, obtaining police assistance was a two step process, contrary to the public’s perception; at worst, staff were unable to contact any help at all.

When the subject of toilet closures was raised as a cause of complaints from older travellers, both focus groups were quick to point out the dangers toilets present to the travelling public, including needle-stick injuries and providing a screen for other criminal activities — the recent spate of toilet bombings featured prominently. One still felt that the real problem for management was the expense of keeping the toilets clean while operational staff sympathised more with the public because of their personal need to use them, but stressed the dangers associated with toilets. Cabramatta station was used by fg2 to illustrate the problem. While open, these toilets were used by addicts to inject their drugs. One person mentioned addicts shooting up on the open railway platform. Another indicated that water bubblers also had to be disconnected to eliminate the water addicts needed to dissolve their heroin before injecting it.

THE MEDIA

The media relations team see their main role as keeping the reports of crime on public transport to a minimum because, ‘if things don't get reported, people don't feel afraid and the media don’t beat up on it’ (fg1). In this regard the police are identified as a problem since ‘they tend to like to publicise the fact that they intervened and saved someone’ (fg1). It appears that most of the information on public transport related crime comes from the police who:

- have a 5 o'clock briefing every morning where they go over every single incident and, on a quiet news day, if someone's been bashed near the station, it automatically becomes a railway associated crime. It doesn't even matter if it didn't happen on our property. It might have been closer to the post office than it was to the railway station but they'll say “near a railway station”... (fg1)
It's the same as if you hear of “man stabbed on train coming home late at night”... [given out] by the police. It's two blokes that've been drinking at the pub and they're having a blue about 20 bucks and gotten stuck into each other. He's not a total stranger... but in the paper the way say it, “stranger stabbed on train”. People say “hey I'm not going on that train”... (fg1)

A bad rail security story is bound to get a run, will always get a run, particularly in the Telegraph Mirror, and probably on television, if they can get pictures. A good rail story is really struggling to get into the local papers. We've upgraded the lights at Cabramatta... and that still hasn't been publicised. (fg1)

These comments go a long way to explaining the concerns which public transport staff have about the media. Many incidents are wrongly reported as involving public transport, many incidents are 'beaten up' to make them more newsworthy (often to the detriment of the image of public transport) and the good work being done doesn't get any coverage. In one case mentioned during the first focus group, an inaccurate report received front page coverage in a newspaper while the clarification was placed on page eight. The group view was that even if the clarification was put on the front page, it would have been too late to repair the damage done by the earlier report.

Overall, the impression gained from this group was that it was the media's tendency to sensationalise any incident in which public transport was mentioned as a 'public transport story', regardless of how remote the connection is, that affects their attitude. One comment referred to journalists preferring to get the minutiae from a junior police officer who would happily provide the gory details of an incident 'he was beaten about the head with a brick [near the railway station]', rather than use the accurate information from the City Rail media staff who could emphasise that the incident had not occurred at the station.

While operational staff don't think that the media stories are beaten up to the same extent as their managers, they are concerned about inaccurate coverage including incidents being related back to a railway station, train or bus, although the link with public transport is often tenuous. The most tragic incident of inaccurate reporting or a beat up came from the interview with the Nightride bus driver who told of a colleague who dropped a group of schoolchildren off at a stop and drove around a corner

Eric [a young schoolboy] got to his stop and along with others he got off. The bus went around the corner and then Eric crossed the road and was hit and that was put down in all the newspapers as a bus accident. It really can't be classed as that... the driver has not worked virtually since... the media crucified him saying it was a bus accident. Well it wasn't t. (i1)
The media emphasis on connecting stories to public transport seems to be linked to the public’s construction of train stations and similar locations as extending beyond their physical boundaries. Understandably, City Rail management focus their crime prevention and fear reduction efforts on railway stations and the trains themselves, effectively disregarding incidents which occur outside of their physical property boundaries. In contrast, the general feeling among operational staff seemed to be that the media were only reporting news, though often these reports were blown up to put a negative slant on public transport. This conflicts to some degree with the comments of managers and media liaison staff who believe that the incidence of crime on public transport is exaggerated in the media by journalists and editors, who in turn, did not give credit for the positive initiatives being implemented, especially as the number of incidents was relatively low considering the number of passengers carried (800,000 plus passenger journeys per day for City Rail alone).

The official media policy of preferring that public transport related incidents ‘not ... be reported’ has some merit when one considers the increased status such coverage gives them (as pointed out in the earlier focus groups) and the inaccurate coverage these incidents seems to get. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that operational staff gain the knowledge on which their fear is based from their own experience and word of mouth — not the media. It also seems to be the case that operational staff have a higher level of fear than the public; even the management group voiced concerns about their family using public transport despite their claims of the system being safe. It is very much a case of

*the perception... [being] much more the case than the actuality... people are afraid of what might happen not what has happened (fg1)*

and for staff, often this perception is ignored until family and friends travel by train.
Trains, buses and ferries, as modes of public transport share a number of similarities though staff are hesitant about making comparisons. Staff from all areas drew attention to the differences between commuters and shoppers and the Thursday, Friday and Saturday night passengers. All are targets for robbery to a greater or lesser extent. While bus drivers and railway station staff are robbery targets, train staff rarely collect money for fares. This is not to say that train guards and drivers are not robbed at all, just that their risk is lower because they don't carry large sums of cash.

The nature of public transport is such that staff have very little control over exactly who uses the service provided. This causes concern in some quarters, train staff spoke of being criticised for not vetting their passengers, while bus drivers also have to deal with their obligation to carry any passenger with a valid ticket while protecting the interests of other passengers. The main concerns expressed in this area related to homeless people, who, during Winter, can treat trains and buses as mobile homes, and rowdy disruptive people, who cause annoyance to other passengers. Bus drivers have an advantage in this area because of their control over who enters or leaves the bus which provides them with some informal supervision over passengers before the journey commences. In the event of serious disruptions the Nightride bus driver interviewed said that he drove the bus to the nearest police station where police could come direct to the disturbance rather than to stop and contact them to travel to the bus. The driver had used this same strategy when he worked as a Taxi driver. He saw his advantage in denying the troublemaker the control of the vehicle (the bus driver revealed that he had been stabbed while working as a taxi driver so he speaks with the voice of experience). Obviously, this strategy is not available to train staff.

Passengers who are concerned about their safety on trains are urged to sit near the Guard's compartment which is marked by a blue light. On buses the equivalent area is the seating in front of the rear door, nearest the driver, while 'the people at the back of the bus are the same as the high school kids: they're the ones that are the most rowdy' (i). This provides a clear indication that those who feel vulnerable get real comfort from being close to or within sight of an authority figure. Accordingly, those who locate themselves away from authority figures are to be feared by other travellers as possible troubleshooters or attackers.
The parents in the earlier focus groups who preferred for their children to travel by bus at night are displaying an inherent knowledge of the bus driver’s ability to maintain a fairly constant vigil over his or her passengers. On trains, the door to the driver or guards compartment combined with the dual level layout of the passenger compartment makes it difficult to monitor train passengers to the same level. As the Nightride bus driver who was interviewed explained when asked about personal strategies to reduce trouble,

one of the things I always do myself and I try to always tell other people to do it is that once you’ve got people on the bus there, you watch what’s going on, just for 30 seconds before you take off… generally the people who are travelling on their own, the people who are a little bit older, will sit in between the back door and the front door (i1).

This process allows the driver to make a quick assessment about the likelihood of trouble or potential trouble on the bus. This type of attention to passengers gives bus travel a unique advantage over trains although the Nightsafe program (a program which allows train guards to close off carriages at night depending on numbers of passengers) approaches it. The reference to this practice of surveying other passengers in the earlier focus groups, either directly, as the man who sat near the guard’s compartment to get a good view of the other passengers, or indirectly, like the woman who looks at the reflection of the carriage in a window, demonstrates the confidence gained from ‘knowing’ with whom one is travelling.

The nightride buses have one more unique feature — community identification. The Nightride contract is awarded to various private bus companies to fill the gap between the last train or regular bus at night and the first train or regular bus in the morning. The people who use this service have often been customers of the company concerned since school. Further, the people who use the service to get to and from work form a bond which, collectively, provides support for the driver even to the point of occasionally policing fellow travellers (i1).

WHO ’ S AFRAID OF WHOM

... in the 11 months we have been running nightride in Sydney, we’ve had one driver badly beaten up in Bathurst Street whilst he was sitting there on a meal break. Someone wanted the till and Don was in the road of the till... we have had a bullet through the side of a bus... various people pull knives and be abusive... fights between people on the bus (i1).

The actual level of crime out there is compared to the number of people that are travelling and in the general community is quite small ... at certain times of the day or night your risks are much higher... so the perception is much more the case than the actuality... people are afraid of what might happen rather than what has happened... most people are perfectly safe travelling on trains (fg1)
My daughter goes to Sydney Uni’, right, and I’m not too keen on her going through Redfern at the best of times… even in the day… I wouldn’t walk through there even now. I wouldn’t even go down near the TNT building at lunchtime, sit on there and eat my lunch. (fg1)

Teenagers to me, do tend because they fear for their safety too, they tend to be in groups. It’s rare that you get a teenager on his own or her own you often get them in groups of three four five six (i1).

We mainly at night time lock the doors now… coming in you get spat on and you get stuff thrown at you (fg2)

The dynamics of fear of crime on public transport are complicated for passengers and they are extremely complicated for staff. Staff fear the same things as their passengers but they can also become targets because of their work and uniforms. Bus drivers are robbed for their tills — they are at their most vulnerable while stopped and having meal breaks. Railway station staff have been attacked as they lock stations in an attempt, often successful, to rob the day’s takings. The fear induced by these factors must make the working life of these people very stressful.

Train guards, and to some extent drivers, are subjected to the stress of being spat on or having objects thrown at them as their trains pull out of stations, the additional pressure of complaints from the travelling public as well as the occasional need to assist them when they become victims of crime or are otherwise distressed. Bus drivers also suffer from job-related stress like the driver who dropped off a young lad, who he was a little uncomfortable about, at East Gordon at four o’clock in the morning to find that he had been murdered shortly afterwards.

Even when a troublemaker is removed from transport the staff are very conscious of the fact that they then become targets for any friends who are allowed to remain behind. It is easy to see why this may lead some staff to ignore an incident rather than put a single individual off the conveyance. This may also lead some to hesitate about calling the police. The staff know that tomorrow they are going to be back on the train, a target once more.

While some people can and do refuse to travel by public transport, staff have to return to work the next shift and learn to deal with their fears. Because of their personal circumstances many commuters are in this same bind. This constant stress must take its toll on an individual's health. The Nightride bus driver explained this situation as ‘if you’re on the edge and you’re worried about it, you shouldn’t be doing it’. All groups mentioned staff who were off work for extended periods due to incidents during their work shifts. While the exact reasons for these absences may not specifically relate to victimisation, the overall work-related stress level of an individual must be a contributing factor.
Regardless of the views put forward about fear of crime on public transport generally, those staff who were parents expressed concern about their own family using trains as transport. Often these comments related to specific hours, stations or train lines. Night time was a common concern but daylight hours also were considered risky, especially for young people, older people and women. The comments in this area seemed to support the views put forward in the earlier focus groups. This was a significant area of common ground between all groups. Notably the Nightride bus driver said that he allowed his 17 year old son who worked late at a Pizza place in George Street in the City to use buses for transport late at night without any reservations.

**Young People and ‘Others’**

There was a general acknowledgment by all participants that teenagers were a problem group on public transport. They tended to be the source of a large amount of the trouble encountered by travellers, including trouble encountered by other teenagers. Quite often staff referred to ‘gangs’ of young people without specifically explaining what the difference was between a gang and a group of young people travelling together. Interestingly when the concerns of private school children were raised for comment, the second focus group was quick to identify them as a problem in their own right: possessing ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ like characteristics. This view was also backed up to a certain extent by the Nightride bus driver.

Just as often, ‘problem people’ were identified as being ‘others’ whether they were homeless, young, non-English-speaking background or just different: ‘the nutters we carry’ was one term used (fg1). The first focus group explicitly identified ‘a 16 stone Tongan’ or two 16 stone Tongans as the symbol of fear to older travellers although later it was established that a 16 stone Tongan travelling with his wife and children would not be feared. This identification of lone individuals or groups of males as a threat supports the views expressed in the earlier focus groups.

When one of the facilitators gave an account of the sexual harassment of a young girl while on a school excursion from the Blue Mountains to fg1, one participant quickly pointed out that the incident was ‘not uncommon... not common but not uncommon’ without being contradicted and a few other participants murmured agreement. It is disappointing to think that such an unsavoury incident is almost regarded as routine with the added irony that the perpetrator did not fit any easily identifiable stereotype. This identifies a further problem: the risks can not be linked with any set description. Often people are on the look out for an ‘other’ only to find that the person to be feared is ‘one of us’ though perpetrators did seem to be strangers.
Walklate's (1997) articulation of ‘being local’ as a defence against victimisation is relevant to this construction of risk on public transport. A parent in fg1 noted that he had no real concerns about travelling with his children on the train because they weren’t identifiable with a target group. The participants in earlier focus groups mentioned people’s concerns when they leave their local area. In Walklate’s terms being different or unknown can make one a target so a sensible defence is looking like everyone else. As the example of a young woman returning from a job interview from the earlier focus groups illustrates, looking wealthy in a poor area can make you a target. Just being an ‘other’ makes one a target: the marginalised pick on the mainstream and the mainstream pick on the marginalised. Transport staff by virtue of their uniforms and jobs are ‘others’.

The review of strategies and programs conducted earlier makes a reference to marginalised groups and their fear of authority figures. Fear of victimisation by authority is supported by a staff member who criticised some security staff on trains as being overly aggressive and creating ‘problems’ rather than solving them (fg2). This tangent of fear deserves further examination.

ASSERTIVENESS

A common implicit comment in the staff discussions involved the need for passengers to accept some responsibility for their own safety by, for instance, asking someone to be quiet rather than waiting for a guard to do it. A positive example provided was based on the move to a non-smoking environment on public transport. This change was almost entirely policed by the passengers themselves. However, as one person pointed out, a smoker isn’t going to stab you, while another pointed out that the ‘16 stone Tongan’ probably gets to smoke. The Nightride bus driver mentioned an incident in which a few of his passengers did act to remove a person from the bus who urinated at the back. They simply called the police on their mobiles and told the person what they were doing. He bolted at the next stop. Clearly, empowering passengers in appropriate circumstances could solve many problems.
COMMUNICATION

One of the staff’s key responses to a report of an incident is to contact help. Unfortunately, this presents distinct problems for train staff. Often the communication system on trains is inoperative and in many cases staff are simply unable to make contact with police or anyone else. One staff member in fg1 told of borrowing a passenger’s mobile phone after three trains were unable to call an ambulance for an unconscious woman who had fallen down a station’s steps. The reaction of the group indicated that this was a frequent problem. Operational staff gave this as one reason for guards hesitating to become involved in helping passengers. They have to make a choice between helping directly by intervening or indirectly by getting help. They are alone and, therefore, often unable to do both. Guards believe that once they leave their compartment they lose any chance of getting help to the scene. It appears that a fully functional and efficient communication system would go a long way to alleviating staff fears of victimisation.

MOVING AROUND THE TRAIN:
MANAGEMENT AND GUARDS

In the earlier focus groups, some people mentioned that they didn’t see the train guards much. When this was put to fg1, the group seemed to agree that part of a guard’s duties involved moving around the train and alighting at stations to ensure that doors were clear before they were shut. They also pointed out that some guards, usually the younger ones, did not always get off the train or circulate through the carriages. Laziness and the need to keep to schedule are a couple of the possible reasons for this put forward in fg1 but the second focus group gave the impression that fear could play a substantial role in a guard’s decision to remain in their compartment. Further, there was also an undercurrent of tacit support for this modification of behaviour as long as the passengers safety when getting on or off the train wasn’t compromised.

The overall thrust of this part of the discussions is to question whether the senior policy-makers are aware of the very real concerns held by staff working on the trains. When the suggestion was put to fg2 that additional staff may solve this problem, it was established that in fact a minimum of two additional staff would be needed. This was because one guard by themselves couldn't deal with a disturbance (police always travel in pairs) and one person would need to stay in the compartment to call for external assistance.
PATRONAGE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

An astute parent in the earlier focus groups noted that money is being spent on freeways to the detriment of the public transport system. Anecdotal evidence from fg2 would seem to support this view. It appears that Sydney’s public transport is only recently recovering from a slump which a couple of staff believe occurred because freeways made travel to the city easier and quicker by car than public transport. They cite the fact that there were more City Rail passenger journeys 10 years ago than today. This introduces an interesting topic for future research on public transport usage.

The merit in this proposition of enticing more people into public transport is evidence which tends to show that incidents are less likely to occur in well populated places. Of course over-crowding can mask incidents just as effectively.
Informal Systems for Dealing with Trouble

Any bureaucratic system has a habit of creating mountains of paperwork. Indeed, one of the reasons put forward in fg1 for preferring security staff to police was that when the police make an arrest they disappear for hours doing the paperwork. Security guards just turn the person over to the police and get back on a train. However, when an incident is reported to a staff member, public transport seems to share this paperwork problem leading to some staff reverting to past inappropriate strategies to deal with trouble: ‘the path of least resistance’ (fg1). These strategies often involve removing the troublesome individual from the train without making a formal report. One staff member also mentioned not being in the compartment when someone knocks as being another strategy. Management is aware of these problems and is trying to address them. On the other hand, operational staff mentioned people knocking on the wrong door and faulty equipment as being part of the problem.

One disturbing aspect raised in this study is the occasional practice of guards closing their doors early when trains leave the station to avoid being spat on or hit by thrown objects (fg1 & fg2). This should be taken seriously because of the safety implications, particularly if doors are operated ‘blind’. Of course any solution should cater for the need to protect the guards. The fg1 group felt that the pressure to keep to schedule may also be a factor leading to doors being closed early.

Agency / Structure

In the earlier focus groups a mention was made of pensioners complaining about an apparently inequitable fare system. The Nightride bus driver noted a similar incident involving a group of young people (all friends). The four university students in the group could travel for two dollars while their two working friends had to pay four dollars forty. Apparently the aggression in this case was directed to the driver. It seems budgetary concerns and apparent fare inequities are not limited to older people but anyone on a low or fixed income.
In general transport staff sympathise with the travelling public. They share their passenger's concerns, particularly when their own family members are involved. On an operational level, one gets the impression that the levels of fear held by train staff exceed those held by the travelling public and that this situation is made much worse by a poor communication system and a move towards technology in order to redeploy staff. These concerns seem real given that earlier focus groups have voiced similar comments. Another important aspect of this is that rail staff's fear is founded in the Left Realist realm of 'lived experience' not media hype.

Many of the initiatives implemented by public transport authorities to deal with the concerns and needs of passengers are extremely positive. Nightsafe, Safe Stations and the installations of Help Points and CCTV are all viewed positively by staff. One criticism which was raised bears noting: Safe Stations implies that the other stations are unsafe. One person mentioned the use of Premium Stations in Victoria which avoids the negative implication. Mention was also made that in many cases the Safe Station rating was based on station access rather than safety (fg1) further confusing the issue since this strategy is reportedly not being widely disseminated in any case.

While management views Help Points as being efficient, one must accept that a worried passenger will not use a Help Point until after they are attacked, while a helpful guard or station hand providing them with a refuge could prevent the incident entirely. One is reminded of the truism that statistics showing a low incidence of crime are fine until you or a member of your family become the victim.

With the knowledge that this small section is part of a much larger study of fear of crime in general, it is probably fitting to close this section with an observation from fg1 that

*the trains only reflect the wider society. If there’s a difficulty in an area then that is reflected in the station...*
SECTION 1: LONG INTERVIEWS

THE MEDIA STUDY

RESEARCH TEAM

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In our Audit Report, we surveyed the literature covering media and ‘fear of crime’, and emphasised in particular the value of two approaches. One was Ian Taylor’s work which uses ethnographic research to situate media analysis amidst a variety of ‘circuits of communication’ (local gossip, children’s tales brought home after school, etc). The other was Richard Sparks’ work which draws attention to the ways in which underlying preoccupations of fear, danger, reassurance and retribution are encoded in crime dramas (as well as the public networks of communication circulating around them).

Sparks’ emphasis on the encoding of texts (via narrative, genre, etc.) and Taylor’s emphasis on ethnographic understandings of the received meanings of media (and other) texts replicate, roughly speaking, what is now being called ‘first generation’ and ‘second generation’ audience analysis within media and cultural studies. Alasuutari, for example, argues in a forthcoming book for an emergent trend of ‘third generation’ reception studies. This will go beyond the encoding/decoding model of Stuart Hall et al (first generation) which focused primarily on specific media texts, and the ethnographic approach of David Morley et al (second generation) which focused on the ‘active audience’, usually at the expense of analysing encoded textual meanings.

*The third generation resumes an interest in the programmes and programming, but not as texts studied in isolation from their usage as an element of everyday life.* (Alasuutari forthcoming)

Neither Taylor nor Sparks would disagree with this ‘third generation’ ambition in media studies. Indeed, Sparks specifically calls for criminological work that is ‘attentive to the ways in which images of crime, law enforcement and punishment are caught up in the fine grain of cultural and personal experience’ (our italics, Sparks, 1992: 5). As we said in the Audit Report, however, Sparks does not actually do this, concentrating on the more formal/ideological analysis of crime drama texts.

As we also said in the Audit Report, to do adequately this kind of ‘third generation’ work in the fear of crime field would require full-scale ethnographic research, together with detailed textual analysis of the media forms thrown up as salient by that research — neither of which is possible within the time-frame of this consultancy. We hoped nevertheless to push Sparks’ conceptual focus a little further empirically into the ‘everyday’, by conducting focus groups and long interviews around the kinds of issues of narrative, genre, character, scheduling, routine, and iconography of place and time that Sparks sees as important.
In particular, we wanted to extend Sparks’ crucial and valuable divergence from both the dominant paradigms in ‘fear of crime’ studies of the media — Cultivation Analysis and Left Realism — by way of his emphasis on the pleasures (in addition to the rationalities) involved in watching crime drama. How can we, Sparks asks, get past the standard criminological accounts of fear of crime which rely (at least implicitly) on a notional rational agent, and thus give very little insight into the nature of fear of crime as a dimension of experience?

If I then go on to argue that non-rational factors have a part to play in explaining people’s television viewing, their experience of fear and anxiety and, moreover, the connection between the two, I do not do so from a lofty and dispassionate height but rather in the belief that we are all swayed by emotions and capable of mistaken impressions and that lucidity has to be struggled for (1992: 2).

In his work, the (valued) emotional experience of audiences to media representations of crime thus becomes a major focus. In doing this, Sparks rejects the conventional ‘disparity’ thesis between ‘real crime’ and ‘fear of crime’, which is frequently tied down to media ‘sensationalism’ in conventional ‘risk communication’ and other traditional approaches.

Of course, no amount of combined ethnographic and textual work will give us full access to people’s emotional response to crime in the media. Some of these responses will be unconscious and not subject to the qualitative approaches available to us here. But what can be accessed by these methods are the situated discourses that people use to explain their experience of (and pleasures in) television crime.

As Alasuutari says of ‘third generation’ audience analysis, it ‘adds a neglected layer of reflexivity to the research on the “reception” of media messages by addressing the audiences’ notions of themselves as “the audience”.’ (Alasuutari, forthcoming) What, in other words, are the moral frames which people use to account for and justify their viewing habits vis-à-vis crime — since it is the filling out of these frames that accounts for some of an audience’s pleasure (though we always have to be cautious of the fact that people may say they enjoy, or more often don’t enjoy, a genre — as men tend to do with soap opera, or women often do with violence — while in fact the opposite may be true: this is one reason why a fully-fledged ethnographic account would be valuable in this area).

Our focus, following both Sparks and Alasuutari, then, is on ‘audiencing’: that is, on different groups’ moral frames (and attendant pleasures) in constituting themselves as an audience for media crime images.
FEAR OF CRIME AND TELEVISION

A key concern in Sparks’ criticism of the fact that ‘the developments in criminology have occurred largely in isolation from those in media studies’ (1992: 6) relates to issues of narrative, character and genre. If, as Sparks argues, ‘what we mean by fear of crime is not so much a calculation of probabilities as a set of “intuitions”’ (1992, 11) — and our study of fear of crime in relation to public transport suggests that for most people this is the case; and if in addition, fear of crime, far from being simply the result of direct experience of crime cannot ‘be separated out from other experiences and hazards and troubles’ (1992:12), then the stories that circulate about crime and justice beyond this or that specific risk become important.

Rather than seeing the media as a ‘problem’ in that it ‘sensationally’ fills the gap between specific risks and our overblown fears of those risks, we begin to understand the media as simply one (albeit an important one) among the many circuits of meaning that we are all exposed to. The embedding of media fears within other circuits of meaning was apparent in our Transport Study. For example, Vickie’s account of the recent incidents in her family’s life, which so accentuated their fear of crime on the trains included:

- TV reports of a knifing incident on a Blue Mountains train;
- a friend’s account of a frightening brawl on the train;
- her family’s own direct experience of extreme violence on another train, where existing racist narratives were upfront (as well as after-the-event moralisations about it);
- her daughter’s account of a man masturbating on the train in front of her and threatening her with his looks — at exactly the time when the newspapers were full of accounts of pederasty both in Australia and worldwide.

Even if we concentrate only on these different ‘genres’ of narrative in relation to ‘the train crimes’, and not on those which accompanied the attempt to ‘catch the criminal’ (the State Rail stationmaster’s talk, the police interviews and line-up of suspects, well-meaning friends’ comments that some small girls seem to attract this kind of attention, the official form from DOCS, etc.), it is immediately evident that far more than direct experience of a specific ‘crime’ is involved here. Rather, we have, as Sparks says, narratives about a whole range of ‘other experiences and hazards and troubles’.
As Sparks puts it

there is no need to deny that people are indeed subject to definite risks in order to agree that crime and justice carry cultural and political meanings which precede and extend beyond our direct encounters with them. Indeed, one may conjecture, the more fearful people become, whether this is directly in proportion to the risks they run or not, the more urgent and important such meanings are likely to become for them... [P]eople who are already fearful may also be the most likely to seek out information, gossip, rumour and stories which bear upon the things which concern them in that they have the need of such “heuristics” for ordering and understanding their own troubling thoughts and feelings. (1992:12)

It is certainly the case that Vickie had become 'more fearful' about train travel, and not just in relation to sexual harassment of little girls. As she became more fearful, she did indeed 'seek out information, gossip, rumour and stories' — from doctors, counsellors, police, railway officials, even from her other daughter — as well as trying to input her own narratives into social circuits of communication by seeking out the researchers behind this report. Driving some distance for a long interview with us was, for Vickie, clearly one of the ‘“heuristics” for ordering and understanding [her] own troubling thoughts and feelings.’

Sparks asks the question: ‘To what sources of information, reassurance or distraction do people turn in seeking to cope with fear?’ (1992: 13) It is significant that when asked at what point her main fears of crime on trains started, Vickie said it was the result of a TV news report. Clearly, the media are powerful and pervasive among the other circuits of communication that carry the meanings of crime and justice in our society. But rather than assume, therefore, a one-sided 'construction of fear' among a passive public by the all-powerful media, Sparks wants to ask questions of audience/media interaction.

Is there a sense in which the distribution of fears either motivates or constrains the availability, plausibility or acceptance of particular images, stories, rhetorics and political programmes? (1992: 13)

How, we might ask, do the media engage with the various other circuits of communication that Vickie encounters, as her fear of train crime increases and becomes personal 'experience'? It is this broader nexus of discursive contexts in which media accounts are used, tested, elaborated or found wanting that Sparks’ preferred focus lies.

My larger argument, therefore, is that the issue of the relation between television and fear is intelligible only when it is understood in terms of the position of crime as a discursive area in contemporary cultural life. (1992: 17)
The different genres of discourse then become important: the gossip of friends may raise new worries about her daughter for Vickie; the telephone talk of the stationmaster appears ‘flippan’ because it, too, offers no resolution to her problem; the TV news report that began her worries unnerved her without reassuring her; perhaps, she conjectures, the research interview (with ‘policy’ implications) will offer the possibility of ‘resolution’, for others if not for her daughter? Meanwhile, she goes, with her daughter, around various other ‘experts’ (police, DOCS, doctors, counsellors) seeking a resolution to her daughter’s sexual harassment in their talk too.

Thus, for Vickie, narrative is also very important: she seeks narrative closure. Vickie’s is a very particular case. She seeks some very particular resolutions; but also some very broad ones. Indeed, the broader fears (about train travel) have underpinned her particular concern about the sexual harassment of her daughter from the start; and in that sense her current project is emotionally underpinned by what Sparks (following Gouldner) calls ‘an underlying paleo-symbolic dynamic of fear.’ (1992: 41) This, in Gouldner’s analysis, is the emotional element of ‘command’ (often conveyed by the emotive power of images and words) that underlies more elaborated discourses and ideologies. And it is clear, listening to Vickie, that a whole cluster of words and images (the knife that stabbed in the original TV report; the repeated words of fear ‘will the police be at Springwood’ in her friend’s story of a train brawl; the repeated words ‘I’m a dinkum Aussie, I’m an Aussie, what are you?’ by the assailants in the racist train assault that she experienced; the image of the young man about to be assaulted wrapping a chain around his fist; the images of her child’s abuser undoing his shirt poppers and his trouser buttons) underlies her increasingly elaborated discourse about sexual harassment.

Television, Sparks argues, is one of the most important and routine purveyors of the ‘paleo-symbolic dynamic of fear’. As

*a participatory and iconic and profoundly familiar medium it asks to be viewed in a particular way. When the experience of viewing produces dissonance or tension (as it may in relation to images of crime and law enforcement) it calls not so much for “intellectual clarification” as for “resolution”, in the sense that a drama... may be “resolved”.* (1992: 42)

Furthermore, Sparks adds, by the early 1970s, crime’s own television dramas,

*cop shows had entirely supplanted the Western as the dominant genre of narrative fiction on US television... largely on the basis of its superior “demographics”. The cop show drew an audience which was not necessarily larger but which had a younger, more affluent, urban profile. The urban audience seemed to prefer to the traditional Western myths of the foundation of the law in American frontier history the contemporary mythology of the enforcement of the law in the recognisable city.*

(1992: 27–8)
So while not in any way emphasising an all-powerful television at the expense of other daily circuits of discourse, Sparks suggests that because of its significance at the paleo-symbolic (emotional level), and because of the vastly increased popularity of cop shows with actual audiences, there is some reason to suspect that when people do go seeking sources of information, reassurance or distraction to cope with their fear, TV police series may well be one of the places they go.

Sparks argues that there are two significant features of this particular television genre which may help give people the reassurance they seek.

i) In TV police series ‘we are presented with a representation, for pleasure, of topics which are otherwise, in other registers of talk and imagery, widely felt as very troubling and dangerous... That is, crime drama is preoccupied with vulnerability and threat, but it is also intrinsic that it provides ways in which the threat is countered and overcome. The “good”, for the most part, continue to end happily, and the “bad” unhappily.’ (1992: 39)

ii) Because of their scheduled routine quality, police series produce, reproduce, and reiterate what Bourdieu calls the ‘doxic’: where ‘the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary — i.e. as one possible order among others — but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned.’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 166; cited in Sparks, 1992: 50–1)

If television itself has the underlying power of the emotional and paleo-symbolic, cop series (Sparks argues) may augment this with the power of the ideological: that is, following Eco, via a ritual of reiteration which reaffirms rather than informs. The analytical task, then, for Sparks becomes the examination of these paleo-symbolic and ideological relations of television crime in the context of people’s other daily practices and discourses. Television brings the public world of power, threat, and ideological resolution into the private world of emotions and fear. But there it becomes part of our ‘mutuality of interaction’ (1992: 47): it is part of our talk, gossip, and so on.

For these reasons I consider that the interpretation of television viewing, the study of the transactions which take place between institutions, programmes and audiences, is in certain important respects more akin to the study of talk than to the study of texts. I am centrally interested in reaching an understanding of television narratives but conceived in terms of their likely “realisations” by viewers viewing in determinate settings.

(Sparks, 1992: 49)

Sparks does not, in fact, undertake this discussion of ‘talk’ about television and crime. But we did; in long interviews and focus groups. We ‘talked’ with viewers about their pleasures in, and fears of, crime and media.
Sparks also argues that

different senses of the term “fear” may be operative for different circumstances and groups of people, so that women’s fear might differ from men’s, or the fears of the elderly from those of the young, not just in “quantity” but in kind. (1992: 11)

We have seen already in our Transport Study different kinds of fear among men, women, young and older people. To what extent are these groups’ use of television cop series and other crime media also differently embedded in fear?

Following the directions of Sparks’ analysis (which are also outlined in the Audit Report, chapter 5), we asked our three age groups of respondents (in Sydney, the Blue Mountains and the Bathurst area) questions relating to:

- their overall enjoyment of police series: do these make them feel better or more ill at ease about the world, or make no difference?
- their pleasures in narrative: do they prefer shows where the police always win?
- their perception of a ‘mean world’: are images of the police (and crime) becoming more cynical?
- their pleasures in scheduling: are there some crime (or other ‘fear’) shows that they just never miss?
- their feelings of personal/family vulnerability in relation to crime shows: are any of the issues raised directly relevant to them?
- their feelings about crime representations of place: would they prefer crime shows that deal with their own or ‘other’ environments?
- their worries about different information technologies: are they more concerned by, for example, television, Internet, videos etc in relation to crime?
- their preferences vis-à-vis type and style of police series.
- their ‘moral agendas’ vis-à-vis media role models (for example in relation to violence).

Other questions dealt with issues of time, public space, police knowledge, local media, and self-concept in relation to degree of ‘privacy’ or ‘activism’. These questions will, we hope, take us a bit further with Sparks’ agenda, which he establishes on the first page of his book: ‘I want to use our participation in crime fiction on television as a point of entry into these matters, by discussing some of the meanings which crime and law enforcement are called upon to bear in contemporary culture.’
Some of Sparks’ questions that we may be able to take further are:

- whether cop shows stimulate or help manage various groups’ fear of crime?
- whether cop shows mystify the truth of policing in suggesting that good guys always win?
- how various groups (such as older people and women) who are traditionally said to have ‘excessive’ or ‘fanciful’ fears of crime actually use crime on the media?
- what ‘fear’ areas of information, reassurance or distraction people turn to?
- what relationship there is between the development of new styles of policing (as imaged in the media) and people’s perceptions of the changing dimension of the crime problem?
- what are the pleasures that people take out of the shock/reaffirmation of cop shows?
- to what extent do people schedule favourite ‘fear’ shows?
- if crime shows have ‘effects’, are these those of distraction rather than confrontation with accepted social sentiments?
(i) Angela, whom we met before in the Transport Study, positions herself ‘in the middle’ when asked the question

*Overall, do you think you are nearer to the “private” end of the spectrum (worrying about things you see on TV but not talking much about them or able to do much about them) or at the more “active” end (in a community group, or through the kind of work you do, or through letters to the media etc)?*

However, as we saw earlier, she then goes on to itemise three occasions when she personally intervened when people were in risk situations. When crises like these happen in the streets or trains, Angela argues, she does react, often ‘when no-one else wants to intervene… It worries me that there’s a tendency now in society for people to pretend that they don’t see, pretend things aren’t happening’. She is therefore, she says, ‘active in a reactive but not in a structured way.’

Nevertheless, Angela used to be more ‘structured’ in her activities. She was a union representative in her last full-time position, and it is arguable that she lost this job indirectly as a result of her work in this role. Now out of full-time employment, and a single parent with a late teenage, unemployed son, Angela is poor. She tells us that she watches television more now that she is older because she cannot afford to go out. She watches on one channel only, in black and white, because she cannot afford an antenna. The channel is ABC, which, as she says, makes her selection of cop series limited. In the old days of employment and a husband, however, Angela did have colour and a number of channels, and her choice of program was much the same.

(ii) Sheri, a lesbian mother living in the Western Suburbs of Sydney with her partner, and with a daughter just out of her teens, also positions herself ‘in the middle nowadays’ of the privatised/active spectrum. Now a public servant, she too is less active ‘structurally’ than she used to be. Brought up as a child in a communist/atheist family to suspect authority, Sheri learnt from feminist groups early that ‘there is no safety anywhere, anytime, so you may as well live your life and not let the fear control you.’ Sheri became very active as a demonstrator. She was arrested on one occasion; and on another, at a demonstration supporting Women’s Refuges at the Parliament in Canberra, she physically threw aside a big policeman who had injured a fellow woman demonstrator by hurling her down the stairs, and was on the point of injuring her further. With her partner (who was trained in boxing as a child) she has also prevented a group of men and boys stealing a woman’s handbag on the train in the Western Suburbs.
Unlike nearly all other parents we interviewed, Sheri is not overly fearful for her daughter, Sally who was ‘always the tallest kid in the class’. ‘Where I’m more likely to yell, she’s more likely to hit.’ At age 12, Sally was thrown off the train by three boys at Westfield station, hurting herself and damaging her clothes. After a brief, angry interchange, she knocked out the boy who had pushed her, using a technique Sheri thinks she learned watching her mother’s self-defense class. Later, as a teenager, Sally had to be dragged off a man she attacked who had tried to steal her bag when she was drunk at a party. Sheri says ‘people don’t mess with me, or my partner or my daughter.’

NARRATIVE PLEASURES

(i) We recall that, just prior to her Transport Study interview, Angela had been to a trade union choir show, where she had enjoyed the gender-bending of the Polish Solidarity choir. With this in mind, and given her union background, her response to the first question we asked her was perhaps surprising.

Q: If you watch cop shows, do they make you feel better or more ill at ease about the world, or don’t they make any difference?

A: Better about the world. I like the idea of there being law and order.

From this point on, we might have expected a conventional ‘conservative’ moral frame to her sense of ‘audiencing’, with attendant fears of crime: drugs, sex, Asian immigrants, etc. Yet our knowledge of Angela already suggests a contradiction here. We did not expect the television pleasures of this woman with quite strong feminist and anti-racist sentiments to be driven by a ‘law and order’ moral frame.

Her response to the narrative question, however, begins to reveal how her structural (and situated) social position resolves this apparent contradiction.

Q: Do you prefer the shows where the good guys regularly win?

A: That doesn’t really make much difference. I don’t care. The good guy doesn’t have to win. The story is more important and the characters. If it’s a cop show I do enjoy mystery, finding a solution at the end... And I enjoy the characters being realistic, well-rounded, other things happening in their lives apart from the story... outside of the text and the action. I like that in cop shows.

In terms of Roland Barthes’ narrative codes, Angela is emphasising her pleasure in two of them: the hermeneutic code of puzzles and mysteries; and the cultural code — here a preference for the epistemologically ‘real’, with ‘well-rounded characters’, a density of detail from the world beyond the action-narrative, and so on.
Q: In your experience, have crime images in the media become more mean and cynical in recent years, or not?

A: Yes. There’s [the appearance of] the Australian Christopher Skase-type characters as criminals... I’m not sure in the case of the police. Perhaps they’ve been exposed more in the media, yes. Perhaps the racist attitudes of Australian cops that I’ve always been aware of have been exposed more... both in fiction and in documentary-type things.

Q: How does this view you have, and the view you mentioned before of liking to think there is such a thing as law and order, relate to your perception of real-life police corruption... ?

A: I’ve always been aware that police corruption exists in real life. I haven’t expected it to be otherwise, so I haven’t been surprised by the exposure. I’ve been relieved by the exposure as an admission that it’s actually existing, instead of a denial. So I welcome that. I think we have ceased to deny the existence of corruption in society.

Q: So it’s interesting that you’re relieved at the exposure of real-life corruption, yet at the same time you like cop shows because you like to think that there is law and order.

A: Yes. But if corruption is exposed then I am more likely to find law and order.

Q: Right, so law and order is not necessarily what the police are standing for in the first instance?

A: No. No!

‘Law and order’ — her main pleasure in cop shows — is thus not to be revealed by repetition of the ‘doxic’ taken-for-granted world of ‘natural’ police justice, but rather by ‘exposure’ and ‘probing’. This combination of a preference for ‘real’ characterisation and plot-lines with ‘probing’ beneath the ‘surface of appearances’ is, of course, coherent. Her moral frame turns out not to be conservative at all. It derives from the epistemologically realist valuation of probing for ‘ontological depth’ in order to reveal the ‘deep structures’ underpinning patterned activity (see Audit Report, p.78). Consequently, her preference (in ‘helping her handle issues of crime and fear of crime’) is for ‘down-to-earth documentaries’ on the police. It is her belief that the media increasingly are helping us to probe and not hide corruption that gives her, she said, ‘a greater sense of control of her situation.’ So Angela both sees Gerbner’s ‘mean world’ through her television screen and feels a greater control over it.
Thus, regarding Sparks’ concern about the relationship between ritual repetition in cop series and the ideological conservatism of the ‘doxic’ (where ‘the established cosmological and political order is perceived... as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned’), Angela’s pleasure in the ritual repetition of the genre is quite the opposite. The one police series she ritually watches is The Bill. For her the routine characterisation of The Bill allows her to relax and enjoy the series according to the realist principle that as ‘the weeks have gone on and the characters have been built up, more has been added to each character.’

I like The Bill. I always watch The Bill. I like the several layers to the text, the well-rounded characters, the stories — realistic stories of ordinary people. I would like to think it’s a good reflection of the police force in action and the circumstances they work under. They don’t always win out, the good guy doesn’t always win, that’s acknowledged. And perhaps because I know the characters too, it’s an easy thing to watch, it’s a comforting show... I do like the comedy crime too. I like The Thin Blue Line because I like the comic aspect of the police force; also the rather quaint Hamish Macbeth dealing with a minor incident — these still exist in society. That’s comforting, the fact that minor incidents are still considered important.

As Sparks might predict, Angela does not watch police series to manage personally direct crime fears and experiences, but for ‘other experiences and hazards and troubles’: the probing of police corruption and racism; the ‘comforting’ negotiation of the minor, ordinary-everyday problem; the recognition that, far from being dignified and inevitably patriarchal bastions of law and order, the police can be funny as well as corrupt.

(ii) The Bill is also the only cop series that Sheri will watch, mainly because of ‘the tough female cops’. She will not watch Millenium because in the very first episode the fellow’s wife and child were threatened... Violence towards women and children bothers me a lot. I don’t watch the sorts of murder/horror things where women are being stalked.

This particular narrative concern might seem a contradiction for the ‘people don’t mess with me’ woman we have described earlier. In fact, Sheri is not a fearful woman. She describes how, when travelling alone by train at night through the Western Suburbs, she would deliberately walk through the train (a most unusual thing for a lone woman to do), to seek out the very few other single woman on the train, sit with them, and talk through their anxieties. She describes herself as ‘wary and cautious and careful, but not fearful.’ As a child Sheri was subject to significant violence from her father when he was drunk, and argues that she has been through the fear of violent pain, knows about it, and while being cautious to avoid it, no longer fears it. She also knows from ‘this first hand experience that there is not necessarily any safety at home either, so I’m not going to lock myself up, and I’m not going to limit my life.’ When out at night, she feels it is her psychology as well as her physical self-confidence which keeps people from worrying her. She feels that, like her daughter,
so long as she has the chance to feel active and some sort of power she feels better. But when she can’t respond, and she’s forced into the passive role, and she feels powerless, she flips.

A narrative where a hidden male assailant’s gaze stalks a frightened, passive woman is constructed to make female viewers feel powerless. Sheri says it is better if she doesn’t feel powerless, so she avoids watching that kind of storyline.

I do know that I have a tendency to be easily influenced by the things I read and watch, and I don’t want to end up paranoid.

Like Angela, Sheri is not in the last surprised at the ‘meaner’ and more corrupt police images of recent years.

Yeah, there’s a lot of cynicism and stuff, but they’re bringing in a “human” element I think a lot lately too. You know “He might be a tough, mean cop... but at home he’s got a wife who’s threatening to leave him and he’s actually caught up with grief, but because he’s a male he doesn’t know how to express it”... There has always been police corruption. I also acknowledge that there’s always been the good cop in there who’s joined the force because he wanted to do the best he could for the community... But I was brought up in a communist household, totally anti-authoritarian, “Cops are somebody not to be trusted”, and I have always thought that they were authoritarian... that they took advantage of people and use their authority in an unfair way.

Sheri says her parents were not in any way ‘propagandist’ about this (and in fact tried hard to protect her from any backlash from their politics) but that she picked it up from odd comments her father made about things on television, etc. Her experience with police since, though, has fully confirmed these views.

Not unrelated to this background is Sheri’s love of science fiction. She watches Burning Zone, Dark Skies, The X-Files (‘except the real scary horror ones), and of course I really like the government conspiracy ones. I don’t know whether I believe in conspiracy now, but in my twenties I was most definitely paranoid about conspiracy — it was the thing at the time. After a while I realised that a) they’re probably not interested in me, I’m a nothing, and b) if they are, I don’t have anything to hide anyway... I especially like The Pretender — nasty government agency doing all sorts of funny experiments on children... One of them grows up and escapes and is being chased by the agency... It’s the fear of authority getting at you, but the fear more of what they’re doing out there than what they’re doing to me; and I like the aspect of escaping from authority and getting even with them. I really, really like that aspect of The Pretender.

Sheri’s scheduled pleasure in science fiction equates with its programmed anti-authoritarianism.
Sparks suggests (following Stuart Hall) that the cop series’ obsession with contemporary urban environments as mean, violent and dangerous may represent a crisis in the authority of the state, even while its narrative resolutions reaffirm police authority.

(i) Angela recognises (and doesn't like) this particular city/urban emphasis in many cop series and other media images. She feels that not enough media emphasis is placed on her own environment and its crime problems. Rather,

A: a lot of emphasis is placed on the drug scenes and the drug areas...
Cabramatta... Then there’s always an emphasis on the Cross and inner Sydney. Penrith and the Western Suburbs cops a lot of attention too.

Q: What kind of image of those places gets conveyed?

A: There’s always the image that you are going to be attacked and drugs will be forced on to you, virtually. Murder, lack of law and order or safety.

These recurrent images of city and urban areas would not stop Angela visiting these places if she needed to go there ‘for some specific reason... But I'm not sure that I'd then go there for pleasure... So possibly there’s a slight [media] influence on me there. I certainly wouldn't be attracted to these areas.’

Q: Would Redfern be one of these places portrayed by the media badly.

A: Oh yes, Redfern is badly portrayed, yes... It would stop me going there... It would be provocative I feel to walk down Eveleigh Street in Redfern unless I was with Aboriginal people... I think that’s fair enough... I see no reason why there shouldn’t be Aboriginal territory there. So unless I’m with Aboriginal people or have some real reason to be there, I don’t see why I should go there... It would be provocative.

As we listen to Angela carefully, we realise that it is not the media image of Redfern in itself that will prevent her going there. She is not afraid of visiting Redfern, but rather does not want to go as ‘invader’.

Angela’s sense of the media's representation of place is thus fully informed by her realist moral frame. As we saw earlier, Angela is angered by the fact that the local Blue Mountains media has not adequately covered the bashings of teenagers in Katoomba station subway, while the national media spends too much time on generating racist fears of drug wars and Aboriginal violence. In her view it is the young people of the local area who are exposed to risk by these biases (she argues that the local press is significantly biased politically).
Consequently, her own reaction to an assault on her son (while he was travelling on the train) by a drunken Aboriginal man is, as we said in the Transport Report, embedded in a wide range of identities. Her fear for her son while travelling, as Sparks puts it, here “exceeds the information given”... It is deeply implicated in [her] more general sense of well-being or otherwise in the environment in which [she] finds [herself].’ (1992: 12)

That environment she sees as one where the 'ordinary people' (including Aborigines) should have more ownership. She believes, for example, that the example of Newtown indicates that when you get more people on the streets, you decrease fear of crime.

Making the streets happier places to be in. Having even just musical events, buskers... In Newtown there are always people out in the streets. My friend said that people who can’t sleep will get up and go for a walk, find someone to talk to. So perhaps people are more liable to make contact, commune with others... That’s something I’ve felt about being in parts of Sydney too: that, strangely for a large city, there’s more of a sense of community than you will get in the Mountains... Though in some suburbs of Sydney you do get people closing off and retreating to their little fortresses.

Angela, then, resists the syndrome of the generic ‘mean city’. She argues instead (quite un-romantically given her situation in the Blue Mountains) on the one hand for a greater potential democracy of the streets there (and with it, less fear of crime), and on the other hand against the potential to develop fortified enclaves in the city. She wishes, therefore, that the media spent less time concentrating on the negative aspects of urban spaces like Cabramatta and Redfern and spent more time focusing on the positive aspects of urban spaces like Newtown. And, regarding newspaper reports that the residents of Point Piper wanted to put up boom gates and surveillance cameras to control fear of crime in their precinct after a street bashing, Angela

found that appalling, absolutely appalling. Fortress mentality, retreat into their own fortress. I don’t think they’ve got a right to retreat from the world like that. Other people... have a right to use these streets, to use these spaces.

(ii) Sheri, unlike Angela, actually lives in the Western Suburbs, in Tregear (near St Marys). But like Angela, she thinks that it is represented unfairly in the media.

The Western Suburbs is [only shown] in a sensationalist way. You know “Crime in the Western Suburbs!”. But I haven’t had any trouble at all... Every now and again it will come up in the media as “an issue”, especially if it has to do with other cultures — “Asian gangs at Cabramatta”, “drug-dealing at Cabramatta”, Cabramatta, Cabramatta, poor old Cabramatta, they’ve really been ripped off, they’ve been sensationalised, they’ve been focused on to an extent that probably was unfair... And meanwhile, me, my family and my environment are all under-represented. I’m a dyke, so that’s under-represented — especially an ordinary dyke, not a lipstick or famous dyke like K.D.Lang...
The recurrent media images she sees of Cabramatta have never stopped Sheri shopping and eating there — she likes Asian food. Similarly she has travelled a lot on the train in the Western Suburbs at night, ‘as late as I needed, I would be out on the last train’ (while always taking precautions, like sitting in the “Blue Light” carriage). Sheri describes this as ‘a normal cautiousness as opposed to a fear thing’; and we have already seen that she is prepared to walk through the train looking for other women.

Because I was actually curious about this culture on the train... Nobody expected a woman to be actually walking the train. I think they expected a woman to sit down meekly, quietly and try to be invisible.

On one trip she talked successively with three women

about safety and fear on the trains... It was interesting that all of these women who were sitting by themselves were quite fearful [of] certain places on the train that had a more dangerous feel than others — the front-end carriage felt more dangerous and had more men by themselves who looked more dangerous... A lot of it would be media-portrayed things... like their being unkempt, their slouching, their smelling of alcohol... They had that sort of “image”.

Sheri says she talks a lot, with her partner and her colleagues at work, about violence, especially the massacre at the Strathfield shopping centre where a number of them shopped. This talk was

more like a testing out of my feelings about the situation — it wasn’t like all of a sudden I became too scared to go to Strathfield shopping centre... It created a lot of discussion, some of the other women were expressing fear, usually I provided a reality check... I have that role... It probably helps me a bit too, but more like a getting rid of the sadness and the grief of it rather than getting rid of the fear of it, because the fear becomes negligible.

She would like to talk more, with more accurate information, but feels deprived of this by the media. She does, she says, use crime fact and fiction on television to learn from (Australia’s Most Wanted’s dramatic re-enactments can be informative, and the Anita Cobby murder reports taught her to be personally more observant of things around her when she walks alone). But these national media are generally too sensational to be very useful, and she tends to learn ‘negatively’ from them (eg about how women shouldn’t behave). The local media is more factual; she says that as a free paper, it is not bound to be as sensational as the national newspapers. ‘It's good to have an awareness of crime — information keeps fear in check.’ But she finds that the local papers, too, give little sustained information. She spoke of the fact that her neighbour warned her of kids who might burn her ‘dead’ car on the street outside (and added that no local residents leave their cars in the street for this reason). Indeed the local paper recently reported two cars being burned in her area. But Sheri complained that it was only a two-line report; with no real information or context.
In this case of potential crime, neighbours’ gossip, brief newspaper reports, and the visual cue of streets empty of cars generated a local fear that Sheri felt she could not properly negotiate.

Information lowers a feeling of fear in any area for me. With the car burnings in Tregear and St Marys, I want to know what the situation was. There wasn’t enough information. I can’t fully assess that and make a personal judgment about what level of worry I should have about it... Sometimes a lack of information can be worse than sensationalism because it leaves you with questions that can play on your mind... I think a lot of the problem with authority in general is that they feel like people can’t make personal judgments, so they don’t give information. You know, “it would be too much, we must protect the little people”. I would rather make a judgment for myself — give me the information so that I can assess it.

Like Angela, she rejects the Point Piper residents wish to put up boom gates and surveillance cameras to protect their local area from crime. Sheri has had experience of living with her cousin in one of the fortified enclaves in the hills behind Los Angeles.

It’s got boom gates, it’s got huge fences and barbed wire all the way around it... But if people want to get in, they’re going to get in... There’s some who’ve cut through the wire fences already. But inside you don’t notice if you’re not close to the fence, because it’s just like a middle-class urban area, neat lawns and little shaped shrubs... I think they’re missing the point... As I said, there is no safety anywhere, any time, so you may as well not let the fear control you. You may as well get on with your life. Why limit your life? Fear of being on the streets at night, so you don’t go out there? I love the streets at night. They’re quiet — it’s probably the safest time to be out there in some areas.

Like Angela, Sheri wants people to take to the streets at night, and like her also, she rejects the privatisation of cities into ghettoised fortresses which will make roaming wide and free impossible.

OUTRAGE

(i) Angela’s answers to our questions indicate the variety of circuits of discourse through which she ‘reads’ the media in her daily talk (for example, the Newtown stories of her friend). The examples she gives also indicate the spectrum of kinds of fear of crime response that the media can generate in one individual: from her specific, personalised nervousness when going to the family court at the time of media reports of bombings there; to her complex reaction to her son’s assault on the train by an Aboriginal; to what she defines as her ‘emotional reaction’ of outrage to media reports of young children being harmed.
The Dunblane Massacre affected me more than any of them because I worried about the bizarre attraction to injure, kill a group of little children. Again there was the attack in Cairns on the little O’Shane boy, an attack on a child... So I worry about children... I was outraged and worried... I discussed the motivation of them with my son and other friends... I always get outraged over any abuse of children, whether it’s an international child slave or sex market, or anything which is an abuse of power, especially over children. I get very angry ... where people abuse their position... over weaker people on the basis of racial supremacy... over Aboriginal groups within Australia... or South-East Asian groups, anything which is an abuse of power — but especially over children.

(ii) Like Angela, Sheri’s use of national and local media, and her extensive involvement in home, office and train ‘talk’, indicates the fields and circuits of discourse through which media-generated fears of crime are negotiated. Also like Angela, her outrage is especially reserved for people who exploit the weak.

I feel outraged at crime against women and children. I feel outraged at any crime against innocent people. I feel outraged at crime against people who can’t fight back.

This, in both Australia and the USA, includes black people. Yet Sheri argues that her experience of American media helped increase her distance from black people, and hence her culture shock when she visited the USA.

I was very much more aware, say, late at night in inner-city Seattle of being much, much more fearful. And what I did, as I walked, doing my usual thing of eyes up and walking straight ahead, was to think “is my fear justified or not?”... And nothing ‘bad’ came at me... But in fact the portrayals of race violence in America did effect me... I was very conscious that it had gone into my head. So when I was walking through an area that had a lot of black people in it I was much more conscious of the fear then. But thankfully I was conscious of it and thinking about it and judging it all the time.

Sheri’s overall attitude to fear of crime once again confirms a number of Gunter’s research findings: for example, that lack of fear is strongly related to belief in one’s own self-defence competence; and that the most risky perceived location for walking was the streets of the USA rather than one’s home location.

A long interview can reveal, however, what Gunter’s research methods cannot: the way in which media discourses (about ‘race violence’ in the USA), reflexive thinking (Sheri’s own use of memory and experience to assess the actual situation), and — as we will see in the next extract from her interview — non-verbal circuits of communication like body language and facial expression are all woven together in dealing both behaviourally and emotionally with fear.
A black man was walking towards me. He had a piece of paper wrapping up something in his hand. As he got fairly close to me he crumpled it up and threw it at my feet. He was directing it at my feet, at the ground right in front of me. I didn’t look at him but I stepped around it, sort of slightly bowed my head in his direction, and kept him in sight as I walked past him. I didn’t turn my back on him until I knew he was past me, and continuing on his way; and then I turned around and kept walking. At this point I brought my eyes up again to assess the crowd around me, and the next black man who was maybe twenty feet behind the first one, looked at me and met my eyes and smiled… I have no idea how my reaction was perceived by either man. It was a completely instant reaction... It was in a way acknowledging the first man’s presence by half-nodding my head, stepping around the paper... It was an unusual situation. I didn’t know the ground rules. I was very conscious of the media’s portrayal of race violence, and I didn’t know how much of it was true, how much wasn’t... My conditioning was a very, very big factor there... And the second man’s smile — I was trying to read so much into two seconds. But I would say I saw a slight humour in it, I would say I saw a slight appreciation of my tactics, I would say I saw a slight reassurance “I’m not going to do the same thing”. Who knows how much of that was real, but I looked up, and I met his eye, and he smiled, and I gave a half-smile, and I nodded again, and kept going — and thought “whew, calm down now”.

Sheri’s lucid account indicates in detail the negotiation of memory, experience, media narratives, her own political discourse, and visual circuits of communication when she — like Angela — ‘invaded’ the territory of a group that she regards as exploited.

PLEASURES OF GENRE

(i) Angela’s preferences for particular police series indicate different kinds of emotional security (with varying degrees of pleasure) that sub-genres within the cop show can provide. She does not, for example, agree with the older people interviewed in Katoomba who used Heartbeat to argue back to their past. In those days, they believed, the face-to-face presence of police on the street led to there being less crime — and fear of crime — in all city areas. For Angela, however,
I have this same feeling from seeing the paddy wagon patrolling around Katoomba, I’d get the bobby-on-the-beat feeling from that. They do patrol... and if you’re out, you do see the police fairly regularly... They’re not walking the streets but communication is much better, so I feel more secure about that... The Bill reminds me that communications are better, we’re going to have the police and fire and ambulance on the scene very quickly if necessary... Police Rescue tends to be a different thing — it’s rather nice to know that somewhere in the background there are policemen willing to swing off cliffs and save you... It’s quite good to feel. I wasn’t aware that this service was around until I saw Police Rescue... But it’s not a show that I’ve watched a great deal... There’s no mystery involved in saving someone from a cliff. It’s acrobatic rather than a mystery.

‘Mystery’ for Angela is not just a hermeneutic puzzle. It also includes that sense of uncovering and probing the surface of one’s ‘taken-for-granted’, like The Bill does for her to some extent. Thus, correlative with her outrage at abuse of adult power over children is her belief that good role models for children are those investigative shows (like Media Watch and Four Corners) and comic shows (like Good News Week) ‘which encourage young people to probe and look beyond the superficial... They can be good role models in their way much better than the Arnold Schwarzenegger sort of stuff.’

(ii) Sheri has had many arguments with her teenager daughter Sally and her teenage niece about Arnold Schwarzenegger. Both of the girls enjoyed the Terminator movies; Sheri was appalled. But, after talking with them, she did come to like Schwarzenegger’s comedy films, and then returned to the violent blockbusters slightly more sympathetically. ‘I still don’t watch silly Stallone... But at least the Terminators didn’t involve stalking women and such, so they didn’t scare me or worry me so much in the end.’

But Sheri’s greatest pleasure is in science fiction, especially when there are strong female roles. Her chosen role model for teenagers is Sigourney Weaver in the Alien movies.

The best one was her with the little girl, because it wasn’t just about her fighting the big, bad alien, it was about her relationship with the girl as well, and her absolute determination that the girl had to get out no matter what, and the fact that they gave up on all other adults who had been caught and imprisoned. She went after the girl... It was her relationship with her as well as the fact that she was just so tough.

Both Angela and Sheri get a lot of their media enjoyment from genres that relate to their perception of children: Angela in the ‘probing’ series (like Good News Week) which she feels provide teenagers with a good role model; Sheri in science fiction films and TV series which show children (and strong women) resisting ‘authority’. It helps both of them with their outrage.
FEARS ABOUT MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

One of the concerns expressed by the Blue Mountains Seniors focus group was about media technologies. Children nowadays, it was said, can learn how to make bombs on the Internet! This is perhaps the latest extension of what Sparks calls the ‘law and order mythology’, which has concerned itself with each new technological form (at least since the days of silent film), but has found its most long-term public expression in the ‘television violence’ campaigns of figures like Mary Whitehouse in Britain. Sparks notes

\[\text{If, as Hall} \text{fears, we stand in danger of “drifting into a law and order society”… the colonisation, in our society, of the main channels of communication (both fiction and reportage) by an imagery of order and symbolic threat may be one dimension of this movement. (1992: 76)}\]

Ten years ago there was a major public fuss in Australia when a soap opera raised the problem of children risking serious injury by making bombs. This, it was said, would encourage children to experiment. The current fear about bombs and the Internet is the most recent version, all the more threatening because of the fear that children can do it privately and secretly.

(i) Angela will have none of this fear of media technology, and, extending her valuation of ‘probing’ children, tells us a ‘private and secret’ story of her own.

\[\text{I know there’s been a bit of fuss over kids having access in the Internet to “how to make a bomb” information. But that information was always available through books... During the Second World War the army had set up barracks in our school. They had a network of chambers and tunnels in the paddock adjacent to the school where they kept their ammunition. That was sealed after the war. And at one point when I was a fairly young primary school child, we found a way into this network, so we had access to all this ammunition left over from the Second World War which had been sealed up in chambers and forgotten; but we could climb through the tunnels and into these chambers. I remember that being a bit of a to-do. So the potential for kids to access dangerous goods or information about dangerous goods has always been there.}\]

(ii) Sheri also dismissed fears about the Internet. ‘It makes information available that other people would’ve had a hard time finding, such as recipes for making bombs. But the information was always there for anybody who was serious about finding it anyway.’ She was less sanguine, however, about violent computer games and horror videos.
I think exposing children to violence and things that cause adrenalin shocks is really bad because they get to the stage of numbing out to the point that they think violence is normal. It’s not so much that I think that they will do violence, it’s just that they become numbed out to accept it as a normal part of everyday life. I think that’s a wrong thing to teach children... The way that all the society’s conditioned prejudices are portrayed in the media in a way to reinforce those prejudices is wrong. The terrible preponderance on horror as it is directed at women — stalking in particular. I think... what that sort of media does is become one of the controlling factors. It makes women so scared that they will do anything for safety.

Like many of the parents that we discussed in the Transport Report, Angela and Sheri are concerned with major issues and problems of the current social order: violence, drugs, racism, police corruption, and so on. In particular, though, this single parent and this lesbian parent are mainly worried about the representation in the media of these social issues.

Angela’s social anxiety is about the mystification of these matters, and the blaming of it on ‘weaker people’. Her television pleasures in relation to crime are thus greatest in those ‘probing’ programs which expose the ‘real’ and underlying issues ‘where people abuse their position’, whether these are ‘crazed’ gunmen who shoot young children or irresponsible police and media tycoons. It is not a coincidence that she applauds the appearance of the ‘Christopher Skase’ type of media tycoon among the television ‘baddies’ when asked her ‘mean world’ question. A heavy television viewer by force of economic circumstances rather than choice, Angela is a candidate for Gerbner’s ‘mean world’ syndrome. She does, indeed, see a meaner world on television nowadays. But for her this is a cause of pleasure, control and empowerment rather than passivity (as in Gerbner). This is because the ‘mean world’ of television is ‘probing’ more and more to the reality of power, racism and corruption that underlies appearances. Her negotiation of her fears in relation to television and media crime is coherently and intelligibly related to this pleasure in the moral frame of ‘the real’.

Sheri has, as a result of her father’s physical violence, been ‘beaten to the wall and back’, and thinks that this is a major reason why she is not fearful.

I know about violence, it can’t scare me. I’ve just been reading a wonderful book about a white woman in the southern states of America who... said “I have been there. I have experienced the fear that the racists can make me feel. I have lost sleep, sat up all night with a gun in my hand... I know what they can do. They may hurt me. They may kill me. They will never make me fear again.”... For me it has taken more processing than that, a lot of ingrained fear that I had to learn about in order to get past it in order to say ‘I will never fear again’... Mine was a long term project to get there. But that feeling at the end... is very real for me.
Like Angela she is encouraged by the Wood Royal Commission (‘Mount Druitt police station got done’), and also the fact that the police force is now advertising for lesbian women officers. But she has had too much direct experience of ‘the dangerous cop’ to be sanguine for the future. The recent killing of a man on Bondi Beach frightens her more than crime as such, because she sees in it an almost certain case study of ‘the dangerous cop’, losing his cool and killing unnecessarily.

These stories, she argues, do not get covered seriously in the media, nor do the daily events of domestic violence, and nor do regular crimes against children.

*There’s huge amounts of domestic violence out there that isn’t shown... When a woman got... shot by her husband... outside the courthouse that was dramatic enough to be covered by the media. But they don’t cover every time a woman gets killed, especially not in domestic violence... Also... they only cover crimes against children when it’s hot-topical... The news that does get into the media is very much the large sensational stories not the everyday ones, and then they can be isolated... as single events: like by one organisation — a Catholic orphanage or something... Parents abusing children every day are not covered enough.*

Sheri used to experience these issues very directly when she worked with Women’s Refuges.

*I don’t demonstrate about those any more... But I talk. I talk to individuals, I talk in groups at work, conversations, seminars at lunch time and work time... Once I did some work around my own childhood violence. I figured out what... my survival tactics were; and I took that survival tactic and brought it into my present life in a more conscious way. So I use it instead of it just being an unconscious thing... Then, in my twenties, I realised I was fearful of fear... So I started thinking about whether fear was justified or not... Then, later again, there was that realisation that there is no safety anywhere, anytime, and the consciousness-raising done around that by a group of feminists... I made a conscious decision then to be cautious and wary but to do as I please... And I hope I have inculcated those in my daughter... But being a mother was an educational thing. You have to take care of yourself or you can’t take care of your kid... So what was once totally anxiety-ridden is now just a broadened sense of awareness of what’s going on around me.*

Sheri’s perceptions, values, judgments, and behaviours in relating to fear of crime at any one moment — as for example when she engaged with a black male in the night streets of Seattle — are worked through a detailed, reflexively experienced biography. Neither Angela’s nor Sheri’s fears of crime are ‘excessive’ or ‘fanciful’. What we can see very clearly through our interviews with them is the ways in which they negotiate and use crime and policing — both in the media and in their own lives — as a continuous project of self-awareness, for themselves and for their children.
MAE / BILL, BATHURST / SYDNEY

In the Sydney parents’ transport focus group, there was some outrage over insensitive and misleading media reporting, particularly via ‘home invasion’ beat-ups. One woman said of these, ‘It seems to me that people in their 70s are restricting their lifestyles too much because of media reporting.’

Mae is a Bathurst resident of this age, the recent widow of a farmer, who now lives on a new housing estate. Her first comments to us, unprompted, were

_ I don’t like it when I see things on TV like home invasions._

She adds that the TV material on home invasions that she has seen showed attacks on older people, people who are on their own, and ‘people who can’t defend themselves.’. Mae qualifies on all three counts.

_ It makes you wonder why they have to attack old people. That’s what frightens me. When you’re on your own, you wonder if you might be the next one._

Mae says her neighbour and all the other older people around talk about this fear. She has adopted various personal strategies to protect herself at home. In the last five years, she has put deadlocks on the windows and deadlocks on the doors; makes sure that everything is multiply locked up at night; locks the front door when she’s in the backyard, and locks the back door when she in the front garden.

She has done this

_ because of what you see on the TV and what you read in the papers._

Home invasion is her biggest personal fear, especially now that she is alone, because she is never out at night, and usually goes into town with other people. Even in the daytime, she keeps doors and windows locked. There are four locks on the front door, two on the security doors; and she says that many of her older neighbours have similar security measures.

Because of her fear of home invasion, she doesn’t watch cop shows. In these, ‘You can see what happens and it frightens you.’ The previous evening, Mae had seen the promotion for _Frost_, but she didn’t watch it because she knew it would frighten her.

_ I don’t watch The Bill or any of those... I watch The Thin Blue Line... but that’s a comedy and I know that’s all right. No, I don’t like any of those sort of shows that’s got violence in, it frightens me._
Mae used to watch cop shows when Bob, her husband was alive. Then she watched with him.

It’s all right when you’ve got someone near... But ... when you’re on your own, every little creak and you think somebody’s getting in. You get frightened, you see. That’s what it is, it’s the fear, the fear. I think it builds up. You know, you see these things and think that could happen to me...

She says she does not need TV to make this fear even worse. So she doesn’t even watch the ‘softer’ police series like _Heartbeat_ and _Wexford_. Mae mainly watches the ABC (heavily self-censored), and the late afternoon quiz shows ‘because there’s no violence in those.’

She thinks that cop shows are becoming more mean and cynical — but she gets glimpses of this meaner TV world nowadays only from ‘the shorts’.

That’s the trouble, they’re getting too much like what’s happening out on the streets... like what you read in the paper, the knifings. I watched the shorts last night and they had a big stick or something that I don’t know whether they used or not. But those sort of things frighten me. I didn’t watch it to know how it happened, but only the shorts.

May has made her private home like a fortress since her husband died, and resolutely refuses to watch all police series and other violence on television for fear of letting ‘home invasion’ fears in. Yet she has had virtually no problems since Bob died, only calling the police once when a neighbour through a sparkler in her gutter and it caught alight.

Her situation, and her fear of crime in relation to the media, is remarkably different from that of Bill, a senior in his 80s living with his wife in a retirement village in Sydney. Bill lives in an almost enclosed community and feels very secure. Even though in a heavily populated part of the City,

We’re isolated rather. That’s sort of changed your view a bit. Maybe we’re getting a little bit complacent... [We feel] more secure [here].

As a result, Bill is much more relaxed about his private security than Mae, just taking a few ‘sensible precautions’ like locking up at night and, when they go out together in the evening (which isn’t very often) ‘we don’t stop anywhere, just come straight back, straight in.’

Bill is much more reflexive about the media than Mae. For her, the media represents the real world all too graphically, so she shuts it out. For Bill, the media only prints bad news, otherwise young people wouldn’t read it. He does, however, watch some cop and detective series: he mentions _Frost, The Water Rats_ and especially _The Bill_, which he particularly likes.

I like the reality of it. The others... sort of like to be... a little over the top, you know, fellows jumping off 50 foot towers and landing on one foot.
Still, he does like the good guys to win,

*I suppose that’s a feel-good thing. Generally yes. You don’t like to see evil triumph.*

So that while Mae, with her much greater personal/private fear doesn’t watch evil on TV at all, Bill helps manage his fear via ‘good’ narrative resolutions. Yet Bill represents a good example of Sparks’ comment that

*the implications of narratives of crime and law enforcement are always in varying degrees unnerving or reassuring, and the extent to which they are experienced as pleasurable lies largely in the dialectic between these terms.*

(1992: 25)

For example, Bill didn’t like a recent episode of *The Bill* where there was insufficient evidence to prosecute a man and he walked free. But, then, he says, ‘that is more realistic’; and being more realistic is one of his main reasons for liking *The Bill.*

**The Power of Talk**

One should not exaggerate, though, the degree to which Bill uses cop series to manage his fear of crime. He says that these shows are not that important in his life, that you can reach saturation point with them (and TV generally) — so that he often gets bored and switches off. Much more significant is a discussion club with other men in ‘the village’ every Friday night. He spoke about the effect of the Port Arthur media coverage on them.

*It definitely had an effect on everybody. That Port Arthur business was shocking and so was the Dunblane. It makes you wonder how these things happen, you know. You just can’t understand it. I mean obviously he was off his rocker. But it’s a bit late to find out after he’s knocked off dozens of people.*

Events like that reinforced his view that people shouldn’t have guns. He talked about it with his son-in-law in Bathurst who had ‘bought himself a good rifle’, and suggested that he turn it in to the police. At his Friday night men’s discussion group at the RSL

*We talked about gun control and the necessity for it. We thought that the Government did the right thing immediately putting it on. Because the pressure immediately came then. And instead of messing about, because NSW is very slow, they should have applied a bit of pressure, we felt. And then the local police would have known who keeps guns and who was likely to and should have recalled them.*
He said that there was some minor disagreement in the discussion group as to whether people in rifle and pistol clubs should have been able to keep their guns ‘under lock and key in a vault somewhere, perhaps in a police station’. But there was overall agreement about gun laws, and Bill said it helped them to talk about it, especially as some government action followed.

His feeling of reasonable empowerment as a result of his ‘village’ security and his sense of being surrounded there by others that he can actively talk with, is in marked contrast to Mae. She said that she did talk with friends and neighbours about Port Arthur, particularly about the trial. But,

*It’s [Port Arthur] in the past, but these other things [home invasions] are happening every day.*

Unlike Bill, Mae doesn’t talk with those close to her about her fear of crime (only with neighbours who are equally fearful). So she doesn’t talk with her children about it, nor with them about her concerns for her grandchildren. Her family has not talked with her either about the locks or her crime worries. She says that she guesses they know how fearful she is when they see all the locks on the doors.

Whereas Bill feels empowered by talk about media crime, Mae feels disempowered. She says that she did watch *Australia’s Most Wanted* when her husband was alive. Now she wouldn’t because it plays on her mind that those things would happen to her.

*Being on your own, it’s a big thing... If you’ve got somebody to talk to, it gets it out of your system. You bottle it up when you’re on your own.*

Bill’s attitude to *Australia’s Most Wanted* is very different. He watched it for a while, but wasn’t particularly affected by it.

*We know it’s [crime] going on. But you don’t have to have it shoved in front of you. Somebody’s making money out of something, so it’s another one I switch off.*

Both Bill and Mae switch off *Australia’s Most Wanted*, then; but for very different reasons.

**FEARS (AND PLEASURES) OF PUBLIC SPACE**

Mae does not go to the local parks. Once she used to take her young children there, but does not go now. She does not have a dog or other pet. By and large, she stays in her home environment, but does not feel safe there.

*I don’t feel safe, otherwise I wouldn’t have so many locks on my door.*
However, she would feel even less safe in Sydney. She says you are safer on the streets of Bathurst than Sydney. She would not go out in Sydney. She believes the urban picture conveyed by TV is realistic, and says that TV would not keep reporting all these things about drugs and burglaries if it wasn’t happening. The media are not sensationalising it.

Bill, of course, lives in Sydney. As we have seen, he thinks that the media represents only the bad news not the good because ‘young must take notice of it.’ And, he says, ‘It’s a young people's world.’ Still, he doesn’t let the media image of Sydney affect him too much. On the main, he thinks the media concentrates on the ‘good’ parts like the water, and the ‘bad’ parts like Cabramatta and Green Valley/Mount Druitt. He would visit the ‘good’ parts for a meal etc if he had the money; and he does visit the ‘bad’ parts. Recently they enjoyed going to Cabramatta.

*We went to have a meal and look at a couple of places. I had a visitor from the country, and he was keen on Asian food... It was nice.*

Unlike some older people we interviewed, Bill was relaxed about Asian immigration, only commenting that if mixing people together is the aim, ‘You can’t do it in places like Cabramatta. It’s practically 100% Asian.’ But, then, Bill is able to visit it as a tourist with his country visitor and enjoy the Vietnamese food!

For a man in is 80s, Bill is very empowered, both mentally and physically, quite unlike the younger Mae. Whereas she hides behind her walls, he gets out and about, taking ‘sensible precautions’ for someone who is an ‘old bloke... on his way out’.

*The only thing we do is be careful. You don’t go into places where you’re likely to be knocked over... We don’t go out in the evening, ‘cause we’re getting a bit ancient you know. You can’t afford to take chances. We go out in the day and we’re always home by sunset, or at least dinner anyway.*

Despite their differences (and Mae’s tendency to stay behind her own walls), they do have a similar (negative) response to the newspaper report of the residents of Point Piper wanting to put up boom gates and surveillance cameras in their streets. Mae thinks that all that obvious security may attract crime. Whereas Bill is

*not happy about the idea... That’s like the people in another part that wanted to put fences along their harbour front to stop people from coming along. They can’t do that. It’s public land... They’re greedy, they’re selfish... [Rich, with lots to protect] they’re the worst types.*

Typically, despite their similarity in responding to the Point Piper report, Mae inflicts her disapproval strategically (boom gates etc might cause more home invasion), while Bill is more interested in keeping public space in Sydney open and available for people to visit.
Bill says that he's not really sure whether there is more crime than there used to be.

Percentage-wise, I don’t suppose so, because the population is a lot bigger. It's hard to tell. There just seems to be [more crime]. Maybe we're getting back to the media again… There seems to be because if something happens, you've got a television thing poking you in the eye… It certainly gets more publicity. And they hunt in packs… the young people today.

Still, despite the dramatic notion of young people hunting in packs, Bill is fairly relaxed about crime. He and his wife travel about, go to shopping centres etc. Sometimes they read in the newspapers about how dangerous the streets are, but

It doesn’t worry me. It doesn’t make me fearful. It’s just a matter of being careful and making sure that whatever you’re doing you can handle it.

Mae reads about crime in the newspapers very differently. She has recently begun to worry about her grandchildren and drugs. She was never worried about that before, but times have changed. Reading her newspapers, she finds it is not just a Sydney problem. It is in the country just as much as anywhere else. She reads the local Advocate and the Sydney Telegraph, and she reads a lot about drugs in both of them. In the local paper, she always reads the court cases section: and nine out of ten cases are about drugs.

You see so much of it on TV, you know, where people are dying for taking drugs. Peer pressure and all those sorts of things. It doesn’t matter how good a child is… they can be turned around, can’t they.

A Current Affair, with Ray Martin, is one of the shows on TV that she regularly watches, and it often looks at drugs. She relates her worry about her grandchildren (like Liam, the Sydney parent) to the case of Anna Woods: that she only went out for a night, took drugs and then she was dead. Mae says she often feels sorry for the parents of today. It wasn’t a problem when her children were growing up. There may have been drugs around, but you never heard of them — not like today.

Reports of drugtaking are, of course, related to Mae’s main fear: home invasion. She believes that unemployment and drugs are the main reason for young people increasingly breaking into homes nowadays. Mae seems to read her local paper somewhat obsessively as a result: reading the court cases in the local newspaper is important to her, and she mentions doing so more than once in the interview. Yet, it seems to be the ‘home invasion’ connected stories that most catch her attention. She could not recall, for example, a front page news item in the
Advocate a couple of months before of an armed robbery at the TAB office in the shopping centre only a couple of blocks from her home! What she did remember, and was obviously disturbed by, was TV news coverage of the bashing of an old man. Though this was in Sydney, and the TAB robbery was almost next door, the attack on an older person was much closer to her.

Meanwhile, Bill, who is relaxed about his own village environment which has gates that are normally left open for the public to walk through, is also relaxed about the local media. There are few reports of crime in it, in his view; and it mainly appears to report petty crime, driving under the influence, etc. When he lived in the country it was similar. Then he did talk about local crime in the pub with his friends, but it was ‘no big deal’.

The only recent local crime news report that has worried Bill was a robbery at the National Bank. His daughter works at another branch of the National Bank.

It just gives you a ticklish feeling… Oh, I think about it, yes.

Significantly, when asked about his concerns in relation to new information technologies, his only worry was that ‘if a man's going to rob a bank… it’s been publicised… in one of the local news or TV serials. They copy the style. They're teaching them.’

PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC

In the long interviews, respondents were asked a couple of questions relating to how obsessively they were concerned with crime (via the media). One asked whether they could remember any particular crime news story in the last couple of weeks. The second was the question: ‘Overall, do you think you are nearer to the “private” end of the spectrum (worrying about things you see on TV but not talking much about them or able to do much about them) or at the more “active” end (in a community group, or through the work you do, or through letters to the media, etc)?’

We were interested in asking these questions in relation to Gerbner’s thesis about heavy television viewing and a ‘mean world’ belief; and also in the context of Gunter’s critique of Gerbner, and his own emphasis on anxious people turning to television to cultivate crime prevention competence. Mae is clearly at the privatised end of the spectrum, not even talking with her family about her fears. She certainly has a ‘mean world’ view of her environment, yet she does not watch a lot of television (unlike Gerbner’s ‘mean world’ heavy viewers), and nor does she turn instrumentally to crime shows on television in order to cultivate crime prevention competence, as Gunter suggests. In fact, Gunter’s suggestion that
the anxious viewer should find comfort and relief in drama because it ultimately reduces their anxieties by projecting a just world... [via] the ultimate triumph of justice (Gunter, 1987: 92)

does not work for Mae at all! What seems to have happened in the short period since her husband died is that Mae actually re-reads the same police shows she watched before, finding them now more ‘realistic’ and therefore more frightening. She says that she found cop shows less realistic in the past, ‘compared to now she is alone’; and she recognises how being on her own has profoundly changed her perspective. She says that these shows are getting more mean and cynical: ‘That's the trouble, they're getting too much like what's happening out on the streets.’ So, unlike Gerbner's ‘mean world' heavy viewer, she turns her TV off (especially avoiding police shows), yet her world gets meaner still — fleshed out by her avid reading of the local newspaper's court cases.

Despite the fact that Mae's case does not support Gunter's selective perception thesis in relation to the relationship between anxious viewers and the instrumental use of crime series, in many other respects she does support his theory; in particular:

- Gunter's most persistent concept that personal confidence in competence to defend oneself related most closely to risk evaluation (cf Mae's major fear about criminals who attack older people ‘who can't defend themselves');
- his view that how viewers interpret the content of TV programs depends on whether they see them as realistic or relevant; and,
- his emphasis on the situation-specific factors (in this case Mae's recent bereavement and isolation in her privatised home) in relation to television and feelings of personal vulnerability.

In contrast, Bill, though significantly older is, of course, male (as Gunter notes, women more frequently perceive a strong likelihood of being violently assaulted than men), much more secure in his ‘village' environment, much more engaged in ‘talk' which helps him manage the upset of media issues (like Port Arthur), and much more comfortable about wandering the streets of Sydney (even Cabramatta), provided it is in the day time. For Bill, then, old age is seen as a pleasant and comfortable process for an 'old bloke... on the way out.' And as a corollary, this man who is proud both of his convict ancestors as well as having as a youngster played sport against policemen who were ‘as straight as a string', can talk comfortably about the ‘mean world' and changing his perception of the police in the wake of the Wood Royal Commission.

You’d have to change it really. [But] you can’t blame the 90% — the sins of the old ones on to the young ones. I think that they’ll [the police] be all the better for it [the Royal Commission].
Consequently, Bill's understanding of ‘realism’ in TV police series does not change according to private personal circumstances, as it has with Mae, but with events in the NSW police inquiries. Consequently, he does not turn police shows off, as Mae does, but enjoys the greater realism of the new, more ‘graphic’ and ‘true-to-life’ series like *Phoenix*. Bill would like to see more police back on the beat, and thinks this would improve the safety of Sydney's public spaces — for instance at the time of the Sydney Olympics, but more generally as well. Mae's talk about the police relates only to her own privatised space: they were 'good' when called to put out the fire in her gutter.

So though Bill also sees himself as at the 'private' end of the spectrum, we can see that from his own 'isolated' village home, he in fact ventures out into the current public spheres of Sydney, both in his talking (Port Arthur and gun laws, the Royal Commission and police corruption) and his walking (Cabramatta, shopping malls, etc.). In the private/public space spectrum — in particular in the 'let's take our space back' area of empowerment for older people that Ellen, our Blue Mountains senior in the *Transport Report* emphasised — Bill, with his visits to Cabramatta and his opposition to people who wanted to privatise the Harbour beaches, is very much a denizen of public space.
Lisa and Rob are both Sydney 16 year-olds. Lisa lives with her mother and stepfather (who is affluent through his Fund Management business) in Rose Bay. Before her mother's second marriage she lived in Bondi. Her natural father is English, and his first wife (before Lisa’s mother) is a drug addict. Lisa has half-brothers as a result of both his father’s first and his mother’s second marriage. Rob lives with his mother, a lawyer, in the inner-west of Sydney with his young sister. Previously, they lived down the South Coast where Rob’s mother worked for a neighbourhood community centre.

Schedule and the ‘doxa’

Following Bourdieu, Sparks worries that the repeated viewing of cop series will, via reiteration, establish what Roland Barthes called a state of ‘myth’: where the socially arbitrary is ‘read’ by the viewing public as a self-evident, natural and unquestioned order. This area of concern is where Sparks comes closest to a ‘social control’ theory for the media; and, as always he emphasises that in this focus, too, the study of the meanings which flow between media institutions, programs and audiences, needs to be ‘the study of talk [rather] than... the study of texts.’
In the case of both Lisa and Rob, Sparks needn’t have worried. We asked them what programs relating to crime that they did watch repeatedly. Both said that they do not regularly watch cop series where the ‘good guys’ win all the time, because that is boring.

Because it’s not real and so it kinda makes the whole thing stupid. It’s O.K. if the whole thing is meant to be funny, but if it’s meant to be serious and then at the end the good guy wins, it’s just stupid and ruins the whole thing. It should be balanced. (Lisa)

Both Lisa and Rob do watch one series, *Good Guys, Bad Guys* quite regularly, however. As Lisa puts it, the ‘good guys’ in this series are bad guys, but not the bad guys. ‘Elvis is O.K. but his whole family are crooks’. The ‘nice crooks’ win, so ‘it’s funny’.

*The police in Good Guys, Bad Guys are all evil, sort of... They’re all corrupt. But in The Bill they’re all sweet, lovely.*

But *Good Guys, Bad Guys* for Lisa is ‘just TV stories, TV characters, not real.’ In contrast, *The Bill* (which she only occasionally watches — with its ‘English accents — with her mother and stepfather) is ‘just not real’, even though it tries to be, because the good guys (police) usually win. ‘Good doesn’t always win in real life.’ Similarly, Rob says, in *Good Guys, Bad Guys*,

Elvis’s... not good. Like he’ll still be devious in his actions. But in the end, he will always beat the bad guys. But he is not truly good. That’s what I like about that.

Neither Lisa nor Rob feel that cop shows are important to them: so where do they turn for their “heuristics” for ordering and understanding their concerns and feelings?

**GENRE AND VIOLENCE: LISA AT HOME AND AWAY**

For Lisa it is the ‘real life’ crime incidents shown on the TV news that really affect her, so that she does not want to watch them alone. She often tries to talk with her family about them afterwards, in order to 'to write them off'.

*Cop shows like Good Guys, Bad Guys... kind of lighten them [fears about crime] so it’s not as bad in some ways. But not on the news because they show you how much of it is actually happening, and so you’ve got a bigger chance of it happening to you.*
For Lisa, the reiterated quality of television actually increases her fears. It is not ‘doxic’, in Bourdieu’s sense, calming her terror within the ideological narrative of the ‘good police’ always winning. Indeed, police series like *Australia’s Most Wanted* actually have increased her fears because they confirmed her view as to how ‘dumb’ the police are. ‘It’s brought the little hidden thought at the back of my mind right to the front’ that the police cannot solve crimes, even with television’s help.

*It shows how much is actually happening in our community... like passes by without us kinda even knowing or being able to stop it. So it makes it worse.*

But, if she doesn’t often find ‘heuristics’ for ordering and understanding her fears in media genres (either in cop series or the news), she does talk, often via the media. For example, with her two girlfriends, Lisa will discuss major TV events like the Oklahoma Bomber or Martin Bryant (who ‘shouldn’t be given the death penalty because he just wanted to die’). Thus she converts major TV crime events into discursive logics where she talks with her friends about the right and wrongs of punishing and releasing threatening male criminals. With her friend Louise, for example, she ‘talks all the time’ about a man who raped a woman to death, and that he should not be released (when there are reports in the media that this might happen).

It is Lisa’s own personal experiences that often give substance to her ‘talk’, and to the ways in which she finds the media wanting. When she was about 11, Lisa used to go to her other girlfriend’s house. This girl was molested there by her mother’s much younger boyfriend. The mother didn’t believe her daughter when she raised the issue with her. Lisa was staying with the girl on one occasion when the man actually came into their bedroom and tried to molest her. No police were called; and on this occasion the girl did not want to tell her mother because she didn’t want to harm their relationship, and worried that she would be sent away from home. Lisa now says

*It was pretty bad in some ways. But it was O.K. because we like talked to each other heaps about it. But it was a bit bad not being able to tell anyone.*

Lisa experienced many other frightening events before she moved to Rose Bay. She recalls when she was 10 or 11 a man at school who pretended to be a doctor attempting to molest primary school children. One day when she went to the toilets with the same friend who was molested by the mother’s boyfriend, this man followed them into the toilets and they ‘freaked out and ran.’ For months after that they had to always go to the toilets in pairs.
At about the same age she was robbed in an alley near Bondi Junction train station by a man who took her Reeboks (his partner later returned the shoes to her). A boy she knew was also robbed of his shoes, hat and shirt. Her house at Bondi was burgled twice; and the family car was constantly being broken into or stolen. Often she and her friends were hassled for money or cigarettes at the train station. And in addition, there was the problem — close to her through her older half-brother — of his drug addict mother.

Though Lisa fears items on the news, she doesn’t believe this genre helps her with these personal experiences. TV, she says, goes for the ratings. You do not see ‘ordinary events’.

With child molesting it’s on a bigger scale — paedophilia, old men or something, rather than just like in a family situation… Muggings get shown heaps on cop shows, but don’t really get shown on the news very much. And the same with like family abuse or whatever, it gets shown on shows but doesn’t really get on the news so much. And drug addict mothers get shown on cop shows but not really on the news. More would happen on cop shows because they’re not believable.

So the fears she has experienced are shown on TV but in genres she dismisses as ‘not believable’. Meanwhile, the ‘real’ genres like the news, which she does take notice of, do not cover them to her satisfaction. The same is true of her ‘giant fear’ rape, or murder. Especially at Bondi where ‘the backyard was really dark — you felt people were creeping around outside’, she feared murder, and burglars coming into the house and raping her. When she was younger she used to sleep with a knife, until her mother convinced her that the burglar would only use the knife to turn on her.

As with her other personalised fears, Lisa turned to talk with other people, not to the media, to help her manage these Bondi fears. With her neighbours at Bondi, who were also ‘always being robbed’, Lisa would talk about their experiences.

It does help because you kind of know that you’re not the only person thinking that’s pretty scary… So it does help to talk, I think.

As she gets older, Lisa watches less and less crime on television, because

You experience more, whereas it kind of trivialises it on the show. You realise it’s not like that. You get a better view of the world [through your experience]. You realise it’s not like that at all, as they show it on TV shows.

Lisa’s fears are, fundamentally, about what she calls the ‘normal’ crime — of sexual abuse to children, street muggings for Reeboks, break-ins at Bondi, with all the extra risks for a female victim which that can bring. So, unlike many of the people we interviewed, major TV events like the Port Arthur massacre and the Perth serial killings did make her more fearful — but for their ‘normality’ most of all.
Yes, because they’re kind of all presumed normal people who like went off and killed 30 people or something. And the serial killer one is heaps scary because they don’t even have any idea who it could be. So some slacko serial killer’s running around. And he’s gotta look — or she’s gotta look — pretty normal.

Whereas the Port Arthur massacre doesn’t increase her long-term fears because it happened in ‘unavoidable places’, the Perth serial killings have made her more fearful ‘of everything, everywhere’. ‘I guess it does make me heaps more fearful because they are normal, presumed, people.’ Her talk with her friends, she says, is frequently about how everything seems normal but it is not, how you are not really safe anywhere you go, and you cannot really protect yourself.

The police in her real life experience are no more of a confidence boost than the ones she sees on TV, who are either ‘dumb and nothing ever gets solved’ as in *Australia’s Most Wanted*, or ‘all sweet, lovely’ as in *The Bill*. Lisa’s own experience with police has not been positive. She has a friend who is married to a wife-bashing policeman; another friend, Wendy, who has been hassled by a policeman while in Lisa’s company for her skimpy dress in the street at Waverley (‘some old granny complained’); another girlfriend who was attacked and her purse stolen on Bondi Beach, where the police, who are only three minutes walk away took 20 minutes to arrive (‘The Bondi police are so evil — they don’t care about anybody but themselves’). Lisa feels that police are getting more mean and cynical, and relates this to her personal experience at Circular Quay where she ‘used to hang out’. Many of the buskers there were her friends, and she watched the police harass them.

The cops there are really mean. And they like to harass people. The buskers, they harass them for their licences… They knew [they had asked for licences the week before], and they really enjoyed it… And they harass beggars and stuff. They’re just really mean. They get their jollies from upsetting people.

Lisa’s fears of crime are those of the ‘normal’ for a female — robbery, rape, assault, murder. She does not get help from the media: which either trivialises them, or resolves them via impossibly good and efficient police, or raises them beyond the level of the ordinary, everyday. As she sees it, television doesn’t really show rape as ‘a delicate situation — it’s only massed rape, serial rapists’ that it emphasises. ‘Delicate situations’, like the sexual molesting of her girlfriend, in its full and difficult context of family relationships, are not handled adequately by crime media. Like many females, Lisa worries most about invasion of the home by strangers; but also about the risks that can lurk from intimates within the home. The home is a major image in her discourse (she compares for example the relative safety of her Rose Bay flat with the house at Bondi, even though she finds her new location very boring). And when asked about fears in relation to new technologies, again her focus is on the home.
You can do so much with computers and stuff. It’s really scary like you can just lock yourself in your house and still not avoid crime... You can’t avoid it anywhere now. You don’t even have to go out to be faced with crime.

It is important to emphasise that, despite all of these concerns, Lisa does not seem at all obsessive in her talk or fears. Indeed, given the personal experiences she has gone through, she appears very well adjusted. She speaks about her current ‘normal, but slightly dysfunctional family’ as one of the ‘grey in-between families’ that do not get shown on television. Either, she says, the media show the poor, down-trodden ‘shaven heads with rats-tails’ from the Western Suburbs and the negative images (‘knife-fights, harassing people, breaking into cars, raping people’) of Redfern, or the ‘complete upper-class snobs.’ Among these latter, she would position the citizens of Point Piper who wanted boom gates and surveillance cameras in their streets.

You can’t lift yourself up above the rest of the community, and just make yourself the special suburb. If they do do it, like heaps of other suburbs will follow. It is a government suburb, so you can’t just decide that you own it. I mean, other people have to go through there as well.

Lisa positions herself in the middle of the private/active spectrum. She does talk a lot about fear of crime with friends and family. And she does get out and about, identifying, as we saw, with her friends the buskers of Circular Quay. But, she is also cautious. She does not walk by herself alone at night, or even go into the City alone. She makes sure she has plenty of locks on her doors and windows; though she is relaxed that some of them do not work properly, given that Rose Bay is a ‘very safe’ area. She has also learned at least one strategy from the much-despised cop shows. In this case, it is Cracker, which Lisa symptomatically both likes and fears because it is ‘real’ and about the ‘normal’.

Cracker is really dark, more realistic and it’s scary. It’s about serial killers who are normal people.

From Cracker, we suspect, she has drawn (or perhaps re-emphasised) that central concern she reiterates in her talk with friends: about murderers as ‘normal people’. But also from Cracker she has learned the strategy: ‘Don’t cry rape, cry fire. No-one will come to a rape scene, but people will come to a fire.’ Clearly, then, the media is significant as one among the many circuits of meaning that Lisa is exposed to; and she draws on different genres of crime on television (news, serious police series, comic police series) in relation to different emotions and fears. However, when it comes to drawing on “heuristics” for managing and understanding her fears, Lisa has systematically turned to talk with friends, neighbours (at Bondi), and now her ‘normal but slightly dysfunctional family’. In this process, various images, rhetorics and ideological narratives have been tested and found wanting: above all, those of the ‘good guy’ police.
VIOLENCE AND PLEASURE:
ROB AT THE COMPUTER AND AT THE CROSS

When asked about ‘good role models’, Lisa chose Elvis from Good Guys, Bad Guys because ‘he wouldn't hurt anybody, without being a goody-goody.’ She rejected Arnold Schwarzenegger as a role model: his films were ‘funny because stupid’, with so much violence ‘that you don’t take it in.’ Rob also juxtaposed his discussion of Good Guys, Bad Guys with Arnold Schwarzenegger, but with a different inflection of (and pleasure in) violence.

Asked about good role models, Rob said that he liked Schwarzenegger films for

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the violence I guess. I have seen basically every one of his movies... I like the storyline of the violence... It's the way people get hurt. Seeing people in pain. That's fun.
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Rob also enjoys playing violent computer games.

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Diablo, Doom, Quake, different war games like Command and Conquer. Just different games, different degrees of violence.
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Moving on from his discussion of Schwarzenegger movies to Good Guys, Bad Guys, Rob (like Lisa) says that he prefers this series because ‘good guys’ don't always win. But, his reason is different. Instead of happy endings in cops shows he 'would rather see a dramatic ending — like the good guys getting hurt at the end. Adds more spirit to it.'

For Rob, violent shows are pleasurable, especially when at the expense of the ‘good guys’:

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Yeah, it's the level of violence. I like watching violent shows... It's the action scenes, and whether somebody gets hurt... You see somebody get shot — it's good when a cop gets killed because you know it's one for the bad guys, finally... It's the same with computer games, like Command and Conquer. It's a war game where you can either be the good guys or the bad guys. I always like to be the bad guys so that I can beat the good guys.
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So that whereas Lisa shifts her discussion from the ‘unreal’ police series to the more scary news (where she tries to manage her fear by talking about it with her family), Rob compares the cop series with the more ‘real’ world of Renegade, a bounty hunter series that emphasises police corruption, and other ‘true stories about death, murder.’

The difference between Lisa's emphasis on rape and sexual abuse (via the news and personal experience) and Rob's pleasure in violence is, of course, gendered and not unexpected. Rob is, in fact, exactly the kind of male teenager playing with violent computer games that the Sydney parents' focus group (see next chapter) most worried about.
But it would be simplistic to make too categorical a contrast between Lisa and Rob; and, as we will see, the parents’ fears are also somewhat simplistic. If we look at the various circuits of meaning that Rob draws on: in relation to his different emotions and fears; at his ‘heuristics’ for managing them; and at the various images, rhetorics and ideological narratives that he tests out against his experience, Rob appears in fact in a much less macho guise.

This is evident, first of all, in not only what he says about his enjoyment of computer games

I would not say that it reflects on the personality. I’m not a violent person. It doesn’t really influence me;

but also how he talks about his ‘fun’ in the violence of Schwarzenegger movies. We recall that Lisa, too, found the violence ‘funny’. Like her, Rob finds his ‘fun’ in the unreality of the violence.

That’s why maybe it could be fun. It doesn’t seem real. You see people in pain, like if somebody was in pain on the ground I wouldn’t know what to do. But people on TV, because they are actors, they mightn’t have the experience about what pain’s like. It might seem funny. I just like seeing the good guy lose for once.

When we hear Rob say, with real feeling, that he would not be able to handle real life pain on the ground in front of him, we believe him. And part of his ‘fun’ in violence is clearly a narrative one: he is sick and tired of the cliched too-pure hero always winning.

Rob’s fear of real-life violence is also evident in his use of the media for personal strategies when he goes to ‘risky’ places. He says that media coverage of certain ‘problem’ areas that he occasionally visits do make him fearful.

Kings Cross — sometimes they talk about that and occasionally I go there to see friends or something. I worry about people there. Like you get bad news on a certain area, when you go there you worry about what’s going to happen to you.

Because of media influence, he says that he would never go to Cabramatta.

Different gangs or drugs. See images of lots of syringes. Just the images and interviews about it.

As regards Kings Cross,

Occasionally I hear something about a stabbing or a mugging. I walk down the street with nice clothes on, good target. I get worried about that.

Whereas Rob has some fears about his own inner-West city suburb (the bank across the road has been held up, and there was a killing at the local ice rink), overall that area
doesn't really worry me a lot. Sometimes the police are there. I know that if anything goes wrong there is always somebody there to help me.

In contrast, he has only once seen a policeman at Kings Cross, and would not go there alone, even in the daytime.

On the other hand, sometimes the media can offer you useful strategies, Rob believes.

When they interview... on TV about how he mugs people, at least [you hear] different strategies, so if somebody actually came up to me and tried to mug me... [I know] things like walk, side swipe and duck easily, like different strategies, how you approach them.

Having some strategies, and looking around himself all the time, gives Rob the confidence to walk home from parties in Canterbury at 1 o'clock in the morning.

If the media report they are putting more police on the beat, you feel a bit more secure... So I'm still walking alone at night, whereas that sometimes used to get me a bit worried.

But he does also have a geography of places to avoid. Some of this map comes from the media: Kings Cross, Cabramatta. But some comes from local talk and gossip.

Certain areas in Sydney — Hyde Park. I have heard people say you don't go there at night.

Whereas for our interviewer, Hyde Park 'is beautiful at night... beautiful fairy lights — it looks magical', Rob has more realistic local knowledge. Staying at the Whitlam Square YMCA recently, Rob was warned by 'students who lived in the area' not to walk in Hyde Park at night.

He argues that the media do not seriously represent issues of safety in public places.

You hear bits and pieces, but there is no real focus that I know of. You don’t hear them talking about certain open areas like Hyde Park — I've never heard that one on the news. The only way I hear about it is that people told me not to go there at night.

This is why Rob feels there will be an increase in crime in Sydney during the Olympics: because there will be ‘more people who do not know the area, do not know where not to go at certain times.’

Clearly, then, Rob draws on both media and local talk to construct his map of which parts of the City to avoid, strategies to adopt and so on. As regards his fear of home invasion, however, and unlike Lisa's actual Bondi experience, most of his fear seems to be generated by the media. Consequently,

When you see home invasions... I am cautious... I would lock the doors to be safe when I'm alone. But if there are other people home I won’t.
Interestingly, though, it is another television series which provides Rob's answer to the Point Piper residents who want to set up boom gates around their homes.

There was an episode on Millennium, a TV show that I watch. It was where people paid to have their community guarded by bricks, but crime can still get in... It was actually internal. Groups of people, somebody who always wanted to challenge the system — it doesn't matter. You can put walls around entire cities, you will have crime... Like the people in the movie were saying that it must be from outside the area — someone must be getting in at night. Instead of thinking that it could be internal... That's real... [that] they think it's the person down the street not the person next door.

Even in his own local environment, where Rob generally feels more safe, he uses television series in specific ways. He watches Australia's Most Wanted, for example, and because of his work as a checkout chick, where

You see a lot of people, I might watch just in case I see somebody. Apart from that you just watch [Australia's Most Wanted] for a genuine interest. I would not get afraid to watch it.

Overall, Rob does not have as negative a view of the police as Lisa; though he is as aware as she is (both through television watching and through personal experience of police corruption when he lived down the South Coast) that cop series generally give too positive and one-dimensional an image of the police. Whereas Lisa's response to Australia's Most Wanted is that it shows the police as dumb, for Rob it represents the criminals as too dumb. 'It's a very narrow view of crime and the way the police operate — like it's only focused on one particular area.'

At the same time, the media represent drugs within youth culture too negatively. Rob has been to a number of Rave parties, where drugs were freely available.

The way they tell it, they don't have an understanding of what actually goes on... The reality is very open. TV shows just one point of view. It shows the bad things that are happening. But there is a lot more good things... Like the people, you meet real nice people. It is like nobody is crazy or anything. But they're the kind of things they show on TV — somebody comes up to talk... just gives them drugs... takes them home, videotapes them, and kills them. It is just one point [of view]. For starters, you would not take anything off somebody unless you paid for it.

Like many of our other teenager respondents, Rob spoke with irritation about the media's coverage of the Anna Woods affair. Now, at least, he says, things are much safer.
From my experience now, people tell you not to drink too much water — that’s how she died, I believe, she drowned. And people control — like your friends control how much water you drink, and you decide to buy one bottle, and you only drink that. So it’s a lot more safer. It is rarely that people go out of control.

But, in Rob’s view, none of this has been picked up by media series. A recent *Millennium* presented the ‘evil pusher-takes-home-and-murders-young person scenario’, whereas in *Renegade*

*This person was operating illegal Raves, and they would spike the punch and drink whatever with certain drugs. The way they imitated the Rave scene at the time was unrealistic.*

Rob’s account of the media’s coverage of the Rave scene indicates the way in which he uses the media as just one among a number of circuits of meaning that he is exposed to. When it comes to walking home at night, from parties, Rob is comforted by newspaper reports of extra police on the beat, and carries in his head ‘mugger’s tips’ from a TV interview. When he is in the proximity of Hyde Park at night, it is local gossip, not media information he listens to. At his Rave clubs, he listens to the expertise of other ecstasy users, and not *Millennium* or *Renegade*. When he thinks of the use of boom gates and surveillance cameras in affluent areas, however, he does read this *via Millennium’s* critique of our fear of ‘stranger danger’ and the ‘other’. And sometimes when working as a checkout chick, he is on the lookout on behalf of *Australia’s Most Wanted*.

Rob is intelligently aware of his surroundings, and makes distinctions about the safety of different environments — based on a mix of media and interpersonal sources of information. He also makes distinctions between media forms: he argues (from experience) that the local newspaper does not report significant events which have happened within a few metres of his house, like a bank robbery and an ice rink knifing, because

*he local paper tries to give a good view of the community not the bad. But the national [media] doesn’t have any base, they can talk about the bad things in areas.*

Still, he thinks it is important to get a ‘good view’ of the community, and believes the local press can give its public ‘good advice’.

*It just helps — gives me an idea of what’s going on. Like I said before, I would rather not know what is going on, but there is no way that I cannot know, because I will always find out about it. So it’s better having a good view of it than a bad view. Like the local paper would give you a very good view.*
Rob began his interview by saying that he didn’t like cop series in which good always won. He ends by talking about the importance of media emphasising the good in local contexts. This is not, of course, a contradiction. Police narratives which conclude with the ‘good guys’ always winning invest the ‘good’ in an institution (the police), while the public is passive and victimised. In contrast, a media which draws attention to ‘the good’ in specific local contexts can emphasise the power of citizens to construct their own environment. That is a theme which we will see significantly extended among our Cleveland Street (Sydney) focus group of teenagers in the next chapter.

In this chapter we have used the long interview method to examine the way in which teenagers, parents and older people negotiate different circuits of communication (including talk and different genres of the media) in relating to fear of crime. In the next chapter, we will draw on focus group interviews to concentrate more closely on differences between (and within) generational groups in relation to fear of crime and the media.
THE MEDIA STUDY
FOCUS GROUPS

Following Sparks and Taylor, we have begun to ask (via long interviews) the following kinds of questions of our media ‘audiences’:

- their overall enjoyment of police series: do these make them feel better or more ill at ease about the world, or make no difference?
- their pleasures in narrative: do they prefer shows where the police always win?
- their perception of a ‘mean world’: are images of the police (and crime) becoming more cynical?
- their pleasures in scheduling: are there some crime (or other ‘fear’) shows that they just never miss?
- their feelings of personal/family vulnerability in relation to crime shows: are any of the issues raised directly relevant to them?
- their feelings about crime representations of place: would they prefer crime shows that deal with their own or ‘other’ environments?
- their worries about different information technologies: are they more concerned by, for example, television, Internet, videos etc in relation to crime?
- their preferences vis-à-vis type and style of police series.
- their ‘moral agendas’ vis-à-vis media role models (for example in relation to violence).

Other questions dealt with issues of time, public space, police knowledge, local media, and self-concept in relation to degree of ‘privacy’ or ‘activism’.

In this section we will look more systematically at our different age groups’ responses to these questions in focus groups in Sydney, the Blue Mountains and Bathurst. These responses will take us a bit further with Sparks’ agenda in examining,

*different senses of the term “fear” [that] may be operative for different circumstances and groups of people, so that women’s fear might differ from men’s, or the fears of the elderly from those of the young, not just in “quantity” but in kind. (1992: 11)*
Our choice of seniors’ focus groups allows us to take further the ‘privatised v independent’ contrast we have been examining so far among older people. As pointed out in our Audit Report, there has been a systematic ageism built into many institutions (academic no less than media) in starting from the assumption of older people as ‘elderly victims’. We might see the issue of older people and fear of crime differently if we start from the opposite assumption: of older people as agents.

In choosing one of our focus groups we did start from that assumption. The Combined Pensioners focus group that we conducted in Sydney had a number of long-term union activists in it. In addition, there was a woman, born in Ireland, who had experienced unemployment during the Depression of the 1930s, had been widowed young after coming to Australia, and had then been ‘forced to fight her own way in a new country’. This group described itself as at the ‘active’ end of the privatised/active spectrum.

We do discuss these things, and we do write letters that we don’t get printed... because we tell the truth about things. There was a big article of half a page attacking older people in the Sun Herald and we, as Combined Pensioners, wrote a letter in telling the truth. What they were blaming [was us]. They were saying that the young were paying for the old. We wrote a letter giving them the statisticians’ figures and everything. What we said is that it’s not the young or the old that’s causing these sort of things, it’s the people escaping tax, and we named Packer and Murdoch as two that doubled their assets. But it wasn’t printed... In order to understand anything you’ve got to look at both sides of it. You’ve got to look for contradictions in things. When we get that we can solve a lot of the problems. We’ve got to talk to other people, and we’ve got to unite with other people to band for our common interests. When we do that we’ll start to get somewhere. But we’re not going to get that with the press only looking at one side. (male)

If the young and the old instead of being separated like that, they got together more. (female)

Not all older people speak this way, of course. The following conversation from Bathurst seniors is perhaps more typical (a husband, followed by his wife speak first).

I guess I like to insulate myself... I feel I want the good things in life, and I don’t want all the bad things that are happening around the world constantly being thrown at me on television. It spoils the evening. It spoils everything for me — whether it’s a constant lot of murder or whether it’s Bosnia or whatever. So I’m something of a chicken about it, I guess. I like to smell the roses.
I’ll watch [the TV news] and I’ll face it and I know that that kind of thing is going on. I’m not going to put my head in the sand like an ostrich and pretend it doesn’t happen, nor do I think that it just couldn’t happen here.

If I could qualify what I just said, I think the thing that triggers my attitude is that I feel so helpless in every one of these spheres — whether it’s murders, whether it’s drugs, whether it’s poverty overseas, whatever it is I just feel so powerless against all the forces that are around the world, and I guess that I just back away from it, sorry...

As I was growing up I never had the fear of crime. But now all I can say is that you’re not safe — even in your own home or out at night, and I will not go out at night...

I just think that our generation and our society has completely lost the battle as far as crime is concerned.

Even though there is some variety of opinion in this Bathurst group of older people, none of them feel empowered: it is just that some watch the media more than others in order to know what to be fearful of. As a group, they are not much like the Sydney Combined Pensioners, resembling more closely the Blue Mountains Senior Citizens who positioned themselves at the ‘privatised’ end of the spectrum.

We can be disturbed about it, but we don’t really do anything.

But what can we do about it, really? I mean if we were maybe twenty years younger we’d be more involved.

It is important to emphasise, though, that these older people (even when ‘privatised’) are seldom terrified into passivity by fear of crime.

No, we’re not terrified by it. We feel sad about it that it’s come to this sort of thing, that life’s not as easy as it used to be.

But, like many other older people, these Blue Mountains Senior Citizens still move around in the daytime, using a range of strategies: a whistle in the pocket, an apple and a crochet needle on the train, a purse hidden in an inside pocket when travelling down to Sydney, waiting in the bank if there is ‘a mob of young people outside’, never taking house keys to Sydney, and so on. But how do these different groups of older people manage their relationship with crime on the media?
Overall enjoyment of police series: do these make them feel better or more ill at ease about the world, or make no difference?

The focus group of Sydney seniors is a strong example of Sparks’ point that fear of crime, far from being simply the result of direct experience of crime cannot ‘be separated out from other experiences and hazards and troubles’ (1992:12). This group of four males and three females (all 60+ and members of the Combined Pensioners Group) is dominated by three men and one woman who regard economic rationalism as the cause of crime through creating unemployment. Consequently, they argue that there is far too much focus on the effects of crime, rather than its causes, viz. unemployment, the drug problem, power brokers and the big corporations. For some of this group it is the Australian media magnates who ‘are the real criminals’, doubling their assets in one year while ‘economic rationalism is putting workers out by thousands’. They argue for an independent ABC, since this is the only channel where economic rationalist propaganda may not be peddled.

The group’s choice and enjoyment of police shows tend to flow from these broader socio-economic worries. Most enjoy The Bill: because it is on the ABC (‘I am opposed to privatisation, so I support the ABC’); and because it is ‘realistic... made in the streets, the police force as they are.’ In contrast American police series are rejected a) because the group dislikes the power of advertising on young people, and b) because they are too violent and full of swearing, which children come to adopt as the norm. One woman who watches Blue Heelers feels that ‘a lot of crime is glamorised by the media, and... we as a public are getting more desensitised.’ She feels that she would not have watched something like Blue Heelers 5 to 10 years ago.

The Bathurst group of seniors (2 males and 4 females of 58+) also like The Bill (some watch Wexford and Frost also), and contrast the ABC shows with the (mainly American) police series that show too much graphic violence (one man is also sickened by some shows on SBS and ABC when they are very violent: ‘It makes you feel afraid and makes you wonder what it does to the children’). Whereas the Sydney group contrast ‘cause’ (economic rationalism) and ‘effect’ of crimes and violence, this group contrasts ‘after the crime’ series (like The Bill) with ‘before the crime’ (mainly American) series which ‘show people how to do it’. They worry that children are impressed by ‘before the crime’ police series; and there is quite a high degree of worry about rising crime rates in this group.

The Katoomba group of senior citizens (11 women between 65 and 80) ‘only like the English ones’ (like The Bill). They argue that there is less ‘shooting and screaming’ in these.

But American cop shows, oh my god, they seem to be having a private war every time. They don’t sort of go out to catch somebody, they go out to shoot somebody.
Others like Australian cop shows (Cap Shop and Homicide) because ‘believable’. Cop shows don’t make them nervous because they are ‘not real’; in contrast The Bill gives them confidence in the police.

**Pleasures in narrative: do they prefer shows where the police always win?**

The Sydney group prefer good to win; but they define good as the opposite of ‘the acquisitive society, where it’s really big to make money... exploit your fellow man.’ They would like to see television show the better side of people, helping each other. The Bathurst group also prefer it when the good prevails, because ‘it makes you feel better’. Overall, they worry that so many TV programs are directed towards crime and violence, and think that it is young people (in their 30s and younger) who want it; and they believe these young people may be desensitised to violence. One woman, picking up this theme, describes grandchildren who come from a property and only want guns, because their parents shoot kangaroos. The Katoomba seniors also mainly prefer the good guys to win because ‘it gives you a better feeling... makes you feel good... more secure.’ Some, though, disagree, arguing that in real life ‘the good people sometimes lose out, I’m afraid’.

**Perception of a ‘mean world’: are images of the police (and crime) becoming more cynical?**

The Sydney group again focuses on unemployment and the way in which Pauline Hanson is able to exploit divisions between Asians and others as a result. Further, ‘the news media are concentrating on division’, because that keeps the wealthy in power. There is agreement (via a woman who originated from Ireland) that there have always been divisions in Australia (between Catholics and Protestants, for example), always ‘ghettos’, and that immigrants have always brought crime problems with them. But there is a feeling, via the discussion of Hanson, that things have become more cynical, partly as a result of media coverage of the Wood Royal Commission. No-one in the group, however, was surprised at the corruption revealed. One man speaks of a friend’s daughter who died on drugs: he told the police who the dealers were, but they did nothing.

The Bathurst group is sure that the world is much more mean because of television violence. One man describes how his daughter (in her 30s) is so desensitised to violence that she recommended to him a film with ‘appalling’ violence in it. ‘But my life has been insulated against it. And that’s how I want to keep it. I don’t want violence in my lounge room every night.’ There is general agreement that the younger generation have been brought up on a diet of television crime and violence by ‘TV as baby sitter’ (and now via computer games), and so have less compassion and understanding about the reality of violence. Hence younger people will ‘go and knock somebody on the head or kill somebody for a pair of joggers’. The feeling is that older people have a compassion that younger people have lost.
The Katoomba group also thinks that images of police and crime in the media have become more cynical (showing police corruption), and that consequently they all feel more cynical. They also put their feeling of cynicism down to the fact that police are no longer on the beat, so that you only see them through the media.

**Pleasures in Scheduling: Are There Some Crime (or Other ‘Fear’) Shows That They Just Never Miss?**

The Sydney group (as mainly ABC watchers) do not admit to watching series regularly. But they do, by and large, watch *The Bill* because it is ‘ungarnished’. The Bathurst group also regularly watch *The Bill*; and one woman watches *Australia’s Most Wanted* because ‘it proves that by watching it people do ring in and they do catch people.’ However, she admits that she would not watch it if she lived alone; and other seniors avoid it for that reason. Apart from *Blue Heelers*, the Katoomba group watches regularly only British police series: *Thin Blue Line*, *The Bill*, *Heartbeat* (partly for its scenery, partly because it reflects a time when police were on the beat, meeting people and ‘checking up on things’), *Hamish Macbeth*, and *Wexford*.

**Feelings of Personal/Family Vulnerability in Relation to Crime Shows: Are Any of the Issues Raised Directly Relevant to Them?**

In the Sydney group it is the women who respond mainly to this. As we have found elsewhere, responses vary from the independent senior who lives alone, and walks/travels at night without being afraid (‘Am I going to be a prisoner in my own home? No way... I would never get to do anything if I was fearful!’) to the older woman who is very fearful since having her bag snatched, and because of all the stories she sees of home invasions. Seniors agree that the media has made people both more fearful of crime and more cautious: ‘there’s so much focus on it today it makes you more cautious. There was [crime] news before but you didn’t have it bombarded at you... every half-hour.’ Overall, though, they feel that though crime news is blown out of all proportion on TV, it is valuable for the local press to cover issues like bag snatching. Even though the Sydney men worry about the last independent local paper being taken over by the media magnates, they grudgingly agree that in this respect the local press is of value.

The Bathurst group generally feel that the media make their experiences more frightening. One man and his wife describe graphically a case of road rage directed at them in Sydney after he stopped his car when he was lost. He feels that the media has made this situation worse. On the other hand, the Katoomba group argue that one thing they have picked up from the media is the need to lock your house while you are in it. Although the story (whether in *The Bill* or in a local news report) might make them more fearful, they also feel protected by being given that kind of information. All three of the groups of seniors made the point that they were more security conscious at home now as a result of the media.
Feelings about crime representations of place: would they prefer crime shows that deal with their own or 'other' environments?

The Sydney group argue that 'the media doesn't accommodate our style of life' because of its need to sensationalise. Again, there is an emphasis from the men on the propaganda role of the media: 'the role of the media in our society is to mislead the ordinary Jack and Jill', hence the recent Hunter miners' strike was not covered in its everyday reality but gave the 'Rio Tinto view'. As regards the urban environments that the media emphasise, two broad points are made by this group: i) that there has been far too much media emphasis (because of developers' interests) on further concentration of people into the coastal cities (one man compares this with middle-eastern Arab countries which develop desert areas using artesian water); ii) that media and advertising create consumerist expectations among the young, so that small inner-urban cottages which once everybody could afford are being torn down and 'grass castles' put up. There is also some emphasis on the 'society' orientation of media urban stories rather than about 'your ordinary Joe Blow.'

The Bathurst group emphasise the fear of AIDS and drugs that the media has brought into their country lives. One woman says she fears at night in bed being raped and getting AIDS; and her experience of escalating violence on suburban trains ('No-one is game to move to help anybody because you don't know when you're going to be jabbed with a needle') has added to this. 'I mean... if this reaches out into Bathurst, the same fear I and my family have in Sydney, then heaven help us.' A man says he fears break-ins much more now because drugs make burglars more unpredictable and dangerous. 'I've had no experience with drugs directly. But the television has taught me that people that under the influence of drugs that break into your house are just maniacs. That's my biggest fear.' Others agree with this, saying that it is the graphic images of television (rather than just reading about it in the local newspaper) that makes you aware of it. The general emphasis of the Bathurst seniors is of city and country life coming (unpleasantly) closer together via things like drug crimes, youth violence and AIDS.

Whereas the Bathurst seniors believe that there is plenty of crime now in their area (there is a unanimous emphasis on the drug problem among young people in Bathurst), the older people in Katoomba don't expect much local crime news because 'there's not much of it here'. We saw in the Transport Study that the Blue Mountains seniors felt much safer once their trains were back in the Mountains; and the same view was expressed in relation to this question about the media's portrayal of urban localities. These seniors said that the media emphasised the crime in Cabramatta and the Western Suburbs, making them very fearful of travelling through those areas.
Overall, the Sydney seniors emphasised that the issue of media coverage of their own or some other environment is irrelevant; it is the underlying structure of both that is important, and seldom discussed; the Bathurst seniors worry at the closing of the gap between country and city in terms of underlying crime; and the Blue Mountains seniors still feel quite comfortable at their distance from city crime (but are fearful when travelling towards it).

**Feelings about public space and ‘big event’ crimes**

The Sydney group men feel that the main effect of the Port Arthur massacre was to increase the Prime Minister’s popularity at the cost of the public; whereas guns in general are the result of the ‘armament kings’ making money. This leads on to a discussion of imperialist countries using guns to control Africa, Europe etc. ‘Multinational capital is at the back of it’: controlling for example development in Peru, Australia; generating terrorism, and so on. As regards the safety of public spaces, they argue for ‘more cops back on the beat’.

The Bathurst group speak of being made much more fearful by events like the Port Arthur and Strathfield massacres. One woman said that ‘I found I couldn’t go in a shopping centre… I was petrified. I’m looking up and down escalators thinking who’s going to blast us.’ The women will not contemplate going to Sydney during the Olympics for fear of terrorism. ‘No-one’s going to tell me there won’t be another Port Arthur.’ As regards the residents of Point Piper wanting boom gates and surveillance cameras, they feel that this is a sad commentary on society, but it is a need that is spreading. One woman recalled visiting a friend in Sydney some years ago: ‘All the windows were all guarded up, all with mesh and everything, and I thought, fancy having to live in a house like that, but now it’s quite normal for people in Bathurst.’

The Blue Mountains group were not made more personally fearful by these events, and some were appalled by the reporting of the Port Arthur Massacre (as well as the ‘obscene’ coverage of the Gulf War). They do, however, watch less television than they used to, largely because of the increased focus on violent crime. While they think that there will be more crime in public spaces as a result of the Sydney Olympics, there is general agreement that putting more police back on the beat would reduce public space crime. They are in general agreement, too, that the ‘fortified enclaves’ idea of Point Piper residents is ‘not the answer’. The ‘independent’ minded seniors argue that more people in the streets would be encouraged at night if there was less media ‘fear-mongering’; others, though, feel that there are real risks involved. ‘Bring back conscription’ was a popular response here.
Worries about different information technologies: are they more concerned by, for example, television, Internet, videos etc in relation to crime?

The Sydney seniors express a lot of concern about media technologies: television which encourage kidnappers by giving examples; videos which encouraged Martin Bryant and the Bolger killing in England; the Internet which has shown children how to make bombs. However, this group refuse to see censorship as a simple solution, arguing that you cannot separate this issue from more fundamental things like the people who are making money out of new technologies. If more ethics should be taught to children from school up, so too should a more ethical example be given from the top down. But the Skase-type entrepreneurs; the Prime Minister making the Australian public pay to subsidise the Bell telephone company in the US; the previous (Labor) Prime Minister being named the ‘best treasurer in the capitalist world’ by an international monetary organisation whose only interest is to take profit out of Australia: none of these show any more ethics than the entrepreneurs who drove the railways across America a century before.

Both the Bathurst and the Katoomba seniors’ main concern about new technologies was about children ‘while their parents are out at work’: violent videos that were sending ‘children off the rails’; the Internet that taught them how to make bombs; violent computer games made for children. While saying they did not really understand some of the new technologies, the seniors of Bathurst and Katoomba did feel the need for more control of them.

Knowledge of the police: preferences vis-à-vis type and style of police series

There is quite a lot of direct experience of the police in the Sydney group, particularly in relation to trade union matters. There is some agreement that many a young, local policeman ‘will do his best to do the right thing’ (though one man worries about the types who choose to go into the police force). The problem they argue is at the top because ‘when the chips are down the job of the police is to protect capital, to protect big business.’ They discuss different police attitudes to union marches and demonstrations. There is some agreement that media images of the police are positive (though some give the example of the Royal Commission against this). A number enjoy individual police series (Heartbeat) but the argument is given that it is children’s diet of (particularly American) violent cop series rather than individual ones that we need to worry about.
The Bathurst group all have a positive image of the police, though they recognise the full spectrum ‘from corruption to good police work’. Their preference is for British-style ‘after the event’ police series, rather than the more violent American series. They also worry about the violence on the news (including the ABC). ‘Why do we have to see it over and over and over again, the same incident, night after night?’

The Blue Mountains group gets its image of the police almost entirely from the media. The recent media coverage of police corruption has reduced their respect: if people right at the top are corrupt ‘what hope is there for the poor little ordinary bloke in the car’. They also blame their loss of some respect for the police on the fact that they do drive around in cars; and say that the reason they like police series like *Heartbeat* and *The Bill* is that you see good face-to-face police contact with the public there.

*Moral agendas* vis-à-vis media role models
(for example in relation to violence)

The Sydney group find it easier to think of bad media role models than good ones: President Reagan (who put actors’ money into the police force), John Wayne. One positive role model mentioned is Parker, an American liberal who was blacklisted under McCarthy, and who refused to compromise his principles. Schwarzenegger movies are strongly disliked for their violence; and also because of his hypocrisy under Reagan attacking drugs when he himself took steroids.

Neither the Bathurst nor the Katoomba group find it easy to think of good media role models either. Schwarzenegger is universally disliked because he is violent and ‘unbelievable’.

Local Media

Potentially, the local media could be the space where the ‘other’ is challenged. The mass media’s construction of Redfern or Cabramatta as Aboriginal or Asian ‘threat’ has, we have already seen, led to many people saying that they would not even be prepared to visit those areas, and for others to breathe a sigh of relief when their train has gone well past their region. The local press within these areas could present the ‘other side of the picture’ and ‘look for the contradictions’ that the Sydney seniors’ group are calling for.
This group, however, argue that it does not happen because of monopoly control of the media. It upsets some of this group that, as they understand it, the last independent local newspaper has passed into the hands of the monopolies. Consequently, when they think of their grandchildren's future, their concern is less the Bathurst seniors' one of an ocean of violence, drugs and AIDS spreading from Sydney to engulf their grandchildren, but rather the loss of a genuine education. Through their own political background many of this group, although not university educated, gained an alternative view: 'we might be illiterate in knowing a lot about technology and all that sort of thing, but we weren't illiterate about what was going on.'

I think we’re getting one side of an argument. You see, the people that control the media, very wealthy people, have got together, and the people down below I think are only getting one side of it. And when any of us who’ve seen the newspapers get up and say “Oh these people have got to struggle”, it just doesn’t happen. That’s the bring problem today… Kids today are much smarter than we were, but they’re only getting one side of the picture.

So, even though ‘the local paper’s the one that we take most notice of because they're giving us information that's very close to home and your own environment’, this media, too, is ‘not telling us what’s really going on with the big problems today’, like unemployment under the system of economic rationalism. One member of this group thought that as researchers we had asked them ‘a lot of futile questions… every one's the same', because the questions were too narrowly focussed on the media and individual fear of crime, rather than teasing out the underlying social relations between them.

The Bathurst group, too, worried about the local media. But here the inflection was different. Because of the worry in this seniors’ group of the spreading of the evils of the city to their country area — drugs, AIDS, violence — they worried about the ‘top men’ in the local newspaper censoring local crimes. They argued that advertising pressure hushes up some things, and bureaucratic pressure hushes up other things: thus they had heard ‘on the grapevine’ that the education department had hushed up an issue of paedophilia in a local school. The group finds this ‘appalling’ and ‘bad for the community’. But it is ‘human nature’, and is thus ‘happening in every walk of life… It’s not what you are, but who you know.’ In response to this recognition, some of the group say you still need to read the local media in order to know where drugs, crime, and violence are lurking (one man carries a gunstick as part of his ‘defensive plan’ when he goes walking in Bathurst, though ‘the first thing in my plan is flight’).

One senior says
we've lost the battle, it's gone... I just think that our generation and our society has completely lost the battle as far as crime is concerned, and I think that the next twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years is going to be so bad that we're just going to lose it. We've got Asian organised crime coming into our country now and I think that the police are just powerless to cope with... the drug situation... How I feel for my grandchildren is what I end up on: I think that our new generation coming on have just lost the battle, they're going to have terrible things happen. We lived in the best generation.

Older people, when they look past their own weakening bodies, also look both backwards and forwards, on behalf of their grandchildren. What they see is not a pretty picture: unemployment, crime, drugs, AIDS, corruption in high places, a widespread loss of ethics. According to their location and knowledge system, though, seniors inflect their reading of those problems (and with it their particular fears and anxieties) very differently. The result may make them either more or less determined to be active in the years they have before them.
There has been a widespread tendency for researchers of ‘young people’ to draw on the (readily available) source of university students. Our intention, following Sparks, was to use qualitative research to examine

\[ \text{different senses of the term “fear” [that] may be operative for different circumstances and groups of people,} \]

distinguishing not only ‘the fears of the elderly from those of the young’, but also noting differences in fear of crime within the categories of ‘senior’ and ‘teenager’.

Consequently, we chose very different groups of seniors to interview, indicating that the stereotype of the passive ‘elderly’ needs both challenging and contextualising. Similarly, while running one focus group with university students, we have focused on widely different groups of teenagers. So, although the age of our teenage focus groups do not differ by much (last year at school/first year at university), their situations and contexts certainly do.

Our three focus groups consisted of: eight teenagers containing a highly vocal Aboriginal group from Cleveland Street High School, Sydney; a group of white middle-class year 12 students from Katoomba High School in the Blue Mountains; and a group of first year students from Charles Sturt University at Bathurst.

**Overall enjoyment of police series: do these make them feel better or more ill at ease about the world, or make no difference?**

The Cleveland Street High School group immediately focussed the discussion on the media stereotyping of

\[ \text{one particular race... There's a lot of drugs here but there's a lot of other suburbs. Like Cabramatta, it's not in the media as Redfern is.} \]

\[ \text{And all those other areas are worse than Redfern.} \]

\[ \text{There is drugs there.} \]

\[ \text{Not all the people in Redfern are dogs, like alcoholics...} \]

\[ \text{It's not like people say it is in the media.} \]

\[ \text{They say all the bad points, they don't say the good points.} \]

\[ \text{Yeah, they say all the negative stuff, and not enough positive.} \]

This Sydney group sometimes watch Police Camera Action, Blue Heelers, and NYPD Blue. These ‘make out that police are the number 1’; and ‘that they will catch all criminals, which they don’t’.
These teenagers have a lot of direct experience of police.

They just blame the kids. If they see you walking down the street in a group or something, they’ll pull you up and that. If they see you walking down the street with your mother or something, they’ll just drive right past you.

But you don’t see that, they say, on TV cop shows. ‘They’re made out to be perfect — they do nothing wrong.’

The Blue Mountains group watch and dislike a lot of cop shows, and don’t feel these relate to their experience too closely. But,

*Things like The Bill do because they’re more realistic.*

*(chorus of ‘Yeah, The Bill!’)*

*But the Yankee stuff is all…*

*Yeah, some of it’s stupid.*

*It’s so exaggerated.*

*And they always get the bad guy.*

Blue Heelers is useless, because I mean that the town they live in would be the crime capital of Australia with the amount of stuff that goes on there. But The Bill, even though it’s London, is more realistic because it’s a city and there is more crime there. Whereas in a little country town like Blue Heelers it’s stupid.

These students live, of course, in a country town, but they find little of relevance in police shows supposedly about them. Instead, they like the small details of *The Bill*, ‘just petty stuff that you would get wherever you live.’ The ‘big serial killer’ or ‘gang’ focus of American shows would, however, make a number of them fearful if they went to New York. Most do not get worried by either the American or *The Bill* type of shows. But, one girl says (to a chorus of female agreement)

*Shows like Australia’s Most Wanted, in comparison to something like The Bill I do find a bit stressful to watch.*

*Yeah, because they’re real.*

*Yeah, at least like The Bill it’s enjoyable because it’s got good storylines and they’re actors and so it doesn’t matter. But when it’s something real you wouldn’t watch that…*

*In Australia’s Most Wanted they always show a picture of the person that you see doing it and you always think it looks like someone you know.*

*(chorus of ‘Yes’ from the girls)*
And then you think you’ve seen the person somewhere around so you sort of look around more.

Yeah, you see him everywhere.

It’s all psychological... But you do look around more and you get worried. While stuff like Blue Heelers is so pathetic, it’s not real.

All these girls obviously have watched Australia’s Most Wanted, but they say they do not watch it anymore.

The Charles Sturt first year students include some studying communication. Consequently they, like the Cleveland Street students, begin by pointing to media stereotyping. But whereas the Cleveland Street teenagers base this in experience, the CSU students have a more theoretical discourse: violence as a ‘social construction’ by the media. Nevertheless, they do work their enjoyment of cop series through in relation to real experiences. One has been arrested four times, and he has found his treatment by the police ‘harsh’ (for being drunk and disorderly). A female student who has had friends that have been in trouble with the police confirms his view; but she also likes the ‘caring’ policeman in A Country Practice (which, to laughter, she apologises for watching — in the mornings). Most of the group reject the ‘family’ caring shows like Blue Heelers for being lightweight ‘like sitcom’. In contrast one watches NYPD Blue (though it is very graphic and can make you ‘ill at ease’ with the police); another (knowing ‘a little science’) is made uneasy by the genetic engineering aspects of The X-Files (which otherwise is far-fetched); and all of them agree that The Bill is one of the most ‘realistic’ police series, which can ‘make you more worried’. In contrast, Water Rats is a joke with them: ‘I never knew Sydney Harbour was so busy’. An even bigger joke is the suggestion that police series can have any influence in their lives.

PLEASES IN NARRATIVE: DO THEY PREFER SHOWS WHERE THE POLICE ALWAYS WIN?

The Sydney group find most of the police series they watch ‘boring because you know that they’re good guys and you know that they’re always going to win... I’d rather watch alien movies than coppers.’ The Blue Mountains teenagers also don’t like what they call ‘police PR shows’ that show ‘police as all these great people that go round solving all these crimes, but you know that they don’t.’ Again, the CSU students are bored when the good guy can’t die, because ‘it’s not reality’: ‘The good guys only have to win because otherwise they can’t come back for next week’s episode’. In contrast, many of them thoroughly enjoyed The Usual Suspects because the bad guy got away and ‘it showed the media as parasites’. That, they thought, was real.
Perception of a ‘mean world’: are images of the police (and crime) becoming more cynical?

The Cleveland Street teenagers do not think that police shows have become more cynical: in their view they are not bleak enough in their portrayal of the police. Although there is mention of *Cop It Sweet* showing how bad the police in Redfern are, this is seen as ‘real’ not ‘cynical’.

The Blue Mountains teenagers have a different view, arguing that police series are showing a greater range of crime and police corruption, though in the British and Australian series rather than the American ones. This, they say, does not worry them, because

*If [the police series] are saying “everything’s fine” and then you see on the news that everything’s not fine… That worries you.*

*I’d get more worried if they say “everything’s fine” than if they tell the real story.*

*Like in all those police shows when you see the cops always finding the people and all the bad guys put in gaol, and then you watch the news it makes you think that there’s too much crime out there and it just makes you more scared to go out, because you... just think the police aren’t as good at the job as you think they should be.*

*I think the police Royal Commission really brought a lot of people’s views right down on just how good the police force was doing their job.*

(Chorus of ‘yes’)

The CSU students agree that the police are represented as much more corrupt now than they once would have been. They are now more cynical. One student talks of *Cop It Sweet* as a ‘serious show’ that threw light on what police really did. Another says how good *Scales of Justice* was for showing three different layers of corruption in the police: at the beat, detective and corporate levels. The news, too, is now full of police corruption in Kings Cross. ‘The media is trying to report the truth, which we don’t believe because we don’t know what truth is.’

Pleasures in scheduling: are there some crime (or other ‘fear’) shows that they just never miss?

The Sydney group were incredulous that they would ever regularly watch shows ‘with coppers in them’. Some mentioned ‘real life’ police shows like *Police Camera Action* and *Australia’s Most Wanted*, but less to do with the police than with when they impinge on their own feelings of vulnerability. A girl spoke of her fear of ‘weirdoes’ in the context of *Australia’s Most Wanted*, and a boy said
Sometimes it’s not funny you know … you’re sitting there by yourself. When you go to sleep they come in and rape you and ransack your house and that. That could be you one time… that makes you scared.

More unanimously, they do watch and enjoy *The X Files*, as does the Blue Mountains group (though the latter dislike its shift from a ‘little cult show’ to a ‘huge commercial thing’). The Blue Mountains girls say that shows are more scary when they are believable, and that they don’t like watching them alone.

*If you are watching it with friends it doesn’t seem so scary. It just looks fake because you’re not there by yourself. You are in the real world.*

*If I’m watching by myself home alone, the instant I hear a noise or something I get paranoid.*

Talking about it afterwards can help to calm fears, if there is no-one there to watch it with.

The university students tend to watch ‘really dark, morbid’ shows: *Millenium, Outer Limits, American Gothic.* These are series with ‘meanings really well behind the characters, and make you think about good, evil, police, life and the fact that we can incorporate that into anything.’ With these shows it is better (both males and females tend to say) to watch with someone else so you ‘can go “Oh no!” in the advert break’: ‘Your mind gets thinking when you’re alone.’ One female, though, is scared more watching with others, because of their comments and reactions.

**Feelings of personal/family vulnerability in relation to crime shows: are any of the issues raised directly relevant to them?**

The Cleveland Street teenagers have plenty of fears of crime — say ‘of a junkie coming up like to get money trying to stab me with a needle’ — but these kinds of things are not covered in the media, in their view.

*It’s the police I have to worry about.*

*I’m afraid of break-ins to my house, like police say girls get their throats slit or raped when they’re in bed. That’s scary.*

*On television they just talk about murders and that’s it.*

*I get scared when I watch Australia’s Most Wanted when I’m walking about by myself. That’s scary, eh… There’s heaps of deviates about.*

*Yes there’s a lot of devos, men… who are in late night cars and when they see girls sitting there by themselves they stop.*
Quickly the Cleveland Street discussion turns to real events that they (or ‘cousins’) have personally experienced. They say that they are aware of things happening around them, and so get scared if there are items like that in the media. But they only see the reports of murders on the media; not the reality of them (‘never see these on TV’). A lot of their stories relate to drug addicts. But they note that when a ‘sad’ case gets high publicity in the media, it is in ‘rich’ environments. Like Phil in the Blue Mountains, they note the class aspect of the reporting of the Anna Woods case.

_They made it look really sad because she comes from the rich area._

In the Blue Mountains’ group one girl with much younger sisters feels personally vulnerable by reports of child abuse; while another girl with an older brother worries for him because ‘he often gets himself into situations that could be dangerous’. He stays out late at night, and has already been robbed. Most of the girls feel that crime drama generally does not teach them anything because it is so unrealistic. At best these shows might raise their awareness, but would not make them feel better in any way.

The CSU students say they are concerned by media reports of home invasion break-ins, particularly where people get bashed to death. This is particularly the case for those students who come from neighbourhoods the media depict as ‘bad’. But these same students can also be aware of the media beat ups of ‘bad areas’. One who is ‘just scared walking into Redfern’ talks of having a number of friends from there who ‘just love it, and really wouldn't ever move out of Redfern to live anywhere else’. They feel that different genres may have different effects on them: the news can help you by giving helpful tips, whereas films like _Scream_ would stop one woman ever wanting to live in a house with many glass doors and windows.

**Feelings about crime representations of place: would they prefer crime shows that deal with their own or ‘other’ environments?**

All of the Cleveland Street group think that there is too much negative news about Redfern; and that the media don’t show enough positive news about children’s success from the area, community achievements, and so on.

Redfern’s a real strong black community, like they’re all helping each other out and that... Besides the drugs and stuff everybody sticks together... You don’t get very many black communities ever like that. There might be drug addicts and that, but there’s Aboriginals in Redfern that work hard just as much as other people do.

They don’t think other urban environments cop the image that Redfern gets, and one student says it even got shown in a bad light on the news in America.
They don’t know what really goes on in Redfern. They don’t really have a clue.

They don’t know, they haven’t lived there.

These Cleveland Street students say that ‘We know what Redfern’s like because we come out of there’, but the bad media images stop other people from coming there. One Aboriginal girl notes that if you are black and live in this suburban area (she is from Waterloo), even well meaning people ask if you are from Redfern.

In the Blue Mountains group, fine local discriminations are made. One girl says that she lives in Leura and is resisting her father’s idea of moving to Katoomba. She feels ‘paranoid’ about the prospective move from Leura which is ‘a nice sort of tourist area and all upper class’ to Katoomba where ‘everyone’s talking about drugs in the schools and everything, that you just think that there’s going to be so much drugs in Katoomba’. She thinks that if she does live in Katoomba she will watch more television because ‘I wouldn’t want to go out for walks.’ Another girl responded by saying she couldn’t use particular bush walks in Wentworth Falls which were ‘rather infamous for paedophiles and child molesters hanging around there’; so she thought, ‘Oh well, I’ll sit at home and watch TV.’ A third girl feels comfortable living in Katoomba, partly because she is surrounded by ‘unthreatening Brethren’. These are the girls who also won’t travel on the train at night. The Katoomba girl who does use the train regularly alone at night says that her environment would not make her stay at home to watch TV.

Unlike Redfern, there is very little about Katoomba and crime on TV, and the students say the closest police series get is when Police Rescue covers ‘someone who’s gone and got stuck on a cliff — and that doesn’t effect me.’ They emphasise that crime news is primarily word of mouth, because the local newspaper only covers car accidents and theft. So,

You always hear rumours of rape and everything like in Kingsford Smith Park, but you never know whether they’re true or not, and you can’t just stay at home by yourself because you have heard these rumours. Like, if you read something in the newspaper you’d feel a lot more cautious about going out, but it’s all rumours.

One boy says that some of his friends found a corpse on two occasions in the bush, and there is some concern in the group about these kinds of crimes in a ‘close’ community where ‘you seem to know half of the town’. But they agree that, while the local media does not cover it, the national media concentrates instead on places like Redfern. This has made them ‘paranoid about going there’. Even the girl who travels regularly by herself at night on the train says, ‘You’d have to have a really good reason for going there.’ The group emphasises that negative media reports of urban Sydney areas do have an effect on them.
I noticed when I was in Mount Druitt that a lot of them were just Homies, and they were all sort of just standing around doing nothing with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths. It’s all stereotyped but it does make you think they’re going to do something. It’s only because you’ve heard about stuff.

Two of the CSU students (who originally came from the country) also talked about their initial fear of the city, as stemming from the media. The Bathurst students emphasise that the media focus only on the ‘ritzy’ city locales (a program on George Street as ‘the new Hollywood’, the Sydney Casino) or the ‘real scummy’ (currently Cabramatta, Mount Druitt, Redfern). They emphasise the media’s role in both fixing and changing these stereotypes: Parramatta’s now ‘out of the media spotlight’; whereas ‘Oh, let’s show Blacktown in a bad light this week’.

Feelings about public space and ‘big event’ crimes

An Aboriginal girl in the Cleveland Street group responds to the ‘big TV events’ question, with

You know the Port Arthur massacre? See how that was all big, and all in the media and that. Well, see there’s things like the Mile Creek massacre, the Oyster Bay massacre, they’re all big massacres but they happen to Aboriginal people and they don’t do those in the media.

Overall, the ‘big events’ reports neither effect them nor change anything for them. They say there is little talk about them after a couple of days; though Aboriginal students say that their parents tend to contextualise them in terms of Aboriginal history.

Some of the boys humorously say that they are planning their own massacre — blowing up Redfern police station. But overall, they repeat that ‘Whenever you turn the TV on it’s crime’ (male), ‘But it’s crime that aint really crime — it’s not realistic crime like the crime that’s really happening’ (female), ‘It’s bodgy crime’ (male).

The Blue Mountains group feels angry that big events are allowed to happen, like Port Arthur or bus accidents involving schoolchildren, rather than gun laws or bus regulations being put in place beforehand. The girls also speak of children killing other children, as recently reported from Japan or in the Bolger case in Britain. This picks up a theme they emphasised in their public transport interview, that it is frightening that teenage violence is ‘getting younger — that’s the scary thing.’
The CSU students don't feel affected by 'big event television', unless it happens in their area. One female student is from Crescent Head where 'a guy who everybody thought was quite nice just went berko and shot two policeman... The whole area was rocked because they thought this could never happen here.' A number of students were more scared not by the actual bombing at Atlanta, but by the media's persecution of a suspect.

_The media has such ultimate power — and then it'll apologise in the Sun-Herald, page 56: “Sorry”._

They also worry at the media's glamorising of big crimes: 'Oh, Australia's got the biggest serial killer in the world'. Though many of them felt personally involved in the Port Arthur massacre (through having been there, or through acquaintances who were there), they also worry how the media (both at Port Arthur, and then recently at Thredbo) 'just ripped that event apart'. 'We spend three years here doing broadcast journalism and they give the guy who survived a blank cheque [a job in the media].'

As regards public space at the time of the Sydney Olympics, the Cleveland Street group think that crime will increase because 'All the rich people coming here from Asia, from Japan, they'll be robbed.' There is also a major emphasis on the likelihood of boycotts (from South Africa) and perhaps bombs threats ('because of the way they've been treating the blackfellas and the Asians... Because of all Pauline Hanson's stuff'). The Blue Mountains group also thinks there will be more crime at the time of the Olympics as 'loaded people from overseas' visit Australia. The CSU group are sure that crime will rise sharply at the Sydney Olympics: 'thousands of rich tourists, thousands of handbags.'

**Worries about different information technologies:**
**Are they more concerned by, for example, television, internet, videos etc in relation to crime?**

The Cleveland Street group have no opinion of different technologies, but speak angrily again about news and current affairs shows

_That say Redfern's a slum but don't focus on the outer suburbs like Blacktown and stuff._

_Cabramatta!

_Some of the other students are saying “I’ll put a bomb under Redfern. I’m happy it’s getting demolished”._

_We’re not even from Redfern, but because of the colour of our skin they stereotype us and think we’re from Redfern._
These students watch a lot of news and current affairs, and few police series. ‘Face To Face, that’s the racist one, they say we always bludge, talking about Aboriginals.’ Two black girls say they feel really insulted when other students ask if they are sisters, just because of the colour of their skin being the same. They put this ‘ignorance’ down to the media and Pauline Hanson.

The Blue Mountains girls again pick up their worry about younger teenagers and violence.

*Video games are becoming more realistic, and pornographic.*

*And then you see these little kids playing all the gun games where they can shoot everyone, you start thinking they’re going to get used to playing this and they might get used to having a gun in their hand... When you go into the Escape Hatch in Katoomba and you see all the little kids playing the fighting games you start thinking...*

*Give them a few more years and...*

*It’s in their heads now and they’re going to remember it all for the future.*

*I think it’s scary that they have to have ratings on computer games now.*

A boy responds to these girls by saying he has played these games and (like Rob from Sydney) that it doesn’t effect him — because ‘the violence is ridiculous’. A girl says that the videos, too, are ridiculous in their violence now, whereas a black-and-white film like Psycho is still more scary. In other words, fear from the media depends on the quality of the production, not on the form or the technology. In particular, crime on the TV news which relates directly to what they do, like travelling on the train, scares them most.

The CSU students think that talk of bombs being made via the Internet etc is scapegoating; similarly with horror videos: ‘I think the local paper would have more effect on me — just reading about local crime.’ The woman are more afraid of Australia’s Most Wanted and (when younger) by Nightmare.

*Horror was 80’s — like Nightmare On Elm Street. I think people have really gotten over horror movies and they want to get scared with real life now.*

*We’re not going to go and watch Rocky 8 any more.*

*They talk about Killing In America which is real footage of ‘people being blown apart’. None of them can watch this ‘very disturbing’ media material. This is ‘ratings’ driven.*
All the Cleveland Street students speak of harsh experiences of dealing with police; especially police on the beat (‘experience from the gutter’). A boy says: ‘When the police pick you up they’re all racist... ’ A girl interjects: ‘With media they try to make out that police are really caring.’ A boy adds: ‘Real heroes!’.

A boy says that when he walks down the street in Waterloo the police don't pull him up because he is white; when his Aboriginal friend walks down the street they do, even though he has done nothing wrong. A girl says she heard a policeman say to a neighbour: ‘Get inside you black slut, you’re nothing, you’re scum.’ Two of the students say they have been assaulted by the police. A girl recalls how her older uncle was choked in jail by a police officer. She says her uncle was vomiting blood, and had red marks around his neck. They argue that you do not see any of this in the media.

They don’t show the things that we go through.

They show like this court case about murder but they don’t show a case about three Aboriginal boys getting threatened by police. But in the media they show like “this happened to police”.

This media bias effects their behaviour, they believe. Teenagers on the streets will retaliate against the police, by throwing bricks at cars. ‘It happens, now, today.’

Others says that the police make up stories about what Aboriginal kids are doing. They recall incidents at the Redfern train station they have witnessed, like a boy assaulted by the police and then charged with throwing bricks at a train, when he was not doing this.

As regards different forms of TV news/cop shows, they argue that none of them show the truth. In all of these, police are

* made out not to be racist, made out to be perfect and help every single person... But in real life it’s not like that. One in ten is good. All the rest are racist.

I know a black person from Redfern police station who wanted to leave because he was sick of the shit that was going on there... the racist comment.

A number of them approvingly give narrative details from the ABC documentary *Cop It Sweet*. But no particular media format helps their fear of crime. One girl repeats that ‘Australia’s Most Wanted... scares me... It shows real life stuff, how these idiots are around’; while a boy says he knows people who ‘do exactly the same things’ you see on *Australia’s Most Wanted*. All feel outraged by reports of crimes sometimes; basically about crimes against children and older people.
In contrast to the Cleveland Street teenagers, the Blue Mountains students say they get most of their image of the police from the media. However, they also contrast the ‘good guy’ image of the cop shows with personal experience of harassment in the street by the police. Police shows, they agree, ‘give you a false sense of security’ which is then ‘deconstructed’ by what they see on the news (unsolved crimes) as well as by seeing overweight policemen on the streets of Katoomba. A boy describes a crime workshop held by the police at the Fairmont Hotel:

I reckon that built up more confidence — and the people appreciated the cops more by being able to talk to them — than ever seeing any TV show stuff. You realised what they were like.

It is that kind of ‘real people’ that they say they get from The Bill. For the same kind of reason, they are made to feel safer by a documentary about police solving crimes than by ‘fake’ police shows or by Hollywood “True Crimes” things because you think that Hollywood never gets it right, so they’re obviously going to change a lot to make it seem more interesting than it really is. So you’ll get a lot more paranoid by watching that because you’re thinking it’s a lot worse than it really is because they’ve beefed it up for Hollywood....

The really scary thing is you see how on the TV shows they’re always solving the crimes... stuff like serial killers, how they solve it in one episode... But then you think about the guy who shot JFK and they still don’t know really who did it. It starts to make you think that maybe they can’t really do the job.

Yes, I think a lot of those shows probably build up our expectations of what the police should be able to do.

And when you see that they can’t do it, because you’ve watched these movies, you’re more worried.

The CSU students have some experience with police, mainly for drink-driving, noisy parties, minor incidents, or simply seeing ‘the way they stride around, they think they’re so superior’. A woman says that female cops are awful, unlike the media images of them. Media images, they say, are too simplistic: the good guys deal with one big event and clear it up — whereas real life policing is about lots of minor events, too much paper work and sometimes the police just not bothering to follow things up. As regards particular media styles, they find police documentaries the worst and hard to handle; on the other hand they think that nothing non-realistic can help you handle your fear. A compromise is the series Kids which is fiction, though like a documentary. If you can handle the ruthlessly realistic portrayal of men bedding girls (saying they love them), then doing break-ins, assaults, bedding more girls, having HIV tests, bedding younger and younger girls — then, a couple of female students say, it could give helpful cautionary advice: ‘never get sloshed, use condoms, it can happen to me’.
Their 'moral agendas' vis-à-vis media role models
(forexampleinrelationtoviolence)

The Cleveland Street students don't really agree on role models, though one
'looks up' to Stevie Wonder and Morgan Freeman. There is a lot more certainty
(and unanimity) about their dislikes of Arnold Schwarzenegger — 'fake', 'stupid',
'I hope he dies'. In contrast they like films like Colour Purple and Cry Freedom
which portray 'real life' racial violence.

Overall, this group has learnt the following sets of realities from
'real world' movies

*The real world’s scary, like rapes and stuff.*

*You need power to get anywhere.*

*And money.*

*You need to be corrupt to get somewhere.*

*Money doesn’t get you everywhere. Money’s not going to be there all your*
*life... I don’t care about money — you’ve got to have a lot of love around.*

*Money is power.*

The Blue Mountains group also have difficulty in finding role models (one likes
Gary Sweet in Police Rescue). Again, Schwarzenegger is seen as ‘pathetic’ (and
‘Bruce Willis is a yobbo’). But the girls are ambivalent.

*Who wants to see this big beefed up guy just going around... But because you*
*know it’s not real... you can find it humorous... But when you think about it*
*you think you shouldn’t really watch this because it could cause a lot of*
*problems with the violence in a lot of little kids watching it... You watch it*
*because you like thinking that there are people out there that are powerful*
*enough to stop the violence.*

*We all have this kind of attraction, or maybe just curiosity... It’s like turning a*
*page in say a book about World War II and seeing a really awful picture of*
*Auschwitz. We feel shocked at seeing it but we have to look closer because*
*it’s some kind of human thing that’s in all of us.*

In contrast, the girls say they would be frightened by a violent film about rape.

*It’s what every female is really scared of, getting raped. And then if you see*
*that you think that could happen to me... But just punch-up violence, then it’s*
*just everyday and fake... Stuff like Natural Born Killers has more impact on*
*you because it’s everyday people, whereas with Schwarzenegger movies you*
*think it’s all fake because a guy that big isn’t really going to be a cop going*
*around protecting everybody.*
Why do people watch violence, like in Natural Born Killers? Because it’s in us, and we find it interesting, and we think how could they do that.

It’s because it’s like it’s part of us, like everyone can be violent, most people can be violent and at one time of their life they will.

This Blue Mountains group (all the above speakers are girls) come closest to any group interviewed to discussing Sparks’ question: ‘why do we allow ourselves to be enraptured’ by the violence of Schwarzenegger-type movies? These girls tend to support Sparks’ view about a postmodern instability of male identity in the recycling of earlier moral positions via pastiche (Audit Report, p.84). Like Sparks, the group choose to compare Schwarzenegger with John Wayne, and they also invoke earlier ‘bad guys’ like Cagney in gangster movies, suggesting the greater difficulty nowadays in wanting the villain to die: ‘These days they’re making the bad guys seem more attractive to you... They’re not just senseless killers, and in a lot of movies they’ll have a sense of comedy and you can sort of relate to why they’re doing it.’ As they talk about these films, it becomes clearer why they don’t enjoy the ‘good guy/bad guy’ scenarios of many police series on television.

The CSU students can find no good role models, though plenty of bad ones (the Spice Girls, Pauline Hanson). They contrast Schwarzenegger blockbusters (which are nothing but money makers) with other violent films — Heat, Reservoir Dogs, Natural Born Killers — where there were no good guys at all.

Reservoir Dogs is about bank robbers. Pulp Fiction there’s no good guy, they’re either all doing drugs or killers. Natural Born Killers.

Did you like them?

Yeah.

Yes, because it’s reality. It’s just the fact that there really aren’t so many heroes. Every hero makes mistakes...

Schwarzenegger movies are usually like: my brother was killed and his daughter has been taken by these bad guys. I now avenge his death and save my whatever — and that’s the basis for an Arnie movie or a Van Damme or Segal or whatever.

There is agreement among the CSU students that their generation is beginning to differentiate between ‘money-making’ violent blockbusters (sold to the ‘kids’ by advertising hype) and ‘alternative theatres’.

Like Clockwork Orange. Friday night — midnight.

Yeah. Good movies...

You get out of the movie and can have a conversation about it.
Local Media

The Cleveland Street group say that the local papers don’t really talk about crime.

They just show you all the good things that happen in the South Sydney area. That’s good to hear there’s something good. And then you go to the [national] media, and they go “Look at that area, that’s all slum”.

One girl says her brother was in a local newspaper article, which was bad in ‘saying he come from the hard-knocking Cleveland Street High School’, but good in that ‘my brother goes “It’s not that bad at Clevo as they say it is in the media”’.

These students are very loyal to their school.

You’ve got like three teachers and five students, man.

The teachers around here know where we come from.

Like every teacher knows all the kids’ mums, and that, they all know each other.

So school and to some extent the local media are exonerated from these students very negative attitude to authority professions and the mass media.

The Blue Mountains students also talk about their high school and the local media. Like the Cleveland Street students they would like to see positive things about the area in the local press; but also want to hear about serious crime when it really happens.

I think the local media up here are rather prejudiced, because if you get anything on Katoomba High School it’s something bad… No matter how much stuff Katoomba High tries to send in, they won’t publish anything… The whole community gets the idea that Katoomba High is full of a whole lot of ratbags.

I prefer more positive stuff about local people doing stuff, because a cop solving crimes in Sydney isn’t going to help you much in Katoomba.

But there isn’t really much local crime stuff about the Mountains because they don’t want to give up the image of the safe Blue Mountains for the tourists, so that they can get the money up here… You’d worry a lot more [about local crime reports], but I’d rather know that it’s out there… because you don’t know whether the rumours are true or not. I’d rather know that it’s there because then you can be more safe.

These students make suggestions about how Katoomba could become a more positive place for them, rather than simply for the tourists. Lack of light at night, lack of shops and cheap cafes at night, mean that
there isn't enough for kids to do. A lot of the problem is the image of teenagers committing crimes because, if you've got nothing better to do, they think that people walking around Katoomba are going to be causing trouble... Like even if you've got a MacDonalds or something, then we've got somewhere to sit with our friends and talk. We need somewhere inside where there are other people around.

How many of us can actually afford to go to the little cafes. Sure, they might be great for tourists, but whose paying that much for a coffee?

You could go to MacDonalds for a decent meal, dessert, drink for five dollars or something.

At least they serve food that everybody might like — cappuccinos.

I'm not really for Macdonalds at all, but I understand that we need some cheap alternative place.

There has been a long, ongoing campaign in Katoomba by conservationists and others against a siting of MacDonalds in the town. The Katoomba High School group reminds us both of their local geographical situation (positioned in a tourist town) and their temporal situation (last year at school, with few of the facilities that first year university students would expect).

This group say they are in the middle of the spectrum between 'privatised' and 'active'.

But then being teenagers no-one's going to really listen to you about crime anyway, because they think that most of the crime's done by teenagers because they want the money for drugs or something.

They don't take time to listen to teenagers’ needs.

The CSU students (particularly the journalism ones) feel equally powerless with the media as the Katoomba students. But their's is a professional concern. They say that they have been taught for six months that the media are manipulative.

I suppose they are teaching us that so that we do change things. But there's not much really that you can do about it... I can’t see any way because you go into such a competitive industry that if you don’t follow the formulas then you’ll get thrown out. So you just jump into it and have to do what everybody else does and manipulate.

Meanwhile, their present engagement with the media is a very relaxed one. ‘We are all at uni at the moment, we are all first years, we are all excited about studying (laughter), we are going to the bar and the pubs and having our social life’, so they don’t stay home to watch any particular shows. ‘The truth is anything new that we like we watch for a while, but we get very bored very quickly, and something new will come along.’
In this relaxed situation, the local media can bring them down to earth: such as local reports of rapists in Bathurst which advise women not to walk at night in certain streets. Those who come from Sydney say they are ‘more scared of little towns’. They speak comfortably (almost nostalgically) of strolling on Friday night in Sydney, walking through Kings Cross and then down to Circular Quay or Darling Harbour ‘and it’s fine, you can just walk around.’ The following two speakers are both women.

We were 11.30 at night in Kings Cross and my mother went, “oh, Kings Cross, don’t you dare go down there.” But it was great.

You’ve got shops which are open — you just feel so much more secure because of the people there.

I feel very secure in Kings Cross because it’s such a tourist place...

The nicest cafes are in the Cross.

They are, even in the backstreets. Little backstreets, and they have the nicest little communities.

Little tucked-away places, yeah.

And you just walk in off the streets... beautiful.

Parents... My mother hated it. But you sit there watching these movies. You don’t hear the swearing. You don’t think it’s that violent. You go down to Kings Cross for the evening — it’s fine. But to them its “Oh my god!”

You’re talking about a generational thing.

Absolutely, definitely a generational thing.
Teenagers talk of ‘a generational thing’ between themselves and their parents, while grandparents think that their own generation (when there was little overt violence, drugs or AIDS) was the best. Where do parents position themselves?

A conversation among the Sydney parents about Millennium (which was liked by our Bathurst teenagers for its ‘dark, morbid’ qualities) gives a good indication that the CSU student’s comment about her mother is not a-typical.

*Millennium* is really violent — the one I saw the night before last. I’ve never seen it before, and I won’t watch it again. But there was blood spattered, horrible violence. *(female)*

*Millennium* is a really violent, revolting movie. *(female)*

It cannot be good for the nurturing of the social environment. *(female)*

There’s no way it can have a positive effect on society. *(male)*

The parents then go on to worry that their teenagers think these kinds of programs are wonderful.

Parents of teenagers (as we saw in the Transport Study) tend to be anxious about the broader world their children are growing up into; and the media are clearly seen as a very significant influence in the construction of that world. One Bathurst mother says that she is concerned with changes in society, and the callousness of young people.

The viciousness worries me... That seems to me to be a development... a frightening development. I also think it’s quite frightening how very often the most savage things are perpetrated by very, very young people. I find it scary — not for me personally, but a societal fear if you like. What is happening to our society if two 14 year-olds... or 12 year-olds can kick somebody to within an inch of their life, and just coincidentally take the 2 dollars 50 and the cigarettes?

The Bathurst parent group goes on to talk about the lack of self-respect, pack behaviour, children killing children, mass murders and other aberrations which are all emphasised by the media. ‘We are the generation that’s supposed to be in control. What’s happened?’

The parents, as a group, are especially concerned with monitoring their teenagers’ media use. When asked whether they position themselves at the privatised or active/community-oriented end of the spectrum, most argue that they are active — not in belonging to community groups (though a number belong to ‘Neighbourhood Watch’) — but in making the education, the empowerment, and the safety of their children their project.
Many control their children's playing of violent computer games; most pick up their kids in the car for safety reasons ("I'm active — in picking up my kids, "Mum's taxi"); all engage their kids with their own perception of the 'risk' society ("Trying to instil in kids "I don't care how late you call me for a lift home, I don't want you walking home at night or taking a ride with a driver who's been drinking. Don't put yourself in danger!"').

The image of corruption spreading to the local community from other places is a potent one with parents. 'Mum's taxi' is seen as a fragile space of safety against the danger that threatens. In Bathurst, as we have already seen, the pollution (of violence, drugs and AIDS) is seen to be spreading to the country from the city; whereas in the city itself, the invasion is also often seen to be from elsewhere — for example, Brian, a senior mining executive in Sydney, told us in a long interview:

*When you see the level of crime in America... it's the realisation that it's like a ripple spreading from America.*

**Their overall enjoyment of police series: do these make them feel better or more ill at ease about the world, or make no difference?**

Overall police series are not seen as all that important by parents. Some like *Heartbeat* (because it features 'the old style copper you watch with amusement and nostalgia — looking back to a safer time when the cop was the good guy'; 'it sort of reminds me of when I was a child in the sixties... it's just an era, it feels comfortable and secure'). Many like *The Bill* (not too much graphic violence, 'terrific human interest', 'realism', 'informative', 'documentary', 'reportage', 'natural antagonisms and friction with your work colleagues', 'several layers of issues') and *Hamish Macbeth* (for honest characterisation and 'surreal' quality). A few (fathers) thought highly of *Scales of Justice* and *Phoenix* for showing for the first time 'that there was a police culture of corruption'. Some (mothers) say that 'I never thought about crime till I started watching *Australia's Most Wanted*. Now I'm asking for a light outside the house'.

But most parents find that the violence in cop shows 'is stylised, even those from the US, they're not real, I don't identify my own life with cop show worlds'. (One Blue Mountains mother who left Sydney for a safer environment makes an interesting distinction between *The Bill*, which makes her feel that thankfully those problems of crime have not yet reached her community, and *NYPD Blue* which she feels is too 'gritty' and 'so far out there' ever to 'be real' or 'impinge on our lives in this country').

Nevertheless, parents' concern with the increasing level of violence in the media generally means that
If I have a feeling at all [about cop shows] it would be about the effect of the exposure to violence on our children and their behaviour when they are away from our supervision... Because just going back to the surreal nature and the stylised nature of violence and death, I don’t really know if the youth has the value that I understand about violence and death. They seem to consider it to be somewhat lighter, more trivial, the impression that you can jump out of a train at 60 kilometers an hour and not hurt yourself... I think about what impact it has on teenagers and their perception of reality. (father)

I heard a comment once about a 16 year-old who was shot in the United States... and his comment was “I didn’t know it would hurt that much”. (mother)

One country father responds to this that his 15 year-old stepdaughter

knows now, on my farm, what damage a bullet can do... The first day she shot a rabbit she nearly died — she didn’t know what she’d do to it... They don’t have the reality, I agree with what you said... They don’t realise how much damage something like jumping out of a train at 60 kilometers an hour does to somebody.

These Bathurst parents are highly concerned about whether or not their teenagers are enhanced or diminished in ‘their reality’ by the stylised violence of police action in film and on television.

Their pleasures in narrative: do they prefer shows where the police always win?

Though they recognise that it may be less ‘real’, parents often do want the good guys to win. Two Sydney mothers sum it up

It’s a sense of justice, longing for the sense of justice that hopefully exists.

And a feeling too that somehow miraculously the police are powerful and will help us.

The Bathurst fathers also admit to be ‘shallow’ and wanting the good guys to win. The Blue Mountains group adds to this view that ‘pure entertainment’ does need to have the bad guy caught. They argue that their reason for liking The Bill is that it is not too bleak and ‘starkly realistic’ (thus it qualifies as entertainment) without always having the good guys win. Thus occasionally a regular offender will get off or a group of youths will be too young to be prosecuted in The Bill. So the human frustrations within the system are revealed, without the good guys losing their attractive image. The British police shows are preferred over the American because ‘you’ve got ordinary people who are good doing ordinary things, making a real impact on their town, on their society, and they’re doing it at our level, an ordinary person’s level... Empowered by the government, they are ordinary people... doing their bit.’
This is still a ‘good world’ these parents are trying to see in their favourite cop shows. They say they wouldn’t want to see The Scales of Justice every week

Even though Scales of Justice you had corrupt police, there was a culture, I still think... when they are called upon to do their job, even corrupt police will do their job.

A Bathurst mother says

We do like to think that our good guys are good guys, don’t we. And then you get all this Royal Commission.

A Blue Mountains father says

What these shows are is like a soapie. They’re like a comfortable, warm cocoon of a world that we can be transported into for half and hour or fifty minutes and feel nice and comfortable. This is the sort of world we would like to inhabit...

Their perception of a ‘mean world’:
Are images of the police (and crime) becoming more cynical?

Parents do think that police series (and news ‘reality’) have showed a more ‘mean’ side of the police in recent years. The Sydney parents speak of the Royal Commission working to bring the images of the police ‘back to what they should be’. A Bathurst parent speaks about his worries that from the time of the Queensland Royal Commission the media began to show the police in a bad light. The current Royal Commission he thinks is less negative.

There is certainly some criticism of police among parents: at Bathurst their record with Aborigines is seen as a worry; and the recent shooting of a man by police on Bondi Beach was described as ‘appalling’ and ‘unnecessary’ at Bathurst and the Blue Mountains. But the overall view is sympathetic. At Bathurst there is agreement that nowadays people don’t value the police as much as they should because kids are fed a diet of American series where there is ‘a lack of respect for the police’; that young police are ‘only human beings’, and ‘maybe lack of training is to blame’ for the shooting at Bondi; that ‘it’s a damned hard job that doesn’t get enough respect’; and that by and large they ‘do an excellent job’.

Bathurst parents also argue that English police shows present a good image of the police; and the observation is made that, given that English police do not carry guns, perhaps the choice of an English Police Commissioner in Australia is to change the gung-ho attitude to guns of young cops brought up on American series. On the other hand, among the Blue Mountains parents there is also the view that a changing media view on the police is valuable.
Generally it’s a good thing if the media is informing us of developments in society, developments in the police force or the jury system and the courts, and if some of those reports make me fearful... I think that’s reasonable, because... if society is becoming more dangerous to live in then I would like to know that. So I do think that the media, starting probably with the Lindy Chamberlain trial, is reporting matters more starkly, less romantically than perhaps back in the days of Cop Shop. That’s perhaps something we’ve got to get used to, but I think it’s a good thing.

This kind of trend is, however, read differently by a Sydney mother.

When I was a kid I used to watch Homicide and that didn’t frighten me at all. But I think if they made a program like that now there’s no way I would let my children watch it... knowing how they would portray murder these days.

This balance (or perhaps tension) between wanting a media that ‘breaks through a shell of silence’ (for example in the case of paedophilia) in order to create a better society for one’s children, and a media that ‘frightens with violence’, is a common one among parents when considering the ‘meaner world’ of today’s media.

*Their pleasures in scheduling: are there some crime (or other ‘fear’) shows that they just never miss?*

A Bathurst mother is the first respondent to this question in her group.

There are some shows that I make sure I don’t watch — and that my children don’t watch, like Australia’s Most Wanted and highly sensational shows like that.

Another mother responds that after the age of about 13 teenagers have to come to their own conclusions, and from then on parents must ‘have faith in their own ability to have instilled some intrinsic values in the child.’ She mentions one film, White Men Can’t Jump, that her 13 year-old son loved which was ‘full of foul language, street-wise violence and so on’ but with good ethics. The mothers here emphasise the importance of watching these kinds of things with their children.

It is important. You are teaching them to develop their own instincts and to have healthy questioning qualifying that, and to know their rights.

And I think you can answer their questions along the way.

And you can’t just say it’s no good unless you’ve watched it. That’s not fair.

One of the Bathurst fathers returns here to the issue of children needing to know about the unreality of screen violence.
I think being a cynic all the way through [watching it with them] and bringing up the unreality of all the situations, makes them realise that it couldn’t happen... diving out of a ten story window and hitting a swimming pool full of water and not hurting themselves... If you laughed at it they realise that maybe that’s not right.

Overall, parents tend to adopt the view that their active function in watching television is ‘to impart my values’ to teenagers and ‘hope that they will develop their own values that might be coincident with ours... You can do that when you’re watching together’.

Feelings of personal/family vulnerability in relation to crime shows: are any of the issues raised directly relevant to them?

As with other questions, the Sydney parents tended to respond immediately to this question by talking about their fears for their children.

For me my children being attacked. It can be anywhere, but I’ve got one son coming home from work on the train at 8 o’clock at night... It doesn’t matter whether it’s the train or walking home from the station, it’s just that concern of being out at night... and being attacked... Definitely TV news, the newspaper [portrays that]

Child sexual assault and paedophilia — there’s been a lot of cases on TV...

The Bathurst parents also immediately respond the same way

Yeah, sexual assault or sexual abuse, paedophilia with younger ones as well as teenagers. I find that quite scary. You fear for your children’s safety, I think,

It’s mainly having girls. I’ve got four girls, including two teenagers. They want to be able to go out and down the street to their friend’s house or down town. And they realise themselves there’s places they can’t go.

A Blue Mountains parent worries more since seeing the report of a man setting alight a child in a schoolyard in Queensland. He compares this with the Port Arthur massacre, in that since the latter event it will be harder for someone to shoot children with guns; whereas the petrol incident is impossible to control.

Mothers are also concerned for their own safety: one Sydney parent mentions this evening’s local newspaper report of people who steal cars at shopping centres and then drive along the road grabbing women’s handbags and dragging them along the road until they let go; women in all groups talk about reports of people ‘snatching bags from your car while you are driving’; and a Bathurst mother is ‘worried terribly’ by reports of home invasions: ‘You think it couldn’t happen in Bathurst, but it does.’
The Sydney parents say that it doesn't help them manage their fear hearing about people being caught; especially because of light sentencing (as reported in the media at least). On the one hand, parents in all groups question the truth of what is in the media; but on the other hand media coverage of crime can increase their fear. One Bathurst parent said (to general agreement)

*Actually media coverage probably accentuates my fear, like that recent incident where an old man [in Bathurst] was beaten up in his own front yard by a couple of kids. That was a concern. And my personal fear went up.*

A mother responds that the media

*Brings things into your mind and makes you much more aware and conscious of it. But I think sometimes it makes you fearful when you perhaps don’t need to be.*

**Their feelings about crime representations of place: would they prefer crime shows that deal with their own or ‘other’ environments?**

Parents in all groups thought that the media (whether cop shows or local media) do not show family routine: coping with teenagers, driving children to sports, always having one child that is sick, living in the suburbs, washing up, making sure the children do the homework. ‘Normal families are not perceived to be interesting.’ A ‘stepping syndrome’ father objects to ‘mixed’ families (‘my kids, her kids and our kids’) being shown as socially dysfunctional; and similarly a single parent objects to being portrayed as ‘a loser’ in television dramas. A Blue Mountains parent feels that her local region is ‘between a rock and a hard place’, not quite city but not quite country either. So it doesn't get reported unless a tourist loses a camera and traveller's cheques from a car at a cliff look out. Casual crimes against property (‘a house was broken into and lost six onions in last week's Gazette’) rather than crimes of violence against teenagers in Katoomba station subway are what get reported.

All parents agree that it is not their area but Redfern, Kings Cross, Cabramatta, Mount Druitt and Marickville that get reported as places where crime really occurs. There is some agreement also that this tends to make you not want to go there. But some recognize the power of media stereotyping here.

*You tend to avoid places that get featured on the news where crime has happened — if you don’t know the area. But if you do know the area... you’re not about to stop shopping just because the great headline happened once ... But I think it's the repetition, for instance, where Cabramatta is constantly in the news, and the very vivid portrayal of the Villawood situation... that looked particularly vicious and horrible. (Sydney mother)*
Certainly where the portrayals of Aboriginals in the media are concerned, it’s generally Everleigh Street. It’s certainly not your nice little Aboriginal and Islander dance group who are living a perfectly ordinary life in Glebe, along with their Italian family next door, and their Anglo-Celtic family on the other side. It’s always Everleigh Street. (Bathurst mother)

A Bathurst father says that the media wants to find in Cabramatta, Redfern, St Clair etc ‘their American ghettos, they’re looking for south-west Los Angeles, they want it, the media wants to find the machine guns on the streets and things like that.’ Some of the Sydney parents complain of the Home and Away kind of show which portrays ‘abnormal’ (sexual, inter-personal and teenage) relationships as ‘normal’; but others argue that ‘there is a lot of realism in things like Home and Away’, but that it happens in the Western Suburbs. ‘It’s just not normal where we live, and who we live amongst — it’s a very protected environment.’

Another mother, however, queries the ‘protected area’ interpretation. Chatswood, she hears from her children, is a centre for gangs, especially around the train station and some clubs. The difference from the violent image of Redfern and Cabramatta, however, is that she hears this from local gossip not the media.

**Feelings about public space and ‘big event’ crimes**

Concerned about the world their children are growing up into, parents tend to have a more lasting memory of some ‘big event’ crimes than other age groups.

*They certainly make you feel a lot more insecure. I think we grew up thinking that Australia’s a pretty nice, quiet little place and not too much goes wrong. And you hear of all the sensationalism in America. But when these sorts of things happen, particularly when they’re in Australia, you suddenly feel very vulnerable. And wonder what’s going wrong, and society seems to be breaking down. You just don’t feel as safe. I know when I was a kid I really enjoyed my independence and being able to walk places if I had something on. Whereas I won’t let my kids do that.* (Sydney mother)

*Dunblane I think has had a lasting effect. Whenever I see little children in a playground I think of these children at Dunblane. I don’t think I’ll ever forget that.* (Blue Mountains mother)

*The Anita Cobby murder made me very fearful, because my daughter lives in Sydney and travels by public transport, and I’m terrified for her, though in reality she feels quite safe.* (Bathurst mother)

*Certainly these things really do worry you. And once again it’s the safety of the children that you worry about. I don’t worry so much for myself.* (Bathurst mother)
The stereotyped sense of ‘normal’ crime being somewhere else (as in the Western Suburbs) can also lead to these ‘big event’ crimes having more impact.

> When it’s an isolated incident like Hobart or Strathfield, I feel vulnerable because I think they’re ordinary places like Lane Cove. It could happen just as easily in Lane Cove. Whereas when it’s confined to areas like Mount Druitt or Cabramatta and it’s always happening there, you think, it’s all right, I’ll just stay away.

The parents are worried by the arbitrariness of these ‘big event’ crimes: ‘it’s just the luck of the draw’, ‘you just hope your children will make the right decision at the right time.’ But these grand-scale ‘aberration’ and ‘berserker’ events nevertheless frighten most of them less than ‘the systemic’ and continuing crimes: the ‘incredible callousness of some very young people. It’s regularly reported that they won’t just grab an old lady’s bag, they’ll knock her down as well — they’ve already got the bag’. At Bathurst, some of the mothers wonder whether

> the break-down of the extended family has contributed here, where the grandparents probably used to step in and do some of the caring and nurturing, and the respect would be there for the elders. And nowadays, when we just don’t have that extended family situation, the children aren’t given all that love and caring.

> And age isn’t revered anyway, is it. This is a society really geared towards youth. You look young and you’re wanted.

As so often in our interviews, parents relate their own personalised fears back to a complex web which contains their teenager sons and daughters, youth generally, the media, and the frightening overall risks of societal change.

As regards public space, the Bathurst parents (like some seniors) feel disenfranchised; and are keen to reoccupy it on behalf of their families.

> More lighting at night.

> And I think encouraging people to be out and about.

> Yes, not abandoning those areas when it’s dark. People should stay in there with their families and make the rougher element realise that the ‘normal’ families... aren’t going to give up their right to go out and have a good time because they want to yahoo around and throw Jim Beam cans all over the place and hit each other over the head with boards, and whatever.

At the same time parents in all groups find ‘appalling’ the media’s coverage of major disaster events: Port Arthur, Thredbo, the Atlanta bombing and so on. Moreover, where parents are pessimistic about crime at the Sydney Olympics, much of this relates to their perception of the media.
I think possibly the media is going to enhance that. Why do people do those sorts of things in the first place — it’s to get coverage. And of course when the whole world is focused on Sydney in 2000 well what a golden opportunity. I mean every city that hosts the Olympics must go though exactly that and no matter what they do as far as security is concerned people will succeed. There’ll be crazy people who will slip through the loop and pull the trigger — whatever that trigger be... It is a dangerous situation and it’s dangerous because the media will cover it.

In particular many parents criticise the commercial channels for this, and worry for the future of the ABC under de-regulation.

Their worries about different information Technologies: are they more concerned by, for example, television, internet, videos etc in relation to crime?

Other age groups might worry about the influence of new technologies on children; but it is parents who have to decide what to do about it. Most parents’ concerns about new technologies relate to violence. The Sydney parents say that there is a lot more crime and violence in television than when they were teenagers; and now this has been added to by violent horror video games, computer games and violent pornography on the Internet.

Parents speak of being unable to watch violent horror movies with their teenagers, of sons warning mothers not to watch; and a Blue Mountains parent mentions overhearing his son fantasising with a friend on the phone about the violence in a horror video he had just watched (which had driven the father from the room). The Bathurst parents emphasise how incredibly violent video games have become, and argue for less graphic images in both films and computer games.

A Sydney mother focuses the concerns of other parents about computer games by referring to ‘research’; and another mother contextualises this fear in terms of the hopes of the ‘active’ parent.

I think the computer’s very powerful because of the time children spend in front of it. And also I’ve read that there’s been some research about it, how particularly the younger adolescent boys talk about getting “turned on”. If they’ve witnessed too much violence... they can equate that to being “turned on”, like give them a good feeling from movies and the computer. I’ve read that that can be a kind of addiction with young kids to get that rush... Some computer games are very violent — stalking and killing... Because of the time they spend on it and because they are doing it vicariously through the computer, acting it out...
I guess the unknown quantity is the amount of time our kids spend on the computer playing these sorts of games — where will it end up? Will it cause that difference... that desire to get a high, or are there other things that have happened in their lives that will help them to separate that from reality?

These parents monitor and ‘veto’ the computer games played by even late teenager children, though they agree that it is difficult to police their children in other places.

Some of the mothers are more relaxed about the Internet, where they believe that their teenagers are having ‘ordinary conversations’ about music, school and daily events, rather than going out to see violent movies which can’t always be vetoed. ‘That’s certainly a lot safer than the other things they would normally be doing on the computer.’ The usual chestnut of making a bomb via the Internet is raised by all groups of parents, but some feel that access to this information is available through the library anyway.

A Sydney father raises the censorship dilemma

Some people will be triggered but probably most won’t. So do you veto everything for the few that will, and thus cut all the innocent pleasure of the masses for the 1% that will react violently? Society will probably have to weigh that up... Sure the information is out on the Internet to make a bomb. Well there will only be a handful of people around the world who will actually get that information and want to use it. But those handful of people can do a lot of damage given that information.

A Blue Mountains mother worries about the pace of technological change leaving regulations behind.

The problem is that technology is going ahead in such leaps and bounds that the guidelines are so far behind... like... on the Internet you can get instructions to make a bomb. And I believe there’s... child pornography stations you can hook up to. For the new technology there ought to be... rules and regulations people working hand in glove with them, obviously not for total censorship but to place parameters on it.

But it’s impossible to regulate the Internet.

The Bathurst parents also emphasise the need for censorship, plus education at school which ‘debunks’ these kinds of images by showing children how the violent effects are created.

Part of the issue for parents is the invisibility of their children from surveillance: either ‘there in the bedroom’ with the computer, or out with friends watching violent movies and videos.
Knowledge of the police: preferences vis-à-vis type and style of police series

Though we have emphasised in this section the continuities in parents’ positions, like any other set of individuals they are (as Rachel Pain would say) ‘a diversity of identities’. Because we have chosen to compare generational differences in this report, the quite considerable similarity of different regional parents’ fear of crime (especially in relation to their teenage children) has been highlighted. But obviously there are differences too, and this question about their experience of the police (in relation to media images of the police force) tend to highlight it. It is worth emphasising, however, that no group of parents was anything near as critical of the police as any group of teenagers.

Culturally, Australia has long had a more negative image of its police forces than, say, Britain — for reasons which go back to the convict days. Both Bathurst and Sydney parents, for example, talk of hearing about police corruption years ago from their own parents. This long-term negative image is conveyed strongly by word of mouth among a very wide range of our respondents. For example, on the one hand we had Brian from Balmoral, a parent and formerly a chief executive with an international mining company, who had personal experience of a friend buying marijuana from the police during the 1970s, and whose recent experience handing back his guns to the police during the firearms amnesty has not improved that impression. His suspicion is that police recirculated many of these guns back through gun dealers. On the other hand, we had Emma from Bathurst, a 17 year-old who said

*My images are different from the media, where the police are 98% of the time portrayed as the goodies and the other 2% as the baddies, but really there’s quite a lot of baddies... I greatly believe that some of them are just as big criminals as what we are: i.e. they wrote in the papers that something like 8 kilo of hash had been busted from someone, but really it had been 16 and the cops had... just put it back in the streets again.*

At least three things have, however, exacerbated police unpopularity among parents in recent years:

- Royal Commissions in Queensland and New South Wales, which all parent (and other) groups talk about — some parents, as we have seen, pointing to television series like *Scales of Justice* which prefigured the first Royal Commission;
- Increasing awareness of police prejudice to Aboriginal Australians, as shown in the ABC documentary *Cop It Sweet*; but also via some people’s professional experience: one mother at Bathurst for example says, ‘I work with Aborigines and my impression of the police has been coloured by that.’ She speaks of being outraged every time she sees footage of the police shootings of David Gundy in Redfern. Other parents (or grandparents) have had significantly negative experience with police at demonstrations, as trade unionists, women’s refuge workers, etc.
The escalation of teenage street and public transport violence, which has changed parents own night-time habits, made them increasingly fearful, and sometimes brought them into minor conflicts with the police. Thus one mother in Bathurst says that she can’t organise herself to be anywhere without the kids: ‘I drive them everywhere, don’t let them go anywhere, because I’m afraid of the police picking them up — because they treat them as guilty.’ And a Sydney mother compares her favourable feelings towards the police when she sees them pilloried in the media (as over the recent Bondi shooting) compared with her irritation with them when they give her a ticket for stopping at a crossing to let her child off at school.

This mix of cultural/historical, media-generated and experiential discourses about the police among parents tends to lead to:

- (most) parents arguing that some police are corrupt, but the other half are trying to do a good job (and therefore some get annoyed by continuously negative media images of police);
- some parents arguing that there were once systemic problems, leading to difficulties for the ‘young guys’ who want to clean up the police act; and
- a number of parents who argue that the problem is structural, so that only police series like Scales of Justice which focus on the layers of organisational, political, cultural and gendered involvement (within and outside the police force) deal with the matter of Australian policing seriously.

Though this latter group are a minority, the wide degree of ‘sadness’ about police corruption does lead many parents to think that most police series ‘are very sanitised, very stylised, idealised’ images of the police.

As regards the media, police and crime, parents are ambivalent. Some say that the general view of police and crime on the media is not always good; but that the media sensationalise, wanting to sell newspapers.

*The chances are it’s not as scary or as bad as you think it is... but the media will want to make it as scary as they can.*

*On the other hand, other parents argue:*

*I think they give more information about the crimes that are happening so on the one hand they may make us more fearful in certain situations, but on the other hand it allows us to take precautions as well, like I can lock the car when I’m driving by myself and I can say to my son to be careful coming home on the train. So not only do we have that extra bit of fear, but it can also make us more safe and more sensible.*

This Sydney mother says that, for example, media reports have led her to take precautions with her handbag and lock herself in her car immediately after shopping at the Macquarie Centre.
Most parents find it difficult to think of any genre of crime reporting that does — or might — help them manage their fear of crime. Most things they say increase their fear. ‘Only being ignorant will help you manage your fear’ says the Sydney group; while the Bathurst parents say only watching The Waltons helps! Some parents find positive, comforting images of the police in series like Police Rescue, and argue for more programs that show police successes (many parents feel that Australia’s Most Wanted draws attention to the failure of police to catch dangerous criminals).

Many think that television news frightens them the most because of the constancy of the genre and its potential to localise your fears. One Sydney father, for example, talks of his fear of an Asian man who knocked on his door at night and asked if his house was number so-and-so, when the actual number was lit up right in front of him — this incident occurred after TV news reports of vicious home invasions which began in this way.

Parents who believe that police corruption is systemic, argue (as in this Blue Mountains discussion)

> Ironically for me things like Scales of Justice help me to manage fear of crime better, because it demystifies crime and the relationship of police to crime. Seeing what I believe to be a realistic presentation of the situation for me has a demystifying effect... At one level it makes you feel powerless, but at another level more knowledgeable and therefore in a better position to know what might and could happen.

> And also when you actually work out the conclusion of it, and you have worked out who the criminal is, the solution, that assures me that I might just be able to cope with life after all.

Their ‘moral agendas’ vis-à-vis media role models

(for example in relation to violence)

Parents, worrying about ‘the way that society is going for our children’ tend to emphasise media violence as the cause of ‘bad’ developments, and in doing so construct a history of violence via film and television genres. The Sydney parents, for example, felt that:

- **Braveheart** was O.K. because, although ‘graphically violent’, it was about the past and ‘hopefully we’re better than that now’;
- today’s television news reports (of Cambodian skulls and ‘horrible’ violence) is particularly frightening in terms of impact ‘as a real situation’;
- science fiction series like Star Trek have a very positive value because ‘looking into the future there’s hope’, ‘there’s no money’, and the heroes ‘try to solve problems without violence.’
So for these parents, Gene Roddenbury, inventor of Star Trek, is a good role model for their teenagers. Most mothers find Hollywood blockbusters like Terminator boring and depressing, but some parents watch them with their children. Fathers say they ‘quite enjoy’ them (‘it gets my blood going — it’s the hunt’). A Bathurst father probably speaks for the others who enjoy Terminator when he says

*A Arnold Schwarzenegger is a role model for the kids and he has in recent years... tried... to show kids that you can be a great big guy and you can still laugh at yourself and do silly things and be nice.*

A Blue Mountains mother speaks of Murphy Brown as ‘quite a powerful influence on our daughter — a smart, sassy, outspoken female role model... She showed that a woman can be fulfilled without having a partner.’ Scully, in The X-Files is also mentioned as the only character who is taken seriously in the narrative.

**Local Media**

Parents often feel that local media makes them ‘feel worse because nearer to home’. Bathurst parents were very disturbed by a recent report of an old man been bashed in his front yard by youths; Sydney mothers mention reports of local bag snatching; Blue Mountains parents say that ‘a snatch and grab down at Wentworth Falls, if you read that, brings things a bit closer’. Sometimes local newspaper reports of crime can be mobilised by parents as part of their ‘teenager control’. For example, in a long interview Brian, a Sydney parent told us that when his daughter (‘an absolute innocent abroad’) asked to change her ferry route, he showed her the local paper’s reports on crime to dissuade her.

On the other hand a Katoomba mother complains that a bashing of young people in the local station underpass wasn’t reported in the local paper, except in the letter columns; and a Bathurst father worries about the lack of local reporting of the man who stalked and attacked girls recently in Rankin Street. All parent groups express their disrespect for the local media for bias, triviality, inaccurate reporting and prejudice. Moreover, because parents’ greatest concerns are for their children (who tend to travel widely outside the local area), the local media seldom gets to the heart of their central fears of crime.
TRANSPORT AND MEDIA STUDIES: SUMMARY
In our Research Proposal we began by arguing for the importance of situated and lay knowledge of risk: ‘how people construct their own “expert” knowledges with or without the use of professional’s “expert” knowledges.’

Lay knowledges, Wynne argues, tend to be far more contextual, localised and individualised, reflexively aware of diversity and change, than the generalising tendencies of expert knowledges. (Research Proposal, p.2)

In this summary of the Transport and the Media Studies we will, following the conceptual style of those two sections, pay particular attention to these aspects of ‘situated’ analysis: emphasising diversity, the localised, and the individualised. While not ignoring more generalised conclusions here, the more broadly framed findings of these studies should be looked for in the Executive Summary.

TEENAGERS

A ‘lay knowledge’ approach has been central to our Transport Study. For example, we have pointed to the detailed ‘anthropology of risk’ constructed by teenagers as they negotiate different sub-cultures in public places, and devise different personal strategies for dealing with anxieties and fear (which are further differentiated according to gender). While their experiences both in the home and in public spaces do give the teenagers that we interviewed ‘localised and individualised’ awareness of crime and fear of crime — of sexual harassment and abuse, of violence and potential violence from homies, of rave parties and drug cultures, of police harassment etc — they often look in vain to the media for a serious engagement with these fears.

On the one hand, the news (with its portrayal of police corruption as well as its litany of violence) and the ‘reality’ police shows like Australia’s Most Wanted scare many teenagers (though girls admit to this more readily); and media ‘landscapes of fear’ like Redfern, Cabramatta and Mt Druit do impact on their perceptions of these places and on their desire to go there. Thus in the description that we reported earlier by one Blue Mountains teenager of her fear of being in Mt Druit we see a mixing of ‘lay’ (localised) knowledge of homies, ‘expert’ (generalised) media knowledge (about the ‘Western Suburbs’), and a reflexive awareness about media stereotypes. But none of this did much to reduce her anxiety outside the shopping mall at Mt Druit. As in the case of Jan and her daughter who was sexually harassed on a train, these cases point to the inextricable interweaving of ‘lay’, ‘expert’ and ‘reflexive’ knowledge.
On the other hand, teenagers do find pleasure in fictionalised stories of crime, as in TV cop series — in their characterisation, in their ‘local event’ reality, in their narrative ‘twists’ and so on. But these, they say, are little more than a brief respite from the ‘mean world’ reality of the news and Australia’s Most Wanted. These faces from the ‘expert’ (police-aided) programming of the media become faces over their shoulders as they walk in the local community. Their anxiety about these faces is made worse when the local media fail to give accurate information about serious local crime; and also by the failure of the local police to live up to the successful and virile models of the TV crime series. Moreover, local gossip, our teenage respondents say, does circulate its own messages about local crime. One Blue Mountains teenager talked of a body found in Kingsford Smith Park in Katoomba, and about the gossip that suggested he may have been murdered. But no information was forthcoming from the media, and his worry was exacerbated by the fact that this park is where young under-age teenagers go to drink alcohol. This is a ‘mean world’ indeed: a park (close to the station) where adults are afraid to walk after dark; where young teenagers may be putting themselves at risk in a number of ways; and about which the local press seems to remain silent.

Teenagers live locally, but they also often travel between their home locality and their places of leisure. For many young people these leisure places are often somewhere else, ‘in the city’. Consequently, they are stretched between ‘local’ and ‘expert’ knowledge of the places they inhabit. Some teenagers are most fearful of Home Boys, and they see little representation of this particular problem in the media. Other teenagers (as in our Cleveland Street and Glebe refuge focus groups) are as nervous of the police, and, again, say that they never see these realities seriously addressed in the media. Others complain that the ‘intimate’ side of the sexual abuse they have experienced is either treated unrealistically (in television crime fiction series) or effaced beneath the more ‘sensational big events’ portrayed on the news (such as serial killings or institutionalised paedophilia). And many teenagers complain about the ‘unreal’, class-based and sensationalised accounts of teenage drug-use (as exemplified in media coverage of the Anna Woods case).
Teenagers are the most likely victims of crime, and they know they are at risk. Teenage girls experience a wide spectrum of sexual harassment, especially when they travel: from a man's knee rubbing against yours on the train seat or the man's stare devouring you from across the carriage to sexual assault in the train toilets. Teenage boys begin to acquire a localised and expanding ‘map’ of fear — Penrith station, Chatswood station, Hyde Park at night — via personal experience and word of mouth, which they add to other maps provided by the media — Cabramatta, Redfern etc. Sometimes teenagers know about risk in the home from personal experience; but much more often they are aware of risk in these public places: trains and stations, public parks, shopping malls at night, deserted bus stops at night, the NightRide bus on Friday and Saturday nights, and so on. They do not see these problems in public places being addressed, and nor do they draw much comfort from any media genre. Rather the news (and shows like Australia’s Most Wanted) tell them that violent crime against the person is rampant, and that the police are at best poor (and at worst corrupt) in clearing up crime. These ‘reality’ media genres therefore increase their perception of the probability of their being victims of crime.

Teenagers want to know about the reality of this probability, so that they can make their own choices (unlike older people they do not generally meet the problem of crime at night by staying at home). But they complain that the local and mass media does not provide the knowledge they need. In the Blue Mountains, for example, teenagers believe that the tourist dollar keeps the ‘bad’ out of the local press. While in places like Redfern, local teenagers believe that prejudice against their community keeps the ‘good’ out. In the absence of these things their fears continue and expand as a tissue of local gossip and media hype.

In their own areas of competence, both in their own community and as nomads of public space teenagers to some extent are the experts. They are experts in relation to specific time/space co-ordinates:

- the biographical time co-ordinates of being a teenager exposed on a daily basis to the various harassments from quite specifically nominated subcultures of other teenagers (‘footies’, ‘westies’, ‘rednecks’, ‘homies’, ‘yuppies’);
- the clock-time co-ordinates of night-time exposure when the pubs close, in parks or deserted shopping malls at night, and on trains after dark;
- the spatial co-ordinates that are generated by increasing privatisation (deserted streets and parks at night) and commoditisation (as the ‘public spaces’ of shopping malls drive the young away unless they spend money) at a time of structural unemployment.

And so teenagers often ‘hang around’ streets, malls, parks and stations at night.
Public transport is a very particular cause for concern, for several reasons.
i) Teenagers often need to travel for their leisure time activities (particularly if they live outside city centres).

ii) Train compartments are perceived as places of potential isolation and entrapment (as are some train stations like Town Hall and St James in Sydney).

iii) The most feared other teenage group (whether in Sydney, the Blue Mountains, Wollongong or Hobart) — the Home Boys (or equivalent) — actually target trains and stations for their economy.

iv) Teenagers (like other age groups) perceive less and less railway personnel on trains and stations to help them if attacked.

Further problems in this area are revealed by interviews with railway personnel themselves.

- Transit police are too few in number (less than the numbers promised), work in pairs, and inevitably disappear for hours on end ‘to do the paperwork’ if they make an arrest — leaving the train guard to cope with the rest of the ‘gang’ who are still on his train.

- Security guards come from various private companies and, although a major bonus for rail personnel, are peripatetic, largely unarmed, minimally trained, and variable in quality.

- Communication systems between trains and police are virtually non-existent (despite publicly displayed notices to the contrary), and rely on poor equipment and the happenstance mediation of signal boxes.

- Train guards frequently lock themselves in their compartments at night, seldom walk through the train (because of their own fears), and often are not even prepared to step out at stations to ensure that people are getting on and off trains safely — again because of the harassment that they encounter from ‘gangs’ of youths.

Parents of teenagers also reveal considerable worries about their teenagers travelling on deserted trains and via deserted stations at night, and many parents themselves travel at all hours of the night to pick their children up in their cars. Mothers are normally far more afraid for their teenage children than for themselves travelling on the trains at night. All parties interviewed — teenagers, parents, older people, and railway staff nominate travel by public transport at night (especially trains) as the greatest source of fear of crime as well as risk of real crime.
Rachel Pain has argued that the ‘missing discourse in work on crime and elderly people is the perceptions of elderly people themselves’ (Pain, 1997: 119). Like her research, our transport and media studies aimed at accessing older people's own perceptions.

Pain found that among older people ‘public places often come to be perceived as belonging to groups of children or teenagers, and an associated threat of criminal activity, real or perceived, helps to maintain this image’ (Pain, 1997:120). This was our finding also, though it is important to locate older people's fear of teenagers in two different temporal dimensions.

The first of these is biographical time. Older people are often, of course, acutely aware of their declining physical bodies — so that discussions about fear and public transport would very quickly focus on the risks of getting on and off buses, rather than necessarily turn immediately to fear of travelling on trains. By and large older people avoid travel by train at night altogether, as a matter of preference. So that particular aspect of their fear is, on a daily basis, much more generalised and 'academic' than it is with teenagers; and certainly much less specific than their concerns about getting on and off buses or trains. But there is one time of day when older people are made very anxious by teenagers on the train, and this has very little to do with fear of crime. This is when teenagers come out of school and catch the train. At this time older people are made very nervous by the large schoolbags on teenagers' backs which swing around as they walk through the train ('they could knock your head off') or which teenagers leave in aisles, thus threatening older people with life-risking falls. Sometimes, too, older people are subject to harassment by teenagers on trains; as we heard from the response of the older woman from the Blue Mountains who regularly carries with her an apple, a knife and a crochet needle.

The second time scale for older people is biographical time — and the time located in their memories. Older people have long memories associated with travel, and so can remember when they worried for their teenage sons and daughters too. As we saw in our long interview with Jean from the Blue Mountains, the biographical time co-ordinates of older people can be quite complex: a long history of train travel to and from work without serious incident; a specific and concentrated memory of heightened worry about train travel when one was a parent of teenagers; and a predictive account of greater anxiety when one becomes more 'elderly-frail'.
Older people negotiate between these different time scales and memories because they are important in warding off ‘old age’. This resistance to the ‘elderly-frail’ is a very important attempt to manage fear among older people, and helps account for the passion with which a few of our older respondents deemed as ‘pathetic’ the choice of the majority to stay at home in the evenings. Although this majority were often adamant that staying at home after dark was now (in the absence of dead partners) a matter of choice rather than fear, the minority could be quite militaristic in their language and passion, calling for a show of ‘masses’ of bodies to ‘fight’ the threatening teenagers and ‘take our space back from the undesirables’. As June from Blackheath put it, ‘I refuse to live my life fearing... I refuse to be locked inside my door’.

However, a combination of the passing of biographical time with the recognition of the third temporal co-ordinate — historical time — can often lead older people to give in to being locked in behind their door. All three temporal co-ordinates operated to make Ella from Bathurst fearful of crime: she was especially fearful at night; her husband had died recently with a very significant effect on her personal biography; and she believed that crime and risk was structurally much worse now than it used to be when she was younger. Ella’s media use — or lack of it — showed clearly how these different temporal co-ordinates worked together to leave her frightened behind six locks on her front doors. Media coverage of home invasions had created Ella’s greatest fear, and when her husband aged and died, leaving her alone she found that she could no longer watch any television show (fact or fiction) which dwelt on crime. The same police series that she had watched and talked over with her husband now seemed much more ‘real’ and frightening to her. But she still scrutinised the court-case column in the local newspaper and that reinforced her view that home invasions (or at least robberies) were increasing, and were the result of unemployment and young people being on drugs. On the one hand, this made her worry for her grandchildren; and on the other provided her with a causal narrative that tied together her two greatest crime fears: as society got worse, more young people took to drugs and thus to robbery and home invasion to support their habit.

Many other older people reached into their memories to find a safer world in the past: when it was possible for a woman to feel safe even in the roughest parts of the old, criminal sub-world of Paddington because ‘women were respected’; when a young woman could walk home safely at midnight in Strathfield because of policemen on the beat and the fact that the local sergeant knew all the local miscreants and would tan their bottoms to keep local order; when a man on shift work could walk home safely at Blacktown at any time of night, untroubled by today’s ‘gangs’ of youths. It is the combination of these ‘golden age’ memories of the past with their current recognition of deteriorating vigour than can lead older people to an acute sense of insecurity: ‘We’re very vulnerable, very easy prey, old people, frail people, very easy prey.’
As well as these biographical and historical temporal markers relating to fear, older people also respond to geographical markers of place. Older people in the Blue Mountains said they breathed a sigh of relief once their daytime trains had gone beyond the Sydney to Penrith region (especially the Western Suburbs) and were back in the Mountains. Not only was there the fact that the Western Suburbs seemed more dangerous to them than the Blue Mountains, but also suburban trains stepped more often in these ‘risk’ areas, making older people feel more vulnerable to a quick attack-and-grab.

Geographical considerations also influenced older people in Bathurst, who worried that crime was spreading from ‘the city’ (including, of course, the Western Suburbs). While worrying about local bashings of older people by youths and about home invasions, they still felt safer in their country town than in the city. Meanwhile older people in Sydney often imply that their place is being invaded by crimes brought into Australia by Maoris, Pacific Islanders and Asians. In all of these cases crime comes from elsewhere, though it also comes from the young.

‘It’s a young people’s world’, even in the perception of the most psychologically comfortable older people — like John who moves securely from his retirement village in Sydney to eat and shop in Cabramatta. Consequently, older people worry a great deal about the power of the media to teach young people about crime. They talk about American cop series showing young people how to commit crime, of the Internet teaching them how to make bombs, of computer games desensitising them to violence, and so on. They worry that their own children — the teenagers’ parents — are out at work and using the television as a babysitter, unaware of the violence it is inculcating. They fear, via the media about the unpredictability of crime: ‘the television has taught me that people under the influence of drugs that break into your home are just maniacs. That’s my biggest fear’. And the media also makes them cynical about the police whom they once assumed would help them.

An important factor, too, is the economy of old age; where, as Pain says, ‘people lose labour value at 60 or 65’ (Pain, 1997:117) and retirement is experienced as an often confined socioeconomic space. Older people are acutely aware of their often enfeebled economic position: the Sydney transport focus group, for example, spent quite some time talking about the cost of one person as against another getting to the interview (it was for reasons like this that we decided to pay respondents enough to cover their travel); and also about the unfairness of government nursing home schemes when they had to sell their homes.
Nevertheless, despite the feeling of powerlessness that increasing frailty, economic decline and an apparently powerful media bestow on many older people, it is important for academic researchers, as Rachel Pain says, not to follow the media in stereotyping them as automatically fearful and passive. Not only are there the individual cases of older women who, drawing on a lifetime of experience, insist that ‘I refuse to be intimidated... I refuse to be locked in[side] my door’. Not only do older people have a range of strategies for dealing with their concerns about travelling by bus or train (like the woman with the apple, the knife and the crochet needle). But some of them have considerably more in the way of alternative knowledge resources to help them counter (at least psychologically) both the power of the media and their own ageing. It is important not to categorise older people by age; remembering (as Pain says) their multiple identities. It was to illustrate this that we included the focus group interview with the Sydney Combined Pensioners in our Media Report. Though like other older people they also have fears about teenagers, their greater fears are for them rather than of them. Older people may not have the detailed local/nomadic knowledge that enables teenagers both to spot and to adopt very specific strategies to avoid potential assailants. But they can have (as a result of early experience during the Depression, long-term trade union experience, etc.) a very different kind of ‘expert’ knowledge than is generally available from the media, or that teenagers are likely now to gain through their own experience.

**WOMEN**

We have said a lot about women and fear of crime already in talking about teenagers and older people. It is important to re-emphasise here that ‘women’ (like any other category of analysis) need to be seen as multiple identities. To repeat our theoretical position stated in the Literature Audit, our theoretical ‘frame’ is empirical (hence our emphasis on researching ‘lay knowledgability’); culturalist-realist (in that we believe that specific socio-structural, economic, and historically changing conditions are important in understanding fear of crime); and post-structuralist (in emphasising that human identity is fragmentary as well as continuous, and often ‘contradictory’, with both ‘rationality’ and ‘emotion’ constituted through the discourses of a number of ‘collectives’).
Our long interview with women who are parents illustrated this emphasis especially strikingly in relation to transport, the media and fear of crime. Their identities were seen to be institutionally and biographically complex. A mother is the child of (sometimes violent) parents, as well as herself a parent who may well fear for her growing teenage children. A mother has a politics which may (or may not) elaborate those of her parents, be influenced by feminism, be experienced by contact with the police (as a result of union activity or as a victim of domestic violence) in differentiating the upholders of ‘law and order’ from the ones portrayed in the media, relate to fear of crime in different ways as the result of their sexual preference or their ethnicity or their place of domicile. They may (as we found was the case of two mothers we interviewed) be relatively confident on public transport at night (even helping other women or teenagers who are fearful), yet be frightened by particular anti-women themes on television and film. It is only by way of qualitative methods (particularly long interviews) that we can begin to understand the situated interweaving of these multiple identities (or ‘collectives’) as individual women negotiate their fear of crime. Gunter has indicated that the ‘what’ and ‘who’ of risk tended to reside somewhere far off: most likely to be found in the city streets of the US than in one’s own neighbourhood. Our long interviews with women allowed us to understand how fear of crime at the hands of one black man while walking the streets of an American city at night is actively negotiated through all of the biographical identities and ‘collectives’ described above. That example of a woman’s fear of crime in a far off city at night from a (black) ‘unpredictable stranger’ exemplifies the claim of our research theory and method to be empirical, culturalist-realist (with a focus on particular biographical and historical spaces and times) and post-structuralist in emphasising the fragmentation as well as continuity of human identity.

Our recognition of women’s multiple identities was as important in the case of our apparently most fearful female respondents, as it was with our most self-confident female respondents. In the case of one of our more fearful female interviewees, unless we recognise the play between personal history (especially the savage attack at age 13 that brain-damaged her closest female friend), structure (her working-class position which leaves her no option but to travel on trains), gender (the many stories of male threat and harassment among her work colleagues), and agency (her efforts to find a more positive identity that reduces her fear on trains at night), we risk reducing this woman to the ‘frightened little female’ who, according to her own account, is afraid to go to the corner shop after dark.
More generally, we are saying that a report on ‘women and fear of crime’ which emphasised:

- the spectrum of fears of sexual crime among teenagers;
- the anxiety among mothers of teenagers about their daughters (and sons) travelling at night;
- the refusal of older women to go out at night;

would leave our understanding with too passive and fearful an image. The interweaving of women’s different identities, biographies and agencies helps redress this picture.

Women’s fears are specific and situated: relating to a wide spectrum of harassment which they learn about early; but relating also to a male fear which often restricts their autonomy. The very same City Rail management personnel who blame fear of crime on the trains on media sensationalism, fear for their own wives and daughters travelling on trains. And an older Sydney woman finds that a lifetime’s independence in crossing the city (even in the daytime) has recently been compromised by a husband who wants to accompany her now he has retired. The amalgam of personal experience of sexual harassment, media stereotyping and misinformation, and male over-protection must make it difficult for many women to assess risk situations and act agentively in them. On the other hand, the clear-sighted (‘touch wood, nothing’s happened to be yet’) positivity of June, the older woman from the Blue Mountains who insists that she will go on travelling alone by train at night indicates how experienced women, no longer encumbered by the fears of a male partner, can manage fear. June’s encounter with sexual harassment is so different in terms of fear and identity from that of Jan, another Blue Mountains woman. June positioned the young man who exposed himself to her on the train as ‘silly’, ‘young’, and a ‘Christmas eve’ drunk. The guard helped her, and this became a trivial incident for her, only noteworthy of comment as an example of how little one had to fear on the train. In contrast, Jan was dealing with sexual exposure to her young daughter; and like other mothers that we interviewed, fear for teenage children was both much higher than for one’s person, and was usually at one remove in terms of information and pastoral presence. In this case the guard did not help; and nor did the after-the-event involvement of police and other professionals. We would expect June, also, to have been fearful like Jan when she herself was a parent of teenagers; certainly that was the case with another confident older woman that we interviewed, Jean.
Our conclusion, then, is that women's fear of crime in public places is not irrational, but situated. Fears on trains are especially specific, relating to men's activities. Teenagers encounter a range of sexual harassments — enough in any one girl's experience to fear that this could lead to more serious problems unless they are especially surveillant. On top of this, many girls have either themselves experienced, or know of someone else who has experienced some level of physical or sexual assault. Mothers have an extra fear, for both sons and daughters, which is all the more destabilising because parents generally try to allow their growing teenage children more autonomy, yet in a society which they find increasingly threatening. Older women are, in many respects, the most relaxed about travelling (though they have, as we have said, other concerns and fears). Either they avoid travelling at night (enjoying their day-time travel and not wanting to go out at night without a partner); or they draw on a lifetime of experience and confidence in insisting on their right to night-time travel. Indeed, some older women find that it is their over-fearful partner rather than themselves who tries to limit their activity.

Meanwhile, many mothers are looking for ways of de-limiting their own teenagers self-concepts. Some fear that new media technologies are limiting their children's identities in terms of gender stereotypes and violence; others are looking for 'probing' programs in the media (from *Scales of Justice* to *Good News Week*) which are providing more critical role models for their teenagers. The popularity of the British series *The Bill* with women of all ages among our respondents seems to relate to its perception as occupying an 'entertaining' middle-ground between the more violent and the more probing police television series, while at the same time offering a better example than most of decent and caring interpersonal relations. Here, too, the 'contextual, localised and individualised' was emphasised as a significant pleasure of this TV show.
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

In our Research Proposal for this Fear of Crime consultancy, we headed our ‘Recommendations On Strategies Phase’ section with a quotation from Peter Homel’s paper.

‘A focus on the development of partnerships between Government and the community (especially marginalised groups).’

We also supported his ‘acceptance that a fear of crime is as important as crime itself’; and we foreshadowed in the Research Proposal a significant focus in our final report on the notion of ‘reclaiming public space’. Our research showed that people feel much less safe in public space than at home.

These three things — partnerships; the reality of feared crime; and reclaiming public space — triangulate, as it were, our conclusions to this study. They represent, in other words, the method, the theory and the substantive space/time co-ordinates underpinning our Fear of Crime research, and our suggestions as to where to go from here:

- the method (‘making stakeholders partners in the process of risk evaluation and management’ — see Literature Audit Report Introduction);
- the theory and epistemology (accepting that fear of crime, far from being the ‘fantasy’ of empiricist research, is intelligibly related to the real day-to-day lives of the fearful, to their spectrum of sexual harassment if they are young and female, to real, circulating subcultures of violence if they are teenage boys, to the fears embedded in an aging body if they are older people); and
- the space/time co-ordinates (especially public places at night and other high risk areas such as pedestrian subways and shopping areas).

THE METHOD: STAKEHOLDERS AS PARTNERS

In the Introduction to our Literature Audit, we supported the recent culturalist comments of Healy and Handmer that

*Risk communication has been dominated by ‘top-down’ technocratic approaches that can be characterised as expert to public monologues. Such approaches contrast strongly with the more ‘open’ approaches based on concepts such as partnership and consensus that have recently moved to centre stage in risk communication… [In] the ‘Risk Society’… the uncertain and indeterminate nature of technical knowledge is widely acknowledged… The evolution… is towards an emphasis on making stakeholders partners in the process of risk evaluation and management… In the process of dialogue participants reflect on what they really mean, the assumptions underlying their assertions and beliefs, and how their perspectives can be expressed to enable other participants to understand and appreciate it.*

(Healy and Handmer, 1997)
As we also argued in our Research Proposal, current ‘Risk Society’ thinking emphasises the importance of valuing ‘lay’ as well as ‘expert’ knowledge in risk assessment. Lay knowledges, as Wynne argues, tend to be far more contextual, localised and individualised, reflexively more aware of diversity and change, than the generalising tendencies of expert knowledges (Wynne, 1996:70). An important example of this in our Fear of Crime study can be seen by comparing our own findings on young people’s fear of crime with that in the ‘Blacktown’ study of public transport. In the latter, an ‘expert’ discourse is valuably employed to emphasise the way in which, in the current order of youth unemployment and the commoditisation of public space, young people who are not able to purchase goods (in shopping malls, for instance) are driven into other public spaces like train and bus stations where they are constructed as the risky ‘other’ by the general public. What this study omits, however, is much of the contextual, localised, individualised and reflexively aware (‘what youth fears is other youth’) focus which emerged from our own interview data with young people. In particular, what the ‘Blacktown’ study effaced was the detailed, localised sense of diversity among youth cultures which our young male respondents spoke of, and their emphasis on very specific groups (eg ‘homies’) that they feared in very particular places (trains on Friday and Saturday nights, specific stations, specific shopping malls, etc). This is the kind of ‘situated’ lay knowledge which, as Wynne argues, is so important in understanding and countering fear of crime in a ‘Risk Society’.

In our Literature Audit Report, we also outlined four kinds of expert/community ‘partnership’, following Brown and Campbell’s risk communication campaign model (see chapter 4). This model describes appropriate campaign methodologies in relation to two axes or dimensions of stakeholder involvement: level of interaction and level of devolution of power. In principle we support the fourth of these: high interaction/high devolved power; and this is especially the case given an economic rationalist and neo-liberal governmentality wherein public services, parks, transport systems etc have been weakened in terms of personnel and resources. It makes no sense, for example, to recommend the encouragement of older people to travel more by train at night if the public rail system is actually not providing (according to the account of its own personnel) adequate safeguards at night against known sub-cultures of young people who target trains and stations. All of our respondent groups called for more visible security in trains, on stations, and at other public places at night.
Nor does it make sense to use a high interaction/low devolved power ‘consultation’ mode (via public meetings and planning inquiries) to encourage young people to use public places like parks and city malls at night if these are places of significant perceived risk — though public meetings and planning inquiries would be valuable at those times of building or replanning these sites. For example, the public as stakeholders might well ask at those times for the siting of a permanent police presence there; as has occurred with apparently beneficial effect at Epping Station, and also at the George Street cinema complex in Sydney. To take one example to illustrate our point: our public transport respondents in the Blue Mountains might well ask why the new police station in Katoomba was sited opposite a Bible College and nearly a kilometre down the main street from the train station underpass where significant muggings have occurred. Undoubtedly there will be plausible reasons for this siting, and there are other priorities for the police than protecting public spaces. But the point is that these questions have not been put and negotiated in a way that draws on the public as stakeholder and constituent of ‘public space’.

Two key things need to happen, we suggest, before public space is less feared at night.

i) More people need to use it.

ii) They have to be provided with back-up security while doing so.

The recent Bondi project involving members of the Centre for Cultural Risk Research at CSU offers a successful situated example of both these factors operating. (Carroll 1997) ‘Stakeholder partnership’ was strong in this case, since the initial Bondi Beach Community Safety Action Committee involved Waverley Council (including local shopkeepers), police, tourism, health, transport and trades and liquor representatives, as well as members from the Byron Bay Community Safety Committee (illustrating a valuable ‘flow-on’ aspect from one local beach strategy to another). An events management company in Sydney won the tender for the Bondi project, and sub-contracted to Theatre/Media/Cultural Risk staff at Charles Sturt University to provide street theatre and carnival events on Christmas Day and New Year’s Eve (when hitherto there had been substantial rioting and violence). A crucial, situated concept in this ‘Riot to Rio’ strategy was the notion of ‘the journey’: viz., that Bondi Beach was a mythical subject and target for many backpackers from overseas (the ‘Christmas on Bondi Beach’ stereotype held by many Europeans) who have no direct family or friends with whom to spend this time. Thus

(i) Bondi Beach at Christmas and New Year is a place that large numbers of people (especially overseas and local tourists) want to use.

(ii) What strategies could be put in place to provide them with security.
The project offered layered security: (i) students as hosts/hostesses who provided the food and information about carnival events; (ii) security staff out of uniform and mingling with the crowd; (iii) a significant back-up police presence. As a result, Bondi Beach became a place of activities for various age groups, and was regarded by the police as a success.

In our view this project illustrates particularly well the focus on situated (time/space focused) research and strategies. Clearly, a strategy was designed for this crowd (‘the journey’ + family interest) at this place (Bondi Beach) at this time (Christmas/New Year). Equally clearly, strategies for other public places (shopping malls, public parks, train stations) will need to be situated in terms of their own varying time/space co-ordinates.

Nevertheless, the Bondi project offers a clear example of what can be done through stakeholder partnerships. We would advocate more involvement of the stakeholder public in these planning programs. For example, the Macquarie Shopping Centre, Sydney has removed its central open stage area, which used to put on events for children, fashion shows and other public and special interest events. Does this reduce the possibility of all ages sharing this public space (rather than focus entirely on shopping)? Were the public consulted, and what is their view of the changes?

Future policy directions in these different areas relating to the use of public spaces which are especially feared by our respondents (shopping malls, parks, beaches and river-banks, trains and stations) need to respond to the anxieties shared by many people. A number of our respondents spoke of feeling quite safe wherever there were many people around the streets and public spaces at night, shops were open, etc (‘as in Newtown’, for example). In fact, it was one of the more curious features of people’s perception of public space and fear of crime that the geographically almost contiguous localities of Redfern and Newtown in inner-city Sydney could be seen so differently.

In our Fieldwork, macro-level issues like unemployment, the illicit drug trade, poverty and the alienation attached to late-modern cities were clearly linked to people’s perceptions and fears of crime. And while these macro-level issues go far beyond our consultancy brief, they do need to be part of the agenda of future stakeholder involvement in the various areas of ‘public space’ risk that have been highlighted in this study — for example, the problem of unemployment, commoditisation and shopping malls indicated by the ‘Blacktown’ study.
Our methodological focus on ‘stakeholders as partners’ suggests that the kind of collaborative endeavour that we piloted in our **Transport Study** is a crucially important direction for future policy to take. In this study, we drew on interviews with three generations of public transport users (at both ends of a popular inter-urban rail line), with public transport management (including risk managers, and public relations), with train and bus workers, and with a commuter organisation. This was a processual method which elucidated commuters’ specific (‘lay’) fears of crime, and NSW transport and State Rail operators’ own (‘expert’) perceptions.

The ‘final’ stage of this process was a collaborative discussion with the Manager of Passenger Security, NSW Transport Authority which led to the following suggestions for further action. In this collaboration our own particular expertise arising out of the public voices accessed through the fieldwork and out of our experience of the Bondi project came together with the expertise of NSW Transport security management.

1) **More effective police targeting to deal with the ‘homie’ problem via better use of intelligence within the police service.** It is quite likely that, as a result of the nature of their focus on the train system, this group travels through different transit police area’s responsibilities. Yet both the Manager of Passenger Security at NSW Transport and the Transit Liaison Chief in the police service, have concerns with the way information is used at the moment: there is not enough analysis and sharing of information between transit police areas.

2) **There is a need to look at the places where ‘homies’ congregate and at the ways of reducing their opportunities to harass the travelling public and others in public spaces.** Better intelligence as in (1) (above) could lead to
   a) the placing of covert cameras at areas of current concentration of these groups, and b) the use of contract security personnel (after specific training) who, as in the Bondi project, could circulate at targeted stations in a non-threatening way. This would give them the opportunity to differentiate within this group, while still targeting station areas which current intelligence reveals as a problem. The **Fieldwork** results lend support to the Bondi initiative which provides an ideal model for the provision of security services in public places. The layered, non-threatening, visible face of security backed up by an effective police service gives a supportive environment for the fearful without provoking a conflict with negative elements of society. This will achieve three objectives:
   - the fearful will experience a much greater level of support;
   - the security officers will present a reassuring official presence (a uniform) to the problem group and the commuters; and
   - by mixing with the problem group, the security staff will gain intelligence which will be useful if the problem group moves to another area.

As with Bondi, any initiative of this type should be developed in close consultation with the local police to ensure their back-up in case of an incident which the security staff can not handle.

This concept of a supportive, non-threatening security presence is easily adaptable to other dispersal points or areas where the public gather.
3) A joint police/City Rail initiative is needed to explore further the nature of the particular groups which teenagers in different time/space locations see as a major problem, and to look at the possibility of diversion strategies away from unacceptable behaviour with other forms of activity. We agree with the Manager of Passenger Security from NSW Transport that this is better than just relying on policing strategies alone. In this area the 'Blacktown' transport study makes some useful recommendations.

We offer this particular (though preliminary) case study as an example of the kind of policy initiative in 'stakeholder partnership' which is needed in each and every area of risk and fear in public spaces: whether in a specific centre's shopping malls (as in Hobart and Wollongong, revealed in our Fieldwork Report) or in a 'mass' and national institution such as the media. Above all, what is needed is not a series of 'talkfests' where problems are aired and debated without following action. Whether the fear of crime problem is focused on the night streets of Bathurst after local newspaper reports of a series of rape attacks, or in Hobart shopping mall, or around the train stations of Chatswood and Penrith where young people fear 'homies', the kind of collaborative involvement (which might include, as appropriate, local journalists, their various generations of public, local shopkeepers, police, security personnel, etc) which we began in our Transport Study is essential.

It is for this reason that in our survey of actual fear of crime strategies we focused so centrally on 'The 24-Hour City' Conference in Manchester in 1993. This conference at Manchester's Metropolitan University brought together speakers including senior policemen, researchers, licensing consultants, directors of city development corporations, journalists, urban development consultants, senior members of British and European City Councils, and arts consultants. Its strength was bringing together this group of 'experts' with one common goal: relating crime and fear of crime to the lack of a night-time economy. This common economic goal in a very specific kind of 'headquarters' post-industrial city (see Ian Taylor's analysis as summarised in the Literature Audit, chapters 4 and 5) gave a 'partnership' focus, which was completely lacking in another conference we summarised in the Literature Audit (chapter 5), the ‘Climate of Fear’ conference organised at the University of Melbourne in 1991. In the Melbourne conference, the media representatives clearly felt themselves to be positioned as 'guilty' by the conference subtitle ‘Media Responsibility in Reporting Violent Crime’, with a resulting schism between academic and media participants. In contrast the situated goal of the Manchester conference (i.e. a night-time economy in a very particular kind of post-industrial environment) helped to give the different 'expert' participants a common purpose, even if inevitable contradictions (as for example between the different value of an overall night-time economy for pubs and night clubs) arose.
On the other hand, we pointed to a significant weakness in the Manchester conference: the apparent absence as speakers (and participants?) of the 'lay' public. Peter Homel speaks of the importance of 'partnerships' including 'marginal groups', and at the Manchester conference a particularly feared group — 'youth' — was much spoken about (for and against) without, apparently, a voice of its own. It has been an important feature of our Fear of Crime research that the age group that is both most at risk and most feared in public spaces — young people — were given a voice of their own.

The Theory and Epistemology: fear of crime as intelligibly related to the real day-to-day lives of the fearful

An important feature of the new developments in Risk Communication which we have discussed throughout this study is that

[In the process of dialogue participants reflect on what they really mean, the assumptions underlying their assertions and beliefs, and how their perspectives can be expressed to enable other participants to understand and appreciate it. (Healy and Handmer, 1997)]

The theory underpinning our ‘Fear of Crime’ research has therefore been reflexive, in the sense that it has drawn attention to the epistemological ‘assumptions underlying’ both other literature in the field and our own. Healy and Handmer speak of the ‘bounding premises’ which delimit any ‘expert’ discourse about fear of crime (see Literature Audit, Introduction). Not only are police, media and transport ‘experts’ stakeholders in the ‘partnerships’ we seek, but so too are a variety of academic disciplines and intellectual paradigms (including the quite different intellectual paradigms that make up our own research team).

The “open” approaches based on concepts such as partnership and consensus’ which Healy and Handmer look for in effective risk communication, the emphasis on exposing the underlying assumptions and expressions of different perspectives on fear of crime ‘to enable other participants to understand and appreciate it’, need to be applied as much to the various academic ‘experts’ in fear of crime, as to other professionals in that field. This is why, in our Literature Audit of the media and fear of crime we examined different analytical paradigms; and it is why we responded in this area to the central research questions raised by the Fear of Crime tender document twice: relating respectively to quantitative/empiricist analyses (as represented by Gunter), and to ethnographic/culturalist responses (as represented by Taylor). For example, chapter 5 of the Literature Audit contains the following response to:

QUESTION 8: What is known about the tools that measure fear of crime and the effectiveness of these tools in terms of reliability and whether they affect the fear of crime?
Gunter

ANSWER 8: Gunter and others’ main critique of Gerbner’s cultivation hypothesis is at the level of his use of correlational analysis. Gunter argues that rather than any cultivation effect at all, it could be argued that the results of various researchers (including Gerbner et al) indicate that people who believe the world is a just place selectively watch dramatic content to obtain reinforcement and clarification of their beliefs. Or, a compromise view would be that the relationship works in both directions and that social perceptions and selective viewing of certain types of television content can be mutually reinforcing.

Taylor

ANSWER 8: Taylor’s analysis provides very strong evidence of the value of situated ethnographic methods, embedded in broader socio-historical and realist/structural analysis. Yet this is a hermeneutic reading which does not readily allow us — as Taylor himself says — “to “test” the findings of the several studies that have been completed by geographers, urban sociologists, or criminologists on the quality of life in particular localities” (Taylor, 1995: 263). It is not, Taylor emphasises, ‘the result of any systematic formal survey work as such’. Rather, the study offers a description of the ‘symbolic locations’ of this local suburb — the park, the pub, a main street. To do this, it draws on ‘the topics of conversation that occur among small gatherings of residents (in the Post Office, the supermarket check-outs etc.)’, on ‘conversations with a small number of friendly neighbours and friends made in this area as well as from listening to the talk of two teenage daughters and their friends’ (Taylor, 1995: 262). Via these daily experienced narratives, and via his reading of ‘the news stories that dominate the local newspaper press’, Taylor then offers a “hermeneutic” account of the dominant themes and topics so uncovered.’ Clearly this study suffers from all the issues of ‘reliability’ conventionally ascribed to ‘thick description’. But it can (and in part does) also lead to more generalised developments extending the localised ethnographic work via comparative and historical analysis.

However, despite the ‘open approaches’ to ‘stakeholder partnership’ that we have been advocating, our own analytical position is not simply eclectic. Following the above analysis of Ian Taylor’s work on fear of crime, we made our theoretical/epistemological position clear at the beginning of chapter 6 of the Literature Audit. Our theoretical ‘frame’ for this report is

- empirical (but not empiricist),
- culturalist-realistic (in the sense that we believe that specific socio-structural, economic and historical conditions are important in understanding fear of crime), and
- post-structuralist (but not radically textualist-postmodernist: we are in other words committed to the notion that human identity is fragmentary as well as continuous, and often contradictory, with both ‘rationality’ and ‘emotion’ constituted through the discourses of a number of ‘collectives’).
This is a theoretical position which believes both in ‘structure’ (though not as a fixed and unchanging pre-determinant of meaning) and in ‘agency’ (though not in the humanist sense of autonomous, individual, rational choice as the warrant of enlightenment and ‘civilisation’).

Consequently, the following key concepts were described in the final chapter of the Literature Audit as especially relevant to analysing fear of crime.

- negotiation of meanings as personal/social products/practices
- place as situational context (landscapes of fear)
- time (biographical, locational, and historical)
- agency/structure
- everyday routine (including the routine management of fear via media, local gossip, etc.)
- judgments (perceptions) of fear
- values (competing priorities)
- emotions (outrage)
- behaviours (constrained/compensatory/ avoidance/activism/control)
- circulating rhetorics and hermeneutics (media/local)
- gender/age/class/ethnicity/sexual preference
- knowledgability (‘expert/lay’)
- reflexive dialogue

These concepts, which were explained theoretically in the ‘Towards the Fieldwork Phase’ of our Literature Audit Report, then underpinned the fieldwork and its analysis. In addition, the Fieldwork Report adopted an innovative methodology incorporating some of the standard quantitative items used in other fear of crime research (as well as some items devised specifically for the present study) involving ‘tick the box’ responses, but which then added qualitative interview methods asking people to elaborate on their answers.

Finally, we will now return to the central questions asked by the consultancy brief, by way of the findings of our fieldwork phase.
QUESTION 1: Which groups in the community are afraid of crime, what are they afraid of, and from whom?

Our fieldwork research found that for all groups the figure of what we have called ‘the unpredictable stranger’ was the focus of most of their fear in relation to being a victim of crime. The ‘unpredictable stranger’ is a person from outside one’s known circle of family, friends or neighbours, someone who is positioned as Other to Self, who does not share one’s own approach to life, one’s principles and sensibilities. The participants’ fear of the ‘unpredictable stranger’ was largely based on uncertainty: they did not know this individual and thus cannot gauge how he (this figure is invariably thought of as a male) might respond or act. They were more afraid of this figure when moving in public spaces, because they felt that they had far less control over others in such spaces than when in their own homes, and they are far more likely to encounter strangers in the ‘outside world’ than when they are in their homes. However, the idea of such an individual coming into one’s home uninvited — breaching the boundaries of what is seen to be one’s own ‘safe’ territory — was also a focus of worry. Among the groups we interviewed, only the teenage males ‘knew’ in detail the look, customised behaviours and places which constituted the responses of their main potential threat.

Our findings supported Gunter’s, Ferraro’s (and others’) findings that across all locations women more frequently perceived themselves at greater risk of physical/sexual assault than men; and also Ferraro’s findings that the strongest predictors were age and gender — young women, for example, perceiving themselves at the greatest risk of sexual assault. However, following Taylor’s more culturalist position in this area, we also asked the question ‘what “community” are we speaking of, in which particular time/space context?’ For example, whereas teenage girls from all areas have a broad spectrum of fears (especially when travelling at night) relating to the ‘dangerous (male) other’ (who may be of any age), teenage boys differentiate quite specifically between different male sub-cultures, and fear mostly the particular ‘homie’ sub-culture of certain other teenage males. This fear can increase dramatically in teenage male groups (such as GPS schoolboys) who feel specially targeted (because of their dress) by ‘homie gangs’. But all teenage males in all the areas where we interviewed were wary of this group and tried to avoid trouble with them. In the case of both teenage females, who feared sexual harassment and assault, and teenage boys who feared physical violence and robbery, the main fear was of violence against their person. In contrast, parents of teenagers most feared violence and sexual assault against their children, and worried most when their teenagers were out at night.
Older people had a much more generalised fear, so that whereas they too feared violence from teenage ‘gangs’, they did not differentiate between them sub-culturally (as the teenagers and to some extent the parents did). Older people were more inclined to fear for ‘this generation’ (including their grandchildren), and feel that the combination of unemployment, media violence and drugs was creating a frightening dangerous community quite unlike that of their own past. This same combination made many older people more fearful of ‘home invasion’ than other groups; and while they regarded travel by public transport at night as risky, most older people chose not to travel at night. As in Gunter’s analysis, the ‘what’ and the ‘who’ of risk tended to come from somewhere far off — from the importation of overseas drugs, or from the greater dangers of cities like Sydney (for people living in the country). But whereas for many of all age groups (including the young) risk still resided in those ‘other’ places (specifically certain ‘wild’ zones such as Redfern, Cabramatta and Mt Druitt), risk was also conceptualised as on the move, nomadic and constantly shifting (as best represented by the ‘homies’ who catch the trains, and who shift their attention from one station to another over time). While older country dwellers often still think of the big city as more dangerous, they also believe that all the evils (of unemployment, violence and drugs) have now reached their own community, and may threaten them with ‘home invasion’. In this respect, however, our findings did not support Gunter’s data that older people differed from younger age cohorts in feeling more at risk in their own neighbourhood. Older people feel less at risk of crimes against the person than younger people, because of their lifestyle and more limited use of public space (especially at night) whether near home or further afield.

Again, we need to ask here the question ‘in which particular time/space context?’. Younger people in Sydney, for example, had a high perception of the risks of travel at night by public transport, whereas Blue Mountains male teenagers feared travelling more in the Sydney/Western Suburbs region because that is where ‘the real homies’ are. Further, teenage girls in the Blue Mountains could be very nervous about their local community at night, and were made more anxious by the fact that the local media, responding in these girls’ view to the need for a good tourist image for the locality, did not give adequate coverage to ‘violent crimes’ that they had heard about from gossip. When asked about specific crimes against the person, young people have a higher perceived risk than older people.
There has been a tendency in the literature (Gunter etc) to associate fear of crime with gender and age, women and older people fearing more. In contrast, Taylor’s more situated and ethnographic analysis tended to emphasise a greater fear of crime associated with post-industrial privatisation (see also Caldeira here: Literature Audit chapter 7). In our study, younger and female respondents perceived themselves at greater risk. Furthermore, it is clear that a lot of young people go out at night despite feeling unsafe, whereas the older respondents tend not to go out alone at night unless they feel safe. Further, qualitative methods indicate that although young people do go out at night despite not always feeling safe, their fear of crime is sporadic, generated by specific and situated instances or places, and for the rest of the time managed via a variety of surveillance strategies. Older people on the other hand have a more general and pervasive fear of going out at night, which (among other reasons such as lack of a partner) often prevents them doing so. Though we did not address the issue of privatisation directly (except via a specific question about ‘fortified enclaves’, to which most respondents were hostile), it is the case that perceived risk of property crime was predicted by being middle-aged, of English-speaking background, and being a resident of Sydney. Unlike crimes against the person, gender is a rather minor factor in fear of property crime and it is men who are more worried than women at a similar level of perceived risk.

QUESTION 2: Are all types of people equally afraid of crime?

As we note above, there are clear sub-cultural groupings, relating to such attributes as age and gender, through which fear of crime is structured. Individuals’ assessments of their own physical strength and agility contributed to their feelings of risk in contexts in which they felt more exposed to attack. The participants assumed that people of lighter or smaller physique, of less physical strength — women, the elderly and younger people — would be more likely to be the target of men seeking to attack them.

However, there are substantial individual differences relating to personal experiences, and how these are mediated by personal judgments, attitudes and values. Among older people, for example, we found substantial differences relating to the use of public space at night. Some (a minority) were dedicated to ‘reclaiming public space’ at night from ‘undesirables’; others were more comfortable with their choice to stay at home at night, arguing that they had no need to go out in the evening and often no partner to share it with. Equally, there were women who went out alone at night, valuing their independent life style too much to stay at home or to wait for an escort. All women, however, whether going out alone or not, adapted their behaviour via a range of surveillance strategies. Furthermore, many people, although cautious about protecting themselves against crime, and taking steps to avoid being a victim of crime, did not wish to position themselves as particularly fearful or as a ‘victim’. This was the case for both men and women.
Previous quantitative analysis has not demonstrated a simple relationship between experience of crime and fear of crime. Our quantitative data indicated that experience of crimes against the person led to a slight increase in perceived personal risk. Yet our qualitative interviews and focus groups demonstrated the complexities of the relationship. Some people displayed a very fearful approach to crime, particularly those who had been the victim of physical or sexual assault. Personal experience of crime, however, did not always lead to a highly fearful response, and some people who had never had a personal experience of crime or knew someone who did were very fearful. In general, however, personal experience was strongly linked to heightened awareness of the risk of crime and often to heightened feelings of worry about being the victim of crime. As this suggests, people’s experiences of crime are important in their understanding of their risks and their anxieties about crime, but they do not necessarily make them feel more fearful. They may respond to an incident involving themselves or others by adopting protective behaviours, thereby reducing their perceived risk. It is not always the case that those high in fear are responding to prior experiences of victimisation (one older woman in Bathurst who was very high in fear had only experienced a sparkler being thrown on her roof by a neighbour!). Nevertheless, some of our most fearful participants had experienced highly traumatic crimes against their person.

**QUESTION 3:** In what contexts are people afraid of crime: e.g. are people more or less afraid of crime in the home or in public spaces?

In Gunter’s survey, perceived danger levels rose with increasing distance from home. Our fieldwork indicated that people’s own homes are generally represented as places of safety rather than danger in terms of crime. People felt that they could take steps to control the entry of the ‘unpredictable stranger’ by using various security measures; and tended to feel unsafe in their homes only if they thought it was not secure, or if they had recently experienced a burglary or assault. Older people could also be very frightened by media beat-ups of ‘home invasions’; and there were also a number of instances in the qualitative interviews of teenage girls speaking of being afraid of rape by strangers in their homes at night in specific areas (Bondi, Marrickville). Overall, it was places outside the home which made people more fearful, especially at night; and many had a ‘mental map’ of risky places, defined by genre (dark alleys and ‘closed’ as against ‘open’ street environments; specific parks, beaches or river banks at night; the open-air shopping mall at night; university campuses at night; public transport, especially trains, at night) or by area (Kings Cross, Redfern and Cabramatta in Sydney). Such places are seen as dangerous because they are associated with ‘unpredictable strangers’ from deviant and marginalised social groups — injecting drug users and drug dealers, sex workers and pimps, unemployed people, impoverished people, drunks, corrupt police officers, etc). The city ‘wild zones’ also conform to the ambivalent late-modern notion of the city as a place of danger, disorder, alienation, anger, social decay and crowding.
The ‘dark alley’, the park at night, the river or beach area are archetypal spaces of fear because they are dark and it is difficult to see and make assessments of the others who are using the space. The open-air shopping mall is threatening because it is a passage-way where groups of ‘unpredictable strangers’ gather, forcing people moving through to run the gauntlet. ‘Quiet’ spaces — those that have few people — are generally assessed as safe, but women in particular are often more ambivalent about ‘quietness’, because lack of others in such spaces may make them feel more threatened from an unexpected attack by a stranger who might suddenly appear.

**QUESTION 4:** What is the relationship between being fearful in general and fear of crime?

Our findings supported others’ contentions that the populations of western societies have become more fearful in general in relation to the dangers and hazards of modern living — the ‘risk society’ thesis. Most people’s generalised fears relate to the sense that society is breaking down, that individuals are more immoral than they used to be, that there is no longer a sense of community serving as a cohesive force to bring people together to protect each other, that the social strains of high unemployment and growing poverty and family breakdown are contributing to a more dangerous and lawless society. Fear of crime is contextualised within these broader fears and anxieties about modern life and social relations.

In Taylor’s account, becoming more fearful in general is a socio-historical matter. ‘Being fearful’ is becoming a more general condition for all classes in post-Thatcher Britain, but the specificities of fear of crime will vary for different groups. In Gunter’s analysis, women and working class respondents had a greater perception of ‘a mean world’ and the victimisation of others. Our own fieldwork indicated a very strong view (especially among older people) of a world that was becoming meaner — though the reasons for this varied, from the view of the more ‘left’ inclined seniors we interviewed in Sydney that this was the fault of dishonest media (and other) magnates to the more common view among seniors elsewhere that drugs, media violence and unemployment were creating a much more dangerous world, both for them (since they were now more fragile) and for their grandchildren. Younger people could also have a very generalised fear: female teenagers, for example, worried about a whole range of sexual harassments when travelling (such as males eyeing them or rubbing their knees against them in the train) which were clearly seen as part of a spectrum of risks leading up to the very specific fear of sexual assault. It is important to recognise this spectrum of related and graded fears, especially among women. It is difficult, if not impossible to single out women’s fear of crime from their concerns, anxieties and fears about other aspects of contemporary social living.
For most participants in the study fear of crime was situated in space and time. That is, it is not so much a personal trait as an experience in certain situations. Our emphasis here is therefore more socio-cultural than psychological, on people’s fears of crime as intelligibly related to their real conditions of living: to their spectrum of sexual harassment if they are young and female, to real, circulating subcultures of violence if they are teenage boys, to fears for the safety of their children if they are parents, to the fears embedded in an ageing body if they are older people. However, most respondents indicated that on an everyday basis fear of crime was a fairly minor source of anxiety compared to other worries in their life. It seems apparent that consonant with a discourse emphasising the growing dangers of modern living is that which emphasises the importance of resisting becoming a victim, of achieving autonomy and overcoming threats to one’s safety or sense of security. This discourse is also a product of modernity, acting in tension to the discourse of ‘risk society’.

**QUESTION 5: What is the relationship between being fearful and the likelihood of becoming a victim?**

Our findings suggest that the oft-made observation of the paradox that groups at lower risk of being a victim of crime are more fearful than those at higher risk in fact fails to take into account the complexities of the relationship between fear of crime and people’s assessments of their own vulnerability as gendered bodies in particular geographical and life-course locations. It also fails to acknowledge that official statistics on crime rates record certain offences only, and do not reveal the multitude of low level incivilities such as harassment and threatening behaviours that, over time, contribute to individuals’ feelings of vulnerability and anxiety about being the victim of crime and moving about in public spaces. Individuals’ notions about the likelihood becoming a victim, as this suggests, are constructed through repeated everyday experiences, including interactions with others, conversations with others about their experiences, and use of the mass media. Women, for example, are socialised from earliest childhood by their parents, other relatives, partners and so on to be particularly concerned about threats to their person imposed by ‘the unpredictable other’ (and these days also by well-known men such as relatives) and to be constantly on their guard when in public spaces. Many women, as members of societies in which women are positioned as objects for the constant sexual attention of men, are also subjected to continuing harassing behaviour by men such as staring, wolf-whistling and unwanted conversations or touching that, while not officially ‘crimes’, contribute to their feelings of vulnerability and fear of attack. It is therefore not surprising that women, as a group, tend to emerge as more fearful than men in surveys of perception of crime risk.
Previous studies have also often found older people, who statistically are not a high risk group, to be most fearful of crime. As with Ferraro's work in our study, however, young people correctly perceived themselves as at greater risk of specific crimes against the person. Young men, in particular, are highly aware that their main threat comes from physical assault by other young men, and they are clearly able to differentiate the times, places and types of young men who threaten them most. Young women's greater perceived risk of personal crime related specifically to their higher perceived risk of sexual assault. Young women are especially victims of a spectrum of sexual harassment, which they are aware of, take measures against, and conceptualise in terms of the risk of sexual assault. Our case study of public transport indicated very clearly the misperception of this issue among one category of fear of crime 'experts'. Members of NSW State Rail management argued, for instance, that on the one hand, statistics for crime on the trains was well below crime overall in the State; and that many women complained 'just over a pinch on the bum'. This is to miss the point entirely that sexual harassment is conceptualised by women as part of a spectrum of messages of power and control by men; and that many women do not report such incidents so that they do not become official 'data'. Indeed, many of the clearly criminal incidents that we heard about in interviews were not reported either.

**QUESTION 6:** What do we know about the range of concepts relevant to the fear of crime debate, in particular worry, outrage, risk evaluation and fear in general?

Worry about crime, as Ferraro indicates and our fieldwork supports, is predicted by perceptions of risk. Participants in our fieldwork indicated in general fairly low levels of perceived risk of being victims of crime and even lower levels of worry. In the case of sexual assault combined figures mask major gender differences, however. Most males perceive themselves at very low risk of sexual assault and do not worry about it. Women however (and especially younger women) do perceive themselves at least at some risk, and most have at least a low level of worry about it. Young women rate sexual and physical assault as at high a level of risk as burglary and worry about them more. Young men also rate the risk of physical assault as higher than burglary and show a low-moderate level of worry about it. It was clear from the fieldwork that respondents viewed the impact of physical or sexual assault as greater than crimes against property because of the violation of sense of self. As one female respondent told us, 'you can cancel your credit card, but if they hit or touch you you're not going to be able to cancel that out.' In addition to asking about fear for self, the fieldwork identified considerable levels of fear for partners, parents and — most strongly — for children. Many parents indicated that their fears about crime revolved much less around themselves than their children. Here they were faced with the dilemma of their children's growing demand for freedom and the parental duty of care and protection.
Outrage is a concept used to explore emotional responses to crime. It tends to be directed in two ways: against adults who sexually abused and violated children (responding to a lot of media coverage of this issue in recent times); and towards the media itself for its ‘beat-ups’ of crime. This outrage against the media (which conforms to English’s analysis of outrage in terms of the importance of ‘perceived fulfillment of moral responsibility’ by ‘management’) is shared by various age groups, though for different reasons. Young people, for example, are often outraged at the media’s portrayal of the risks of drugs like ecstasy; while older people are more likely to be outraged by various media technologies (television cop series, video games, Internet) portrayal of methods of violence to children. This public outrage against the media is also shared in a very specific form by some key stakeholders in the public space arena, such as NSW State and City Rail management. Outrage against child molesters also has a ‘management’ component, many people arguing for much tougher penalties (some even advocating the death penalty).

It is important, however, to recognise the situated (and often ‘political’) nature of outrage: young Aboriginal and white people interviewed near Redfern, Sydney, were outraged by police prejudice; seniors in Sydney with a union background were outraged by the power and disinformation campaigns by media bosses; young gays who travelled the trains and buses of Sydney were outraged by both ‘homie’ and police persecution of their dress and their sexual preferences. The members of all sub-groups participating in the study were angry and frustrated about what they saw as the breakdown in the social welfare system and provision of employment characterising contemporary Australian society, and many were highly critical of the justice system and the lack of drug law reform. All these elements were strongly linked by the participants to the growing incidence of crime, and they demonstrated a sense of outrage that these social problems were not being adequately dealt with by government. Overall, the ‘risk communication’ concept of outrage (based on the failure of authorities to meet moral obligations in protecting worthy citizens) was also found to be the one that the public works with: they feel outrage when systems which are meant to protect them whether at the micro level of everyday security: adults’ care for children, underpass video cameras, train guards, police and security guards or at the macro level of social organisation: social security and welfare, the economy, the legal system etc) do not do so.
QUESTION 7: What crime prevention methods need to be/have been used to prevent, reduce or manage fear of crime?

We will look here at both ‘lay’ and ‘expert’ approaches to the management of fear of crime. In particular we will focus here on our case study of fear of crime and public transport, given that this was one of the areas of public space that gave respondents of all ages most concern. Transport authorities have undertaken a wide range of strategies to manage fear of crime. This includes: ‘blue light’ carriages; reducing numbers of train carriages at night; ‘safe’ stations; better lighting; the introduction of security guards on trains, etc. While some of these measures have helped some members of the public with their fears (which primarily relate to train travel at night), it is clear that they are far from being sufficient to significantly reduce fear of crime on trains in NSW. All age categories of respondents rated fear of crime on trains highly, and all argued for more staffing, both of stations at night and of trains themselves. In particular, greater numbers of uniformed security personnel or police were called for.

Train personnel themselves are often fearful for themselves or their families when travelling by train at night. Many guards refuse to leave their compartments at night; and even under the new communication system being installed in trains will have no improved contact with train drivers and none at all with police in the event of violence or other crimes on their trains. Indeed, guards will only be able to communicate with drivers by the wired public address system, drivers will only be able to communicate with signal boxes, and from there to a central control point. While some young people are saying that they do not see the guards at night, none are aware of this degree of fear and lack of communication among train personnel. If they were to become aware of it, there would undoubtedly be significantly increased outrage (in English’s sense) and increased fear of crime. Bus travel is both less feared and also able to employ (for example on the NightRide buses) more experienced and quality-trained staff.

Other areas of high fear of crime, (such as open shopping malls and train stations after dark), have in some cases established police points. But, as the ‘Blacktown’ study indicates, shopping malls in the daytime are commoditised zones which are unfriendly to ‘loitering’ young people with little money to spend. ‘Layered’ approaches to crime and fear of crime in relation to Bondi Beach and the problem of ‘homies’ at train stations have been suggested above. The Manchester ‘24-hour economy’ conference, which deals with crime and fear of crime in public spaces more generally, has been discussed above.
Our review of existing fear reduction programs and strategies (Chapter 6) revealed that in most cases, fear of crime reduction was an objective simply added to crime prevention programs. Often this was done on the assumption that reducing crime reduces fear of crime without any real consideration of what the people feared and how that fear was constructed. In many cases, crime prevention methods can reduce fear of crime, but the effectiveness of these approaches depends on whether or not the methods used address the needs of the target community or group. While crime statistics provide a measure for the crime in a community, the only means of assessing the level of fear of crime in a community is by asking the people who live there. Accordingly, fear of crime reduction programs must start with the people who live with the fear.

**QUESTION 8:** What is known about the tools that measure fear of crime and the effectiveness of these tools in terms of reliability and whether they effect the fear of crime?

Standard quantitative surveys make use of questions about safety walking alone in the neighbourhood at night. In our study we used this question in conjunction with a question about people's actual night-time behaviour; and it became clear that for a sizeable group of (particularly older) respondents the question is hypothetical because they never go out alone in the neighbourhood at night. In contrast, other respondents (especially younger people) do walk in the neighbourhood at night while feeling unsafe. The qualitative study enabled us to probe the meaning of these questions for the various age groups and genders of respondents.

The most developed quantitative instrument for examining fear of crime is Ferraro's, which distinguishes between perceived risk and worry, and between a variety of personal and property crimes. We found a sub-set of these questions a useful basis for our fieldwork study, because they focus around specific crimes, and therefore measure anxiety of a more situated kind rather than a more generalised concern about the directions of modern society.

We found that drawing a distinction between ‘perceived risk of being a victim of crime’ and ‘worry about being a victim’ was useful, for it served to distinguish between risk assessment and fear. Our findings revealed that there were indeed clear distinctions in the participants’ assessment of risk of being a victim of a specific crime and their concern about being a victim of the crime. There was a strong relationship between individuals’ perception of being at risk from a crime and feelings of worry about this crime happening to oneself. For example, the participants, middle aged and older, in general assessed their risk of home burglary and car theft as being much higher than crimes against the person, and thus worried more about being a victim of these crimes. The relationship between assessment of risk and levels of worry, however, did not correspond directly.
Those participants who considered themselves to at high or moderate risk of a crime tended not to have commensurate high levels of worry about being a victim. The criticism that by asking about risk to self standardised questions may overlook more central fear of crime issues. Respondents indicated high levels of fear for the safety of relatives especially their children. Many parents made it clear that it was concern for their children not themselves that was their major fear of crime issue.

We did not find evidence in our long interviews and focus groups that discussions increased fear of crime. Instead, respondents sometimes indicated a sense of empowerment through being 'given a voice'.

At a more general level, this question assumes a certain paradigm of ‘tools of measurement’ and ‘reliability’ which it has been one purpose of our study to challenge. For example, a significant part of the research analysing fear of crime and the media has focused not only on the tools of measurement (eg content analysis) but also on the inferences made in relation to the media, and the theoretical assumptions about an all-powerful media and a passive public underlying these. In the Literature Audit Report we examined both methodological critiques (vis-à-vis the weaknesses of correlational analysis, and issues of causality) of the best known of these approaches, Gerbner et al’s cultivation analysis. We also examined culturalist and ethnographic critiques of these tools, arguing instead both for the value of situated ethnographic methods embedded in broader socio-historical (time/place) analysis, and for a new synthesis of textual with situated audience analysis relating to media and fear of crime. Our Media Study attempted this latter approach, and indicated the ways in which genres, gender and space/time co-ordinates are relevant approaches to the understanding of fear of crime.

By situating media viewing in very particular biographies of gender, class, age, race, political affiliation, and time/place we were able to show the ways in which people negotiate their fears of crime via the media: examples included the older woman who has not watched any police-related material since her husband died and who has a terror of home invasion; the mother who built up a fear of crime on public transport via newspaper reports, gossip, the reported sexual harassment of her daughter, and the various (inadequate) ‘expert’ responses to this incident; and the lesbian mother who negotiates the ‘strength’ given her by long experience of violent abuse as a child, and by later feminist groups, with the ‘weakness’ she carries (she believes from that childhood experience) when watching ‘stalking’ narratives on television, and who also negotiates her anti-racist values with her experience of watching American ‘race riots’ on television when she actually meets a black male in the night-time streets of Seattle.
The point of these and many other qualitative analyses in our Media Report is the value of tools of analysis which are situated (in particular space/time co-ordinates), and which understand the interactive (rather than one-way) relationships between people (who are gendered, aged, classed, etc) and crime represented on the media. Our study indicates, also, the way in which (especially young) people work their fears of crime between different media genres, sometimes finding temporary resolution in ‘realistic’ crime series, but then becoming more fearful via news and other genres which point to police failure rates, police corruption, the ubiquity of crimes of violence, and so on. Tools of analysis which can both make distinctions (between media forms, between genres, between the effect of local and national media, etc) and recognise the active relationship between different stakeholders in the media event are urgently needed, and are reached for in the Media Report. Above all, it is important to examine the way in which different people negotiate fear of crime via different circuits of communication — which includes the media, but also gossip, children’s stories, ‘expert’ discourse and so on. Our study offers this kind of ‘hermeneutic’ approach to fear of crime, while also building in more generalisable methods aimed at ‘reliability’ via quantitative analysis.
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