Figure Eights, Spin Outs and Power Slides: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth and the Culture of Joyriding

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ABSTRACT   *Car theft for the purpose of joyriding (for short-term transportation or non-utilitarian purposes) has almost exclusively been the domain of young male perpetrators. Accordingly, existing research has primarily focused on the relationship between males and automobiles as an expression of their masculinity or as a rites of passage to adult status in society. However, there are few studies that examine young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' Indigenous involvement in joyriding behaviour. This paper focuses on the outcomes of a 2-year research project that examined the motivations of Indigenous youth who stole cars for the purpose of joyriding. The perceptions of these young offenders highlight that joyriding can be understood as a distinct culture that allows youth the space to resist forms of governance. The paper concludes with an examination of alternative measures for diverting young offenders away from custodial sentences in a bid to decrease the high numbers of youths who steal cars for the express purpose of joyriding.*

Introduction

It could be argued that, for many people, owning a car is of paramount importance in order to function in contemporary society. The desire to have access to a vehicle is equally significant for young people who become involved in car theft for the express purpose of what is commonly known as 'joyriding'.

This paper attempts to provide an understanding of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their participation in the culture of joyriding. However, it is important to initially consider the characteristics of this offence and where it fits under the general rubric of the crime of car theft. In a paper addressing the problem of car theft in Australia, Mukerjee (1987) constructed three categories in terms of the orientations of car thieves: recreational, transport, and money making. The main characteristics of recreational users included non-utilitarian (fun), status seeking and challenge meeting. For the purposes of transport, perpetrators used stolen cars for short-term temporary travel, extended personal use, and use for the commission of another crime (such as robbery). At the other end of the continuum, the major motivation was for money making. This category consisted of amateur car strippers, professional sale of parts, professional re-sale of vehicles ('reborns') and for use in fraudulent

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insurance claims (organized thefts). Hence, when considering the categorization of car theft, joyriding can be seen as a recreational activity where youths steal cars for short-term transportation purposes (Henderson, 1994).

An analysis of the data on young people who have been charged with car theft highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly represented in this type of crime. Statistical data on Indigenous youth and specific categories of crimes indicate that stealing a motor vehicle (9.0 per cent) was the most common crime behind breaking and entering (22.0 per cent) and good order, traffic and rail offences (25.3 per cent) (Luke & Cunneen, 1993). While these statistics give some insights into the magnitude of joyriding in Queensland, they are of less assistance in providing insights into the motivations as to why some Aboriginal youth become involved in this type of crime. Additionally, while the available statistical data does give an indication as to the numbers of youths charged for car theft offences, it does not delineate between the actual driver of the vehicle as opposed to other youths who may have accompanied him/her. Finally, the data do not offer explanations as to why joyriding is undertaken almost exclusively by males compared with females.

There is no existing research that attempts to focus on what motivates young Indigenous Australians to steal cars in order to joyride. This project attempted to address the dearth of research in this area by gaining the perceptions of Indigenous youth in order to highlight the circumstances for their involvement in joyriding.

The data for this qualitative study was collected across six juvenile detention centres and correction centres in Queensland. The sample of respondents was selected with the assistance of staff at each of the centres. The major criteria for selecting respondents was based on possessing a history of car offences, age (15–22 years) and a representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth from urban, rural and remote communities.

Semi-structured interviews were held with 30 young people who had been involved in and were detained for joyriding offences. All participants were interviewed on at least two occasions, with interviews lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were transcribed to assist in the process of analysis. The analysis of the data resulted in the generation of distinct themes that form the basis for highlighting the motivations of Indigenous youth who joyride. Before discussing the key outcomes of the study, it is important to consider the social and cultural contexts of young people who offend.

Youth and the Criminal Justice System

During the past decade there has been increased media and public attention about the high incidence of crime committed by youth in Australia (Bessant & Hil, 1997). Research conducted into the criminal activities of young males and females have examined a variety of social and cultural factors in order to provide an explanation for the increased contact between some youth with the judicial system. Some of these factors include their social class, family background, gender and race. An individual's social class is a central characteristic of many youths who are brought before the courts. It has been established that many of these youths have limited educational experience and suffer from long-term unemployment (Gale *et al.*, 1990). Unemployment is differentiated by geographic location, with youth living in working-class suburbs experiencing

higher rates of unemployment than those living in more affluent areas. Additionally, youths who do not have English as a first language tend to experience greater difficulty at school and when attempting to find employment. The situation is worse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth who, in some areas, experience rates of almost total unemployment (Cunneen & Robb, 1987).

Family background is also an important social indicator of young people who appear before the courts. The cultural background of some youths determines that they live in extended families with different child rearing and familial relations to mainstream Australian family arrangements. Cunneen & White (1995) argue that juvenile justice agencies define what is 'abnormal' in terms of family situations when making recommendations to the childrens' courts. In a South Australian study, Gale *et al.* (1990) found that one in four young females brought before the courts were from sole-parent families. Cunneen & White (1995, p. 110) observed that 'young people who live outside "normal" family arrangements are subject to different responses once inside the criminal justice system'.

Gender is a major factor when considering the numbers of young men and women who offend. The national average shows that males are more than five times likely to be charged with a criminal offence than females. Additionally, females are more likely to receive cautions from the courts than males (Wundersitz, 1993). In terms of types of offences, females are most represented in crimes such as shoplifting, offences against good order, and breaking and entering. By comparison, males commit crimes such as breaking and entering, motor vehicle theft, and offences against property. The one specific offence where females are more heavily represented than males is prostitution (Cunneen & White, 1995).

A dominant factor involving young people and their contact with the criminal justice system is the high representation of youth who come from differing ethnic backgrounds. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are over-represented in the justice system, due mainly to their interactions with police and high visibility in public spaces (Atkinson, 1993). The trend in the majority of states is indicative of the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous youth who criminally offend.

For example, in New South Wales, Indigenous youth are incarcerated at a rate 25 times greater than non-Aborigines. The Northern Territory ratio was 7: 1, that for Victoria 20: 1, that for Western Australia 14: 1, that for South Australia 10: 1, and that for Queensland 16: 1 (adapted from Atkinson, 1994). An important consideration for explaining the high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander criminal offences is to examine their socioeconomic and class position in Australian society.

In general, Aboriginal people fare worse than non-Aboriginal people in social indicators such as health, housing, education unemployment, and welfare dependency (Johnston, 1991). Other social factors such as sole-parent families and residential location, coupled with poverty, characterize Indigenous youth who are apprehended (Gale et al., 1990). These social and economic factors of youth who joyride are now considered with relation to existing studies in this area of research.

Previous Studies on Joyriding

There is a limited literature that examines young people and their involvement

in joyriding. However, some studies analyse this crime in relation to the social context of young people's lives, rather than as an isolated event.

Media reports have concentrated on the social impact of car theft on the community in terms of the material cost to individuals and insurance companies (Mukherjee, 1987). Additionally, much attention has focused on the personal costs of car theft in terms of the often tragic outcomes of high-speed car chases when young car thieves are pursued by police, often resulting in the death of young perpetrators and/or injury or death to innocent bystanders. For example, Lorman (1997) investigated the impact on the local community when a mother and her son were killed in a head-on collision with a car driven by Aboriginal youths as they were being pursued by Western Australian police. Similarly, in a study of the relationships between Aboriginal youth and police in Western Australia, Atkinson observed; 'There is much concern in Western Australia about Aboriginal youths involvement in motor vehicle theft; tragic accidents and fatalities which sometimes ensure, and high speed police pursuits of offenders' (1993, p. 15).

In a study of young people in South Australia, White (1990) examined joyriding behaviour by taking into account a broad set of social precursors such as young people's access to employment, gender relations, and the availability of leisure options in terms of access to public spaces. White argued that high youth unemployment rates in regional and rural areas meant that many young people were effectively cut off from access to commercial outlets in their spare time. The situation was exacerbated by their reduction on spending power due to unemployment and low wages in the workforce. As a result, many young people use public spaces such as shopping centres as a place to congregate and to 'do nothing' (Corrigan, 1979).

Similarly, factors relating to ethnicity, socioeconomic status and historical precedents may be useful in explaining why a high proportion of Indigenous youth resort to stealing cars. Like many of their non-Indigenous counterparts, the street is a major meeting place for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth because they have less consumer power to allow them to access alternative venues. White observed that an additional factor related to their physical appearance and depressed economic conditions, which make them even more visible to forms of surveillance compared with non-Aboriginal youth.

As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are more likely to be involved in confrontations with police and receive differential treatment. In a major study of Indigenous youth and the criminal justice system in South Australia, Gale & Wundersitz observed; 'Thus by relying on official data we were not able to determine whether Aboriginal over-representation at the point of entry was due to the fact they actually commit more crimes or whether other factors such as visibility, result in higher rates of apprehension' (1982, p. 26).

In a study of Aboriginal street gangs in Perth, Atkinson (1993) commented that, for many, youth police interventions on the street are often interpreted as another form of dispossession similar to that of the original dispossession of Aboriginal land by non-Indigenous settlers. Atkinson theorizes that this is a contributing factor for the negative perceptions held by many Indigenous youth towards police. It would appear that gaining an understanding of the social, economic and historical backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth is integral in obtaining insights as to why Indigenous youth commit crimes such as joyriding.

Atkinson (1993), however, posited that Indigenous participation in joyriding is linked to their disempowerment due to the process of colonization. As a response to their cultural dislocation, Atkinson surmises that Indigenous youth seek to subvert the system by stealing cars that symbolize a form of wealth and power belonging to the colonizers of this country. She argues:

> One response to oppressive colonial systems is to subvert them. Aboriginal people so omnipresently involved with the criminal justice system, know how to subvert that system; to derive different meanings for, and experiences of the system from those originally intended. Our criminal justice system is intended to create fear, shame and conformity to mainstream norms in transgressors, via a system which punishes and deters. Aboriginal people have learnt to shift the moral burden instead to those who police, try and imprison them … By these means they gain some fleeting sense of power—however illusory and transitory it might be—over a system which is overwhelmingly stacked against them. (Atkinson, 1993, p. 15)

It would appear that, for Atkinson, provoking police into a high-speed car chase is one way that Indigenous youth overcome their daily sense of powerlessness. It was argued that Indigenous young people become involved in joyriding and car chases because they want society to pay for what has been done to Aboriginal people. It was also suggested that offending becomes part of a lifestyle that represents the norm within families and communities, and is part of the process of growing up and surviving in this society.

Other studies have focused on the role of car theft and joyriding as being part of the initiation into manhood for Indigenous youth. Their position of powerlessness within the class structure means car theft may hold an appeal for Indigenous and also working-class males, since it is 'rich in excitement, a dramatic break from the tedium and boredom of being wageless in a consumer society' (White, 1990, p. 128). In essence, for White, stealing a car is an affirmation that one is indeed 'a man'.

Walker (1998), by comparison, challenges the assumption that car theft is simply an expression of masculinity among working-class youth. In her study of youth and motor-vehicle-related crime, Walker argues that there is more than one version of male masculinity that 'give rise to different and often contradictory logics and desire in subjectivity' (1998, p. 282). In essence, a variety of context specific factors need to be considered when attempting to understand why males become involved in car crime.

Alternatively, while statistics indicate that females do not participate in car theft at the same rate as males, there is little research that examines why some females commit car thefts. In a paper on gender and criminality, Ogilvie (1996) refutes White's argument about the link between car theft as an expression of masculinity, and postulates that it is surprising females do not steal cars at a higher rate compared with males because many are confined to domestic roles and cars offer a greater avenue of escape and freedom. Apart from Ogilvie's study, there is no other research that examines female participation in the phenomenon of joyriding behaviour.

In summary, the available literature indicates that joyriding is predominantly a male-oriented activity that allows young people to experience a sense of excitement often denied to them in other domains of their lives. The research

that has examined Indigenous youth's participation in joyriding explicates that car theft provides them with an avenue to experience the transition to adulthood and as a response to their sense of powerlessness in contemporary society. The discussion now turns to the outcomes of this research that gain the perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth who joyride.

Joyriding: The Offender's Perspective

To gain a sociological understanding as to what motivates Indigenous youth to joyride, the research initially focused on the social and economic backgrounds of the offenders. Following this, the causal factors that contributed to their offending behaviour are examined.

Social and Economic Background

Most of the young people in this research came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The majority of the sample (76 per cent) indicated that their parents were employed in unskilled or semi-skilled types of employment such as labouring or in the service-type industries. By comparison, another 20 per cent stated that both their parents had been unemployed for over 12 months. High rates of unemployment are differentiated by geographic location, with youth living in working-class suburbs experiencing higher rates of unemployment than those living in more affluent areas. The problem of intergenerational unemployment among young people and their parents is highlighted when considering individuals who live in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Alwyn, an Aboriginal youth, described how none of his family had ever had any form of paid employment apart from stints on the local Community Development Programme. He stated: 'My father and his father have never had a job here. None of the young people can find work here either. If you want work you have to leave here … go to the city or whatever'.

In addition to their working-class backgrounds, the majority of respondents (65 per cent) aged 19 or younger lived with at least one of their parents in either rented accommodation or in homes that they shared with other family members. However, for some, the breakdown of the family unit was a central factor in prompting them to leave home for alternative forms of accommodation. For Christine, the abuse from her mother's partner was the catalyst for leaving home at age 13 and living in 'squats' with other homeless youth:

> Mum and dad split up when I was pretty young. Mum got a new boyfriend and I didn't get along with him. He started abusing me then I left home when I was 13 and started livin' with me boyfriend. Then I moved into squats in the city and hung out with drug dealers who used to look after me. The streets are my home now.

Three-quarters (75 per cent) of the sample said that their parents were unaware that they had stolen cars until they had been charged with the offence. In almost all of these cases, these youth were aged between 14 and 16 years old with no other family members having a history of car-related crime. However, as they extended their career in car crime, it was much more likely that other family members would eventually find out about their repeated offending. A high proportion of the sample (83 per cent) stated that their parents were either upset

or angry on learning of their child's offending. For example, Robert was kicked out of home by his father, resulting in an escalation of his car theft activity:

> Dad started yelling at me and told me he had lost all trust in me and that I would always be a criminal. Then he got my bags and threw them out into the yard and told me to get out. That's when I started on a roll of doing a heap of cars.

By comparison only 17 per cent stated that their parents were ambivalent about being charged for stealing cars. Some parents did not consider car theft to be a serious crime compared with other types of crime, while others told their children that it was their responsibility.

There are distinct similarities among the cohort in terms of their interactions with the education system. All of the youth were asked about what level they reached at school and only 10 per cent stated that they had completed Year 10. A further 53 per cent had completed Year 8 while the remaining 37 per cent had dropped out of school before the end of Year 7. There were various responses as to why each youth dropped out of school before the legal leaving age. Some students were disaffected due to their perceived lack of success in the formal curriculum. The only redeeming feature about school for the majority of youth was the opportunity to stay in contact with their friends, as observed by Leanne:

> I hated school the teachers and having to do what you are told I guess. People kept on tellin' me I'm dumb. I couldn't do English or maths. Just the fact you had to go there and you couldn't leave. The only thing I liked about school was me friends.

Their disengagement in school life resulted in many students leaving altogether or becoming involved in disruptive and resistant behaviour. Rhonda recalled her final day at school that resulted in her expulsion from every school in the state:

> I got expelled from school cause I took an ounce of pot to school. The teachers caught me smokin' it and I blew the smoke in their face. I told them I didn't care what you do. Then they kicked me out from all schools in Queensland.

An additional factor for the poor academic achievement of many of the respondents was their inability to see the relevance of their school subjects in providing them with the means to find paid employment. For many of the youth, the only redeeming element of school was the opportunity it provided them to play sport and to interact with their peers.

> *GD*: What did you think about school?
> *JK*: I went as far as Grade 7. That's all I got to. I only went to high school for 2 weeks and then I got expelled for drugs and throwing chairs at the staff. But I just hated school; the teachers and the work. Like maths for instance is never going to help me find a job on a fishing trawler is it?
> *GD*: Was there anything that you liked about school?
> *JK*: The only thing I really like was being able to see me mates and play football or go down the back and smoke and then jump the fence and go into town.

It is apparent that most young offenders were disengaged from the education system at an early age and spent more time involved in non-school-related activities that were leisure oriented. However, in almost all cases they expressed that they lacked access to these resources because they either did not have sufficient money or because they were geographically isolated from the sites where they could meet their peers. A major response to this situation was to simply 'hang out' with their friends on the street or in public places such as amusement parlours or in parks. However, a major problem with congregating in public places was that it drew the unwanted surveillance of the police, which was interpreted as a form of harassment:

> We'd be talking out the front of a shop and they'd drive by real slow and pull over. Then they'd go through the old routine of you know what's your name and what are you doin' here. It was fuckin' obvious we were just having a chat but they'd do a check on us for warrants and ask us if we were selling drugs. Then they told us to get out or they would take us down to the station.

For many youths, an additional factor was a feeling of physical isolation from forms of entertainment and access to leisure sites that were often located in the centre of larger cities. This problem was not as acute for youths who lived in cities that possessed viable forms of public transport such as trains or buses. However, it was a major problem for young people who lived in smaller towns or in remote communities. For many of these youths, there was very limited access to the larger towns or city centres due to the lack of public transport facilities, which increased their sense of isolation. A common response from many of these young people was that they suffered from long periods of boredom, which for one female was a major factor leading to her involvement in car theft:

> Most of the young people who do crime today do it because there's nothing else to do. I just got bored all day with sitting at home watching TV all day. There needs to be more things in the community young people can do. Most young girls like me get bored with nothin' to do all day. I couldn't get transport to get to places which was a real problem. I couldn't afford some of the things and I couldn't get to them. That's why I steal cars.

Causal Factors

While many Indigenous youth shared similar backgrounds in terms of socio-economic, educational and geographic indicators, other distinct factors emerged for their involvement in the culture of joyriding. The majority of joyriders were comparatively young (13–15 years of age) and either desist from car theft or go on to commit crimes that require the use of a stolen car such as breaking and entering or ram-raids.

Joyriding, therefore, should be analysed as a fluid culture with a changing membership where individuals live out a temporal role before relocating to an alternative site and assuming a different identity. This was evident in the high number of youth who stated they had now 'grown out' of car crime and were

now focused on other areas such as sport or relationships with their family or girlfriends.

For young joyriders, the peer group is central in providing the catalyst for their introduction and continuation to car theft and joyriding behaviour. By comparison, a minority of youth indicated that they stole cars on their own without the assistance of others. The peer group therefore provides a structure for the advancement in status for younger joyriders to learn the skills of car theft and to graduate to the status of leader of a joyriding crew. It also serves for providing youth with an identity in one area of their lives as a result of their exclusion from domains such as school and the job market. Len explained that:

> I loved to steal cars and ride with my friends. I wouldn't do it alone it wouldn't be the same as driving fast around the dirt roads with mates. Everyone had a go at driving which was fair. If you got caught you would never dob on your mates, you take the rap yourself and cop it.

An individual's status within the group is enhanced by his/her ability to drive at high speeds, to perform various driving feats that may be bound up with proving one is 'a man'. It appears that getting behind the wheel of a car allows many young men to feel grander, more powerful, and produces feelings of invincibility among young joyriders. Driving at high speeds in a stolen car may be interpreted as a form of working-class resistance to forms of regulation and social control for at least a short period of time.

> *Jo*: I pulled up outside the skating rink and there was this biggest crowd. Fuckin' heaps of people there. I was in this VK Commodore and I just let loose, just fuckin' dropped it. Just went fuckin' mad.
> *Glenn*: How did you let loose?
> *Jo*: Just do what the car wants to do. Did fuckin' figure eights, dough-nuts, fishies, power slides. I went up the road about six times, just going mad. People just standing there cheering and I nearly hit some of them. It was a real rush …

Identity formation through the car culture is supported and celebrated by various forms of the mass media. Current television advertisements for the new model Holden Commodore show the car flying through the wide-open spaces of outback Australia over red dirt tracks and across rivers. This is Marlboro Country, which gives an image of freedom away from the constraints of everyday life. Car culture is central in the image of African-American gangsta rappers such as Tupac Shakur and Ezy-E. This image was borrowed by some of the Indigenous joyriding crews, which was fuelled by the mass media and advertising that played into their fantasies by perceiving cars as a means of escape from the boredom and predictability of their everyday lives. Seth, a Torres Strait Islander youth, characterized his involvement in car theft due to his alignment with entertainers from the African American Hip-Hop tradition:

> We wore baggy jeans, baggy shirts bandannas and beanies. We wore Nike shoes and we tried to look like real Gangstas. When we were driving around we always listened to songs by Tupac and E-zy E and stuff. I like Rap and I really like Tupac because he's a real outgoing Rapper and real hardcore, He's real wicked. I like the song 'Time To Ride'. It's about being in car and drug dealing and that.

Despite harsher penalties for car theft, recidivism among joyriders remains unacceptably high. Many of the youths stated that being detained had little effect on their desire to steal cars. The majority of multiple offenders stated that they rarely thought about the owners of the cars and there is evidence to suggest that car theft is often an opportunistic activity. However, most of the research subjects stated that the best locations to steal cars were in parking lots, outside train stations or in some cases at the home of unwary victims. For example, Terry was more selective by choosing to steal cars from private residences while the inhabitants were asleep. The motivation for stealing cars from these locations was that it allowed him to be more selective in choosing specific types of vehicles from wealthier owners. It also provided him with an added challenge and a resultant adrenalin rush:

> We usually take cars from Leggo Land where all those fuckin' flash apartments are. We go up to their houses late at night sneak into their garages and push the cars into the street. In these rich places you can steal up market cars like commodores or porches. It's a real buzz driving off down the street while the owners are still asleep and you can't get caught because they won't report them until the next day when they wake up and find their car is missing.

Few of the respondents reported feeling any remorse for their victims. Nor did they think about the inherent dangers of driving cars at high speeds while under the influence of drugs and alcohol. A major factor cited for giving up joyriding was when a close friend was injured or killed in a motor vehicle accident. Over 34 per cent of the sample knew of someone who was a victim of joyriding, and of this percentage 59 per cent identified these events as being instrumental in their decisions to stop joyriding. Harold recalled witnessing the death of his friend after their stolen car hit a pole after a high-speed chase with police. He stated that:

> My mate died in a car crash. We was driving home one night with me and Adam in the front and four other mates in the back. We was doin' about 160 km/hour around the corner in V8 Ford and the front wheel came off and we went straight into a power pole and split the power pole. The side door where my mate got smashed up was smashed and his leg was smashed too. His ribs got pushed in too. He died there and then. I'll never forget that night and that's why I won't be stealin' hotties any-more.

Strategies for Countering Car Crime

It is clear that the present system of providing young Indigenous offenders with custodial sentences does little to quell their desire to steal cars. Detention is often interpreted as a logical step in the rites of passage to manhood for many Indigenous and working-class youth. Additionally, detention facilities are often perceived as a safe haven for meeting peers, returning to the education system, and providing a respite for the uncertainty and risk associated with surviving on the street. Accordingly, it can be argued that the judicial system does little to deter young people from joyriding and that alternative solutions to the problem need to be considered.

In the final round of interviews, each respondent was asked about alternative approaches that might be successful in reducing joyriding behaviour among young people. The most predominant response among the cohort for reducing joyriding was the provision of an education programme focusing on the inherent dangers of car theft and joyriding. Almost all of the youth interviewed stated that they may not have become involved in car theft if they had been aware of the legal and practical consequences involved in this kind of behaviour. There was a prevailing thought among the young people that joyriding was not really a major form of crime compared with other types of crimes. Additionally, there was general consensus that the judicial system would not provide custodial sentences for the first offence and that juveniles (those younger than 17 years of age) would, in most cases, receive lighter sanctions compared with more 'serious' crimes. Liam observed that he was not aware of the full extent of the criminal sanctions imposed for car theft when he began his car crime career.

> The cops are getting dumber these days. I used to drive around when I was fourteen and I never got busted even when I drove straight past a police patrol. I don't reckon the cops are really interested in joyriding. They don't really see it like it's a crime; it's like smokin' dope. Everyone's doin' it.

Other youths like Justin observed that he had followed his peers into car crime and that participation in joyriding was a common occurrence and part of 'growing up' for those who lived in his suburb. Hence joyriding and other crimes such as petty theft were an accepted part of the rites of passage among young people and were not viewed as a serious offence.

> When I was 12 all my friends were into various types of crimes such as nicking cars and selling stuff like mag wheels or tapes that we flogged out of them. It was like part of our lives and a way to get money to buy drugs or booze. I never really thought about it all being like a serious crime.

At the same time, most youths admitted that when they began their car crime careers they had no conception about the physical dangers of joyriding as well as the potential injury or death to innocent individuals who were unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Older joyriders such as Alwyn stated that he would not have been involved in this type of crime if he had been aware of the potentially serious outcomes of his behaviour:

> Kids need to know more about what might happen to you if you joyride. It's not worth it. I reckon you never know that you might be in a serious car crash, anything can happen. One day you might be drivin' along enjoying yourself, you and your mates. The next minute you might be dead. At the same time with your mates you don't think about your safety or other people's safety, or the police and other people's cars you stole. I never used to think about those things but now I do.

Relatedly, it was felt that young people should be educated about the use of alcohol and/or drugs when driving cars at high speeds. For those who admitted using substances, the false feelings of invincibility when driving need to be highlighted in any anti-joyriding programme. For example, Imogen described

how drug and alcohol usage made her take risks that she would not have normally attempted:

> We never really thought about the danger and that needs to be shown to other people. We were always drunk and we'd do dumb things like drive right across the road and across the train tracks just in front of a train. We knew we'd get caught soon or a later but it never worried us about being hurt because we were always so out of it.

If an education programme is to be produced, it needs to be innovative and delivered in a way that resonates with the lived social and cultural experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who hail from diverse backgrounds. It must be remembered that, for the majority of youth who become involved in car theft, education is seen as a negative experience, and in some cases is totally rejected. It seems feasible that the term education in this sense needs to be broadened to include street life (working-class youth) and cultural (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth) experiences if it is to have any impact on the target groups for which it is designed.

This research strongly recommends that a concentrated effort be made to construct and disseminate an education programme to bring home to offenders (and non-offenders) the serious nature of car crime offences. Such an education programme should include mundane details of the harm suffered by the victims of car crime as well as evidence of the some times shocking outcomes involving stolen cars. A culturally sensitive education programme may take various forms, ranging from interactive computer packages and the use of messages promoted through the media similar to campaigns aimed at reducing speeding and drink driving. An additional feature of the programme may consist of integrated writing and drama activities that explore young people's perceptions about joyriding while at the same time exploring the repercussions of this type of behaviour.

In this sense, an education package would serve as one part of an intervention strategy that would be available to all students in schools and other education programmes. The requirement for early diversionary strategies such as an education programme is significant considering these research outcomes that highlight the collective nature of car theft and the early age of young people's first involvement in this type of crime.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that this research describes a familiar backdrop against which much offending occurs among Indigenous youth: low levels of family employment, high truancy rates, low educational attainment, and a lack of leisure and transport facilities. Many Indigenous and working-class youth are further marginalized due to living in remote and rural locations that provide even less opportunities for employment, further education and leisure facilities.

For many youth, there are few legitimate opportunities for excitement and financial gain due to their class and economic position. Unlike their counterparts who come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, the majority of youth in this study had limited access to the consumer market and held little hope of ever owning a car. In addition, there are few facilities for young people in rural areas and areas that are inexpensive and cater for their recreational interests. Young

people congregate in public spaces due to a lack of facilities or areas where they can meet and come under the attention of police or private security staff. In part, car theft may therefore be interpreted as young people's response to a lack of access to public spaces and resistance to their lack of economic and social power.

For many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, joyriding may be interpreted as a form of resistance to their social and economic marginalization in society. Joyriding culture may be seen as one area where Indigenous youth can construct their identity through participation with their peers and obtain a sense of belonging through a perception of group solidarity. In this sense, policy makers and governments need to respond to the marginalization of youth by addressing some of the larger social issues that prompt young Indigenous such as those in this study to disengage from education and to provide alternative forms of schooling outside of current school practices. Employment opportunities for young people who do not follow the traditional academic pathways also need to be provided with direct links to vocationally based education programmes for students who are identified as 'at risk' of disengaging from education altogether.

City planners may also offer opportunities for young people to be involved in decisions to provide facilities and spaces for youth. This may take the form of recreational facilities such as skate bowls and spaces where young people can meet without fear of harassment by police. These facilities, however, need to be accessible either through the provision of public transport or in areas that are centrally located.

Finally, there may be merit in considering alternative approaches in order to reduce the incidence of car theft by young offenders. For example, the provision of diversionary programmes such as motor-based projects like the Street Legal Programme in South Australia could reduce the numbers of young people entering detention facilities and rehabilitate them before they become entrenched in the spiral of crime and institutionalization. However, governments and other funding bodies must ensure that such programmes receive recurrent funding so they can be evaluated over a realistic time frame. For if we are to consider the best way to prevent youth from becoming entrenched in a culture of crime, there is a need to coordinate a response that attempts to address the social and economic factors that result in many young people being marginalized from participating in society.

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