# 'Police are good for some people, but not for us'

## Community perspectives on young people, policing and belonging in Greater Dandenong and Casey

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# Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a qualitative study with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds living in the Greater Dandenong and Casey area about the impact of police encounters on their sense of belonging. The report focuses solely on experiences of belonging and non-belonging as reported by community members. A subsequent report will include material from interviews with Victoria Police members. It will analyse policing practice in more depth, identifying systemic factors that shape interactions between police and these communities.

## About the study

The study was completed in two phases. In the first phase, five focus groups were conducted with 22 young people (13 female, 9 male) living in the Greater Dandenong area who were born in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Samoa and New Zealand. Most of these young people reported minimal contact with police, but had encountered other authorities in public places, notably on public transport and in railway stations.

The second phase included four focus groups involving 33 young people (13 female, 20 male) and three interviews with five young people (all male) who had experienced contact with police, some of them on multiple occasions. These participants were from Pasifika and South Sudanese backgrounds, the groups that emerged as having the most problematic relationship with police in the Greater Dandenong and Casey area. In addition, five group interviews were conducted with 19 adults who were community workers and/or parents from Pasifika or South Sudanese backgrounds.

In total, 79 people participated formally in the study between mid-2016 and mid-2018. In addition, multiple informal discussions took place between the researcher and local youth and community workers. All participants were invited to recount both positive and negative experiences that had affected their sense of belonging.

## Phase One findings on the dynamics of belonging

Young people who had not experienced many encounters with police described a wide variety of other circumstances in which their interactions with authority figures and members of the general public had made them feel that they did or did not belong.

Focus group participants described their responses in terms of personal feelings (being comfortable, at ease, safe and free versus unsafe, fearful, uncomfortable and insecure) and also in terms of their relationships to others (being accepted, understood or helped versus discriminated against, powerless and left out), revealing multiple layers of belonging.

Belonging was also experienced on different scales – from membership of families, clubs, peer groups and schools; in one-off contexts such as trains, cafes and public places; in terms of cultural or religious communities and the wider community; and with the nation as a whole. While being told to 'go back where you came from' communicated a direct and hostile message of being unwelcome, young people were also sensitive to the more common question 'where do you come from?' which carried a more subtle message about their non-belonging.

Although local, cultural and religious communities were a prime source of belonging for these young people, national belonging was still important. However, it was noticeable that, regardless of the degree of national belonging they said they felt, the language used by all these young people contained the assumption that the term 'Australian' did not automatically refer to them.

Belonging was also found to be related to place. Some participants had experienced school as a place of safety and belonging while others complained about 'racist' teachers and pupils.

Travelling on public transport was the most frequently mentioned place to encounter experiences of non-belonging, including being singled out for aggressive or intrusive treatment by ticket inspectors or protective services officers, and subjected to racism and rejection by other passengers. Having other passengers step in to help was interpreted as a sign of acceptance and belonging to the local community.

Perceptions about shopping malls as sites of belonging or non-belonging divided the participants along the lines of culture and gender. Several of the young women from Muslim backgrounds saw their local mall as a place of danger and potential victimisation. Some of the young men said they 'hung out' regularly with friends in the mall, but young African men in particular said they felt 'uncomfortable' on a daily basis since they were routinely treated as suspects in shops and while using ATMs.

With some exceptions, places of worship were identified as places of belonging, and this notably included experiences of being welcomed by people of different faiths.

Strategies to deal with messages of non-belonging included adaptation, avoidance and, in some cases, directly confronting the perpetrator. By challenging the legitimacy of messages of non-belonging from members of the public, these young people positioned themselves as agents of change.

## Phase Two findings on policing and belonging

Young people who took part in the second phase focus groups reported a wide range of negative experiences with police including being repeatedly questioned for no legitimate reason, openly discriminatory stops and other interventions, lack of police protection, and in some cases racial

vilification and violence. Fewer positive experiences were reported, but common features were being listened to, having discretion exercised in their favour and being treated with courtesy.

Of the small group of Pasifika parents who participated in the study, some were critical of young people who attracted police attention and sympathetic to the difficulties faced by police. However, those who were also professional community workers were much more critical of the policing practices they had observed first hand, and identified a 'hierarchy of discrimination' in which South Sudanese youths faced the most discriminatory treatment.

Although the numbers were again small, every South Sudanese mother interviewed for the study expressed fear that her children would be unfairly targeted or mistreated by police, had experienced her own negative encounters such as heavy-handed home visits or being followed by police while driving, and reported being dismissed or unfairly treated when she sought police services.

Young people who had experienced negative contacts with police used a much wider range of vocabulary to describe their feelings about these encounters than was observed in the first phase of the study. Some directed their feelings towards police, saying they had been 'frustrated' or 'furious', or made judgements about police behaviour saying they felt 'judged', 'discriminated against' and 'stigmatised'. Others internalised their feelings of 'trauma' or 'shock'. While other young people described their feelings in terms of relationships with others, feeling 'misunderstood' or 'let down'.

Some terminology used by young people suggested that negative experiences with police had challenged their sense of their place in society, including being 'humiliated', 'not taken seriously' and 'powerless'. Negative experiences could also be projected into the future through ongoing feelings of being 'paranoid', 'anxious' or 'frightened'. And for some young people their experiences of being perceived as 'not trustworthy' or 'a threat' had prompted them to question their own identity.

The study showed that police can play a role in the 'governance of belonging' where their interventions carry powerful messages about who does and does not belong. A frequent example was when young people from Pasifika and South Sudanese backgrounds were singled out from mixed groups for differential treatment. This was experienced as humiliating and isolating, and understood as being based on racist stereotypes.

At worst, messages of non-belonging were conveyed through physical and verbal violence. One named officer was said to be notorious for 'bashing Samoans', and fears of police brutality were widespread and omnipresent amongst the South Sudanese mothers interviewed in this study. One young man (who had arrived by air as a recognised refugee) was reportedly asked whether being handcuffed by a police officer well known to him reminded him of being 'back on the boat'.

Participants from both generations reported receiving unfavourable treatment when seeking police services, such as being treated as the perpetrator when they believed they were the aggrieved party.

One woman summed up the feelings of many with the words: 'I think the police are good for some people, but not for us'. Despite these widespread reports of negative experiences, many participants acknowledged that not all police behaved this way.

Police were also found to be key players in the 'politics of belonging' through the messages that their words and actions conveyed to the wider public. Targeting of young people from Pasifika or South Sudanese backgrounds in public places could readily identify these groups to those passing by as threats to public safety. One South Sudanese mother complained that unnecessary and heavy-handed visits to her home by police had prompted a neighbour to report her to the housing provider as a 'gangster house', threatening both her security of tenure and sense of belonging.

It was widely acknowledged that police were only one player in the complex politics of belonging, which was also influenced by the attitudes of shopkeepers, teachers, ticket inspectors, train passengers, neighbours and, most significantly, by media reporting.

Participants saw the discriminatory treatment of their communities at the hands of police as being strongly shaped by external pressures, with one young person observing that police would 'go harder' when the media criticised police for 'not doing their job'.

The combined effects of non-acceptance across all these spheres of life could convey a powerful message of non-belonging. In line with the theoretical literature on policing and belonging, the quality of interactions with police was widely interpreted in terms of effective citizenship. Being listened to, and taken seriously by police, who were seen to represent both the government and the majority community, could send a powerful message of being accepted as 'one of us'.

Research participants from the parental generation in particular expressed despair at losing the sense of security that they had hoped to find in Australia due to community hostility and their perceived lack of rights. Fear of deportation, perhaps the ultimate statement of non-belonging, was said to be a growing problem.

## Conclusion

The participants in this study have reported a range of negative experiences with police in Greater Dandenong and Casey that have impacted individually and collectively on both their sense of security and their feelings of belonging. Nevertheless, there is a widespread desire for improved relations with police and the sense of protection that derives from being treated as equal citizens.

Specific recommendations to work towards this goal will be included in the second report from this study which will integrate police and community perspectives.

# 1. Review of literature on policing and belonging

## 1.1 Belonging, citizenship and inclusion

The experience of making a life in a new country is intimately connected with questions of belonging and social inclusion. It is widely accepted by academic researchers that social inclusion and exclusion do not exist as discrete alternatives, but that inclusion can be considered along a continuum. Moreover, in the case of immigrants, the act of physical inclusion associated with legal acceptance into a new country may not be matched by a similar level of social inclusion and acceptance in their new community or society. This has led some commentators to observe that immigrants experience an 'excess of inclusion over belonging' (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, p62) or are subjected to experiences of 'inclusive exclusion' (Agamben, cited in Aas, 2011) due to differential treatment that reduces their access to material and social goods.

Markers of difference and exclusion are often bundled into the idea of hierarchies of citizenship. Bosniak (2006, p134) notes that those defined by law as 'aliens' are not the only groups denied the benefits of full citizenship since various other forms of 'status inequality' exist. Hierarchies of citizenship, whether legally defined or socially produced through the structural effects of colonization, gender, race, class or nationality, effectively sort populations into categories according to their levels of entitlement. Individuals who do not experience the full range of protections and services accorded to full citizens are effectively consigned, often for very long periods of residence, to the category of 'imminent outsiders' (McNevin, 2011).

Although the concepts of identity, citizenship and belonging are closely related, it has been observed that belonging remains the most 'under-theorised and ill-defined' (Nunn, 2017). Yuval-Davis argues that belonging is not reducible to identity, and is a 'thicker' concept than citizenship, even when citizenship is conceived broadly as the capacity to participate in society. What sets belonging apart from these related concepts is that it derives from a deep human need: 'It is not just about membership, rights, and duties, but also about the emotions that such memberships evoke' (Yuval-Davis, 2004, p215). Belonging may be experienced *affectively* in terms of feeling safe or at ease, or as a sense of being 'at home'. But because belonging is a relational concept, and thereby subject to (unequal) relations of power, a 'politics of belonging' arises wherever the boundaries of belonging, i.e. of inclusion/exclusion, are contested:

> [W]hatever kinds of boundaries are constructed between the 'me' and the 'not me', it is
> vital to emphasize not only that those boundaries are shifting and contested, but also that

they do not have to be symmetrical. In other words, inclusion or exclusion is often not mutual, depending on the power positionality and normative values of the social actors as well as, and in relation to, their cognitive and emotional identifications. (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p275)

While the 'politics of identity' may be decried as socially divisive by political elites, retreats into what Yuval-Davis (2004) calls 'defensive identity communities' may in fact be set in train by an exclusionary politics that is driven by those elites and/or the majority populations they represent. Exploring this 'complex terrain', Nunn argues, (2014, pii) necessarily involves 'continual movement between the social and the personal, the political and the emotional'.

The concept of belonging also begs the question - 'belonging to what'? Here different 'scales' or 'spheres' of belonging can be identified, such as the local, national, international, sub-cultural and interpersonal (Nunn, 2014). Yuval-Davis (2010) notes that spheres of belonging can be associated with any grouping defined by culture, religion or even shared values, with varying degrees of 'boundary permeability' (Yuval-Davis, 2011). At the national level, empirical research has shown that indicators of belonging, such as 'commitment to stay', are not determined solely by the individual characteristics of newcomers, such as language skills and the capacity to build social networks, but can also be negatively impacted by experiences of discrimination or being treated as a minority rather than as citizens (Raijman and Geffen, 2017). Simonson (2016, p1153) agrees that majority attitudes that involve 'tacit understandings of who belongs and who does not' are more important than formal citizenship policies in cultivating a sense of 'having a place in a community'. Because of this, Kortweg (2017) argues against the discourse of 'failed integration', since it erases the role of the host society or community in the production of non-belonging, often along racialized lines.

Also important for our discussion is the distinction made by Hage (2000) between 'passive belonging' (which he defines as a sense of *belonging to* nation) and 'governmental belonging' (interpreted as exercising a *right over* the nation). This raises the question of who is entitled to decide questions about national belonging, and Hage's answer is that governmental belonging is not restricted to agents of the state: '[G]overnmental power … is the power to have a legitimate view regarding who should "feel at home" in the nation' (Hage, 2000, p46). This sense of entitlement to determine the borders of belonging may manifest in 'go home' statements, which are founded on both racist and nationalist sentiments: 'In the desire to send the other "home", subjects express implicitly their own desire to *be* at home. In every "go home", there is an "I want to and am entitled to feel at

**'Belonging is where the sociology of emotions interfaces with the sociology of power.'**

home in my nation"' (Hage, 2000, p40). It is because governmental belonging is dispersed across the community that national belonging cannot be equated with formal conceptions of citizenship, but is driven instead by 'the dominant community's everyday acceptance' of newcomers (Hage, 2000, p50). As Yuval-Davis (2004, p216) reflects, 'neither citizenship nor

identity can encapsulate the notion of belonging. Belonging is where the sociology of emotions interfaces with the sociology of power'.

## 1.2 Policing and belonging

As an institution invested with state power, police are potential agents of governmental belonging, although by no means the only ones. Individual police officers may express their governmental power over the boundaries of belonging in the same way as other members of the majority population, i.e. through respectful and inclusive messaging or via discriminatory or racist comments and actions. However, the special role and powers granted to police provide heightened opportunities to communicate messages of belonging or non-belonging. Systemic factors such as the use of move-on powers and pre-emptive street stops, combined with intelligence-led methods that encourage the classification of populations based on risk, provide an institutional basis that could cast police organisations as key definers of the boundaries of belonging.[i]

Police researchers have long posited a connection between policing and belonging. Police have been described by Loader (2006) as 'mediators of belonging' and by Waddington (1999) as 'arbiters of citizenship'. Tyler (1997) notes that police communicate during encounters with members of the public whether or not individuals are 'respected members of groups'. Qualitative work in the stop and search genre has reported experiences of shame, anger and discrimination associated with unwanted street stops (for example Brunson and Miller, 2006; Parmar, 2011). In addition, belonging, and related concepts such as citizenship and entitlement, have also been invoked in the context of border policing (Brouwer et al., 2018, Bosworth et al., 2017, Weber and Bowling, 2008). The social designation of subordinate groups as 'police property' destined for intensive police surveillance has been an ongoing feature of modern policing, as described here by Waddington, using the language of citizenship (1999, p41).

> [P]olice patrol the boundaries of citizenship: the citizenship of those who are 'respectable' is secured, while those who attack the state exclude themselves from citizenship. Between these extremes are those whose claim to citizenship is insecure and needs repeatedly to be negotiated. Police are the de facto arbiters of their citizenship. (Waddington, 1999: 41)

Because of this, Loader (2006, p202) has advocated a conception of 'democratic' policing that 'highlights the role of policing agencies in recognizing the legitimate claims of all individuals and groups affected by police actions and affirming their sense of belonging to a political community'. He

attributes to policing a powerful role as 'a social institution through which recognition and misrecognition are relayed' which contributes, ideally, 'a small but vital component of the resources of secure belonging' (p210).

Advocates of 'procedural justice policing' have taken up this challenge to some extent, arguing that ensuring that all sections of the community are treated lawfully, with dignity and respect, and are listened to during encounters with police, increases perceptions of police legitimacy. Much of this research looks at 'social identification' (an aspect of belonging) as a mediating variable, positing either that fair treatment by police (as representatives of the dominant group) shapes a sense of identification with the majority community amongst members of cultural minorities, or that pre-existing levels of social identification influence the effects of experiencing procedural justice at the hands of the police. The first of these explanations is the most relevant for this research on policing and belonging, suggesting that an encounter with police is 'a key moment in which immigrants establish a sense of place and belonging in their new home' (Bradford and Jackson, 2018, p585).

> **A police encounter is a 'key moment in which immigrants establish a sense of place and belonging in their new home'.**

## 2. This study

### 2.1 Previous applied research in Melbourne

Research on belonging conducted with Vietnamese Australians living in Melbourne found that one of the most common challenges to the participants' sense of national belonging was via the seemingly innocent question 'where are you from?'. The author's explanation was that this phrase 'contains the explicit assumption that to bear the aural or visual markers of a non-Anglo-Australian heritage is to be from somewhere else' (Nunn, 2017, p230). Other research on the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds has made a link between belonging and experiences of social inclusion and exclusion (see for example Benier et al., 2018). Correa-Velez et al. (2010, p1406) concluded that 'the opportunity to flourish, to become at home, to belong is powerfully shaped by the prevailing social climate and structures that are openly inclusive or that exclude'. The most powerful predictors of feelings of belonging or non-belonging from this quantitative study were perceived discrimination, bullying and feeling valued in the wider community (rather than the school or cultural community).

While warning that the factors that contribute to a sense of belonging may differ for young people who have been in Australia for a longer period of time, researchers from the Centre for Multicultural Youth also concluded from their focus group study that factors that supported a sense of belonging for young newly arrived refugees included: experiences of welcome, high levels of cultural diversity in the local community or local environment, a sense of safety and a sense of freedom or

agency. Detrimental factors included experiences of racism and religious intolerance, stereotypes and ignorance about their homeland and experiences, and experiencing only 'partial belonging' within the family or culture of origin but not the broader Australian community (Hunter et al., 2015). Related to the phenomenon of 'partial belonging', Mansouri and Mikola (2014, p35) found in their research in Melbourne, that young people from migrant backgrounds tend to 'oscillate' between 'internal and external spheres within their communities' in complex ways, attempting to juggle what the authors called 'indebtedness' to their families and cultural or religious communities against their desire for belonging in the host society.

Being born overseas is not necessarily the most salient factor influencing an individual's sense of belonging across all contexts. Recent survey research in Australian schools revealed that many Australian school students feel they don't belong in school, particularly students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and indigenous students. Of particular interest to this study, female students and Australian born students were less likely than male students and overseas born students to report feeling that they belonged (Thompson, 2018). First and second generation migrants expressed the greatest sense of belonging, indicating the important role played by schools as sites for the 'governance of belonging'. Previous research with refugee young people in Melbourne also found that schools were generally viewed as places of trust, although negative experiences such as racism and stereotyping from both teachers and peers were also reported (Hunter et al., 2015).

The existing research on young people and policing in Melbourne will be reviewed more fully in the second report that focuses more on policing practice. However, several studies that are particularly pertinent to the topic of policing and belonging will be mentioned here. One was a piece of practitioner research conducted with African young people in Greater Dandenong, Flemington and Braybrook under the combined auspices of the Fitzroy, Western Suburbs and Springvale community legal services. The young people they spoke with reported a wide range of interventions by police in their daily lives generating feelings of anger and resentment. This included unnecessary interference through targeted stops, violence, threats and intimidation. In relation to questions of belonging, researchers found that '[a]lmost all the young people we interviewed reported police engaging in racist name calling, taunts and telling young people things like: "go back to your own country" and that they "are the problem in this country"' (Smith and Reside, undated, p9). An earlier discussion paper concerning Pasifika young people and their contact with the criminal justice system published by the Springvale Monash Legal Service contained no original empirical research, but called for 'acknowledgment by police members of the nature of the problems encountered by Pasifika youth in their search for identity in Australian society' (Springvale Monash Legal Service, 2007).

A major empirical project was completed in 2010 by researchers from Victoria University in formal partnership with Victoria Police (Grossman and Sharples, 2010). The focus was on young people's perceptions of community safety and policing in the Brimbank area and the study included a

survey of 500 young people plus focus groups with young people from South Sudanese and Pasifika backgrounds. As will be reported in the next section, young people in the present study identified 'feeling safe' as an aspect of belonging, so questions of safety have some bearing on the topic of this report. Young people in the Victoria University study 'overwhelmingly' reported train and bus stations as the most unsafe places they frequented, with schools being identified as one of safest. More than half of the young people surveyed said they felt safer when they saw police on the streets, a finding that is at odds with the sentiments of the more highly selected group of adults and young people who participated in phase two of this study. However, only one fifth said they would actively call police if needed, which seems to indicate a preference for avoiding contact. Being 'friendlier', 'more respectful', and 'listen[ing] to what young people have to say' were suggested as factors that could improve these young people's feelings of trust and safety in relation to police. Young people from South Sudanese and Pacific Islander backgrounds expressed higher levels of distrust of police in focus groups, based on 'perceptions of racism, cultural stereotyping and failure to take young people seriously', amongst other factors. Moreover, comments from the focus groups resolved the apparent paradox identified before about the relationship between police presence and public safety. Police were seen to 'simultaneously enhance the safety of young people by their *presence* in the local area – but also place the safety of young people at risk by their *behaviour* in the local area, specifically toward young people in these two communities' (Grossman and Sharples, 2010, pxiv, italics in original).

Recent research conducted across several Melbourne suburbs as explored how young South Sudanese people have been impacted by highly racialized media reporting since the Moomba festival disturbances in 2016 (Benier et al., 2018). Questions of belonging and of experiences of policing arose in the focus groups, although they were not the primary focus of the study. These young people indicated that their feelings of belonging were contingent, and one participant made an appeal for her community to be accepted 'no matter what'. Unlike the present study, the sample obtained for this study was not slanted towards young people who have had high levels of contact with the police. Even so, they reported seeing or experiencing selective targeting by police of young people from African backgrounds in public places.

## 2.2 The socio-political context

Data collection for this study took place in several locations in southeastern Melbourne corresponding to the activities of youth organisations that facilitated the fieldwork. Those locations spanned two culturally diverse local government areas served by a single Division of the state-wide Victoria Police. The City of Greater Dandenong is a longstanding hub of settlement for refugees, with a reputation for welcoming diverse populations, and has relatively well-established local services for asylum seekers and migrants. According to the latest census, 64% of residents were born overseas,

nearly double the national average.[ii] With rising property prices, youth workers advised that many of the communities likely to have the most contact with police had moved further out to the City of Casey. That area is slightly less diverse, with 44% of residents born outside Australia, still well above the national average of 33%.[iii] Between them these adjacent local government areas account for the highest proportion of overseas-born residents (Dandenong) and the highest absolute number of overseas-born residents (Casey) in the state of Victoria (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2017, p4). Although they are far from the most populous cultural minorities in the study area, South Sudanese and Pasifika young people emerged from the research recruitment process as the most likely groups to have contact with police, the latter category consisting primarily of young people of Samoan or Tongan origin plus indigenous Māori from New Zealand. Both communities have experienced extreme social and economic marginalisation, have been subjected to concentrated rhetorical and literal criminalisation and in many cases are living with a long-term status as 'imminent outsiders' (McNevin, 2011).

South Sudanese communities in Australia consist mainly of settled refugees and humanitarian entrants. South Sudanese youths in Melbourne have been subjected to a particularly virulent and sustained criminalising discourse (Nolan et al., 2018) via sections of the media and through political statements from both major political parties that seems not to have been replicated in other parts of Australia (Budarick, 2018). According to Victoria Police statistics, offenders of South Sudanese origin are the most over-represented group in the state, although still accounting for a tiny minority of crimes (Hanrahan, 2018). Part of this over-representation is due to the prevalence of young people aged 18 to 24 within this population sub-group. While a minority of South Sudanese youths have been involved in serious crimes of violence (Shepherd et al., 2017), media coverage has generated levels of fear and calls for political action far in excess of their contribution to recorded crime (Wahlquist, 2018). A high-profile incident of disorder at the popular Moomba festival in 2016 identified Dandenong as the focal point for the so-called Apex gang, which was associated with the disorder. South Sudanese and Pasifika youths were widely reported to be instigators of the violence, despite repeated statements by police that the young people involved were generally not members of gangs as traditionally understood, and came from a range of cultural backgrounds (Zielinski and Booker, 2016). Accompanying the messaging about the criminal threat they pose, South Sudanese communities have also been widely represented as having failed to integrate into Australian society (Nunn, 2010).

Pasifika young people living in Australia have also been subjected to high levels of involvement with police in various times and places. The majority of the Pasifika community, other than young people born in Australia, have entered the country on New Zealand passports having either acquired New Zealand citizenship or been born there. Uniquely within the tightly controlled Australian visa system, their Special Category Visas (SCVs) allow unlimited stay. However, SCV holders are

disqualified from settlement assistance and have severely restricted access to important resources such as public housing, employment, tertiary education and social security. With limited access to Australia's points-based citizenship process, and employed largely in low-paid jobs, many families who have decided to make their homes in Australia have been exposed to extreme inter-generational disadvantage and sustained insecurity (Weber et al., 2013). These deliberately engineered conditions, and lack of future pathways for young people, have contributed to over-representation in the criminal justice system (Liddell et al., 2017). New Zealand citizens now account for the highest proportion of criminal deportations of any nationality in Australia (Powell and Weber, 2018). A high proportion of this group is likely to identify as Pasifika. Previous research by the author in another state established that police were actively targeting this social group for deportation as a strategy to pre-empt future crime (Weber, 2013; Weber and Powell, 2018). Deportation on criminal grounds of people of South Sudanese origin is reportedly also becoming prevalent and is a considerable source of fear and insecurity in both communities.

## 2.3 Study design

This study explores the concept of belonging in more depth than is usual in applied research on young people, drawing on some insights from the academic literature reviewed earlier. It then examines the implications of both positive and negative interactions with police on various aspects of belonging, against the backdrop of everyday interactions with other authorities, social institutions and members of the public. The research involved extensive networking with youth workers, young people and other community members over a two-year period from mid-2016 to mid-2018. Several youth support organisations assisted in contacting hard to reach populations of young people likely to be exposed to policing. The only sampling criteria were that young people were from culturally diverse backgrounds and were at least 16 years of age. The design for the study was exploratory and open ended – allowing research participants to define their own conception of belonging - and remaining open also to the inclusion of whatever groups of young people appeared to be impacted by local policing.

In addition to numerous informal discussions and observations at community events, a total of 79 participants were included in the formal data collection. South Sudanese and Pasifika young people emerged as the overseas-born groups most heavily impacted by everyday policing in this part of Melbourne. In the first phase of the study, focus groups were conducted with young people from other cultural backgrounds. Although it transpired that these young people had very limited contact with police, these focus groups were invaluable in establishing how belonging is understood amongst that age group, and revealed many examples of encounters with other authorities and members of the public that influenced feelings of belonging or not belonging.

| SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Type of research participants | Number of groups or interviews | Number of participants (Total 79) | Places of birth |
| Phase One Focus Groups | 5 | 22 (13 female, 9 male) | Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, Somalia, Samoa, New Zealand |
| Phase Two Pasifika Focus Groups | 2 | 11 (7 female, 4 male) | Samoa, New Zealand, Australia |
| Phase Two South Sudanese Focus Groups | 2 | 22 (6 female, 16 male) | Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon |
| Young people interviews | 3 | 5 (all male) | Egypt, South Sudan, Kenya, Mauritius |
| Pasifika parents / community worker interviews | 2 | 9 (6 female, 3 male) | Samoa, New Zealand |
| South Sudanese parents / community worker interviews | 3 | 10 (all female) | South Sudan |

Young people were invited to recount both positive and negative experiences with police either as participants in one of nine focus groups (totalling 55 participants) or via individual or group interviews (three interviews involving five young people), and to reflect on the impact of their experiences on feelings of belonging. South Sudanese and other African participants were drawn from the Greater Dandenong area. Discussions with Pasifika participants were located in the Casey local government area. In addition to the focus groups, five young people spoke with the researcher via individual or group interviews. Eight of the young people recruited into the study proved to be Australian-born, although all of them had parents who had come to Australia as refugees or migrants. An additional 19 individual and group interviews were conducted with professional or volunteer youth workers who were themselves members of affected communities (five individuals, via three interviews) and with representatives of the 'parental' generation for each of the affected communities, some of whom were also involved in community work (14 individuals, via two group interviews). All participants were provided with a $20 gift voucher to thank them for their participation in the study.[iv]

This study has numerous limitations. The focus group approach failed to take into account possible differences in experience between the overseas-born participants and the minority who, after recruitment, were found to have been born in Australia. More exploration of gender could have enriched the analysis, particularly in relation to the Afghan group where the wearing of a hijab appeared to be a salient factor in the gendered politics of belonging. Systemic factors that produce racialized policing without the necessity for individual racism, most notably intelligence-led policing, have not been canvassed here for reasons of space, although their effects were certainly apparent. These themes, including material collected through interviews with Victoria Police members, will be developed more fully in a second report from this project that will focus on police practice.

# 3. Baselining 'belonging'

## 3.1 Phase One Focus Groups

The data collection began with two focus groups comprising 13 young people who all attend a youth leadership group in the Greater Dandenong area. The majority were born in Afghanistan and Pakistan and had entered Australia as asylum seekers or refugees, some after traumatic journeys by boat. Nine of the 13 participants were female. Although the youth workers advised that gender-specific sessions were not necessary, several articulate young women were the most active contributors to discussions in the first focus group and it proved difficult to coax responses from the male participants. A further nine young people (five males and four females) from Somalian, Thai and Pasifika backgrounds took part in three small focus groups intended to broaden the base of the sample. As is frequently the case with this data collection type, there was considerable variation in the levels of contribution from different individuals in these groups as well.

| Terms used by young people to describe feelings of belonging or non-belonging | |
| --- | --- |
| **Affective dimension of belonging** | **Relational dimension of belonging** |
| *Comfortable, at ease, peaceful, free, natural, at home, being yourself, safe, secure, able to do things, happy, alive* | *Accepted, understood, connected, loved, cared for, related to place, not isolated, not singled out, fitting in, helped* |
| **Affective dimension of non-belonging** | **Relational dimension of non-belonging** |
| *Unsafe, not yourself, uncomfortable, fearful, insecure* | *Discriminated against, stereotyped, bullied, isolated, powerless, misunderstood, unwanted, left out, judged* |

The focus groups began with a brainstorm about what belonging meant to these young people, after which images of typical locations such as schools, local parks, shopping centres, train stations and

pedestrian areas were projected onto a screen, and participants invited to discuss their experiences in these types of places that made them feel they did or didn't belong. The words used to describe their feelings of belonging or non-belonging fell into two clear categories, both of which are highlighted in the belonging literature that was reviewed earlier in the report. On the one hand, words such as 'feeling comfortable', 'at ease', 'peaceful', 'feeling free', 'feeling natural', being 'at home', 'safe', and 'feeling yourself' reflected the *affective* (personal) dimension of belonging, related to emotional comfort and authenticity. Other phrases such as 'being accepted', 'understood', 'connected', 'loved', 'cared for', 'being related to place', 'not isolated or singled out' and 'fitting in' revealed an awareness of the *relational* (social) nature of belonging and the importance of context. Being 'discriminated against', 'stereotyped' and 'bullied'; feeling 'isolated', 'unsafe', 'powerless', 'misunderstood' and 'unwanted' featured strongly in these young people's conceptions of non-belonging.

## 3.2 Place-based belonging

Belonging is not a fixed, individual characteristic but a dynamic phenomenon that is highly context-specific. Before the first focus group, the convenor of the youth leadership group had picked up the

belonging theme himself and asked members to photograph places where they experienced a sense of belonging. The images were subsequently uploaded to the group's Facebook page. These photographs revealed the highly subjective nature of belonging as the locations varied from quiet locations, either outdoors or within their own homes, where individuals could be secure and separated from others; to social settings such as cinemas, schools and sporting teams where feelings of belonging were actively generated through positive interactions with others. (See (Robertson et al., 2016) for a detailed discussion of how young migrants express their sense of belonging through visual representations of place).



Unsurprisingly, when presented with images of places that might be significant to the young people in terms of feelings of belonging, schools attracted considerable discussion. Experiences were mixed. Most participants said they felt safe, welcome and like they belonged in their school. They attributed this to the multicultural ethos of the schools they attended, and to the support and sensitivity of individual teachers. One participant described her school as 'like my second home'. Others, possibly attending the same schools, reported that some teachers were 'racist'. The most frequent example given of this was singling out students wearing headscarfs and not encouraging refugee or migrant students to aim high

or plan for further education. One young man said he had been 'counted out' by some teachers and felt excluded. Another said he had not felt welcome at school, had not received the help he needed with schoolwork, and had been 'booted out'.

Travelling on public transport, particularly trains, emerged as a place of vulnerability where young people often had encounters with authorities and members of the public that conveyed messages about belonging or not belonging. School-aged students are entitled to travel concessions, but they are also subjected to extra checks to ensure they are carrying their concession card. These checks may be carried out either by ticket inspectors employed by the train operator (described by young people as the 'Myki police') or by Protective Services Officers (PSOs) employed by Victoria Police to promote public safety on trains and at train stations. Some participants said they were

> **'It made me feel like I was being treated differently to others, receiving different treatment to my Aussie friend.'**

checked nearly every week, others not at all. One young person described being upset and embarrassed by being asked to disclose his identity and place of residence. Another participant said she had been fined three times even though she didn't use the train much: 'Officers seemed to just check me, not everyone else'. Another young woman claimed she was singled out 'every time I go into the city with my

friends' although her friends were not checked, adding 'I think it's because I am wearing a scarf'. One young man said he had been 'racially profiled' on a train and fined, while another gave a detailed account of an encounter with authority that made a lasting impact on him.

> We were going out of the station, there was an Indian ticket inspector, I was looking at him, he was sending the Aussies down the right lane and the other people (Afghans and Africans) down the other lane. We questioned him about making people go down the different lanes and the ticket inspector got angry. They weren't checking one group more than the other, but separating them. It made me feel like I was being treated differently to others, receiving different treatment to my Aussie friend. It made me aware of how to treat people better, not like that ticket inspector.

The responses of other passengers could also influence young people's sense of belonging. One young woman recounted being 'arrested' by Myki police and placed in plastic handcuffs[v] when she was wrongly accused of not offering her seat to a passenger holding a baby. Some other passengers had defended her, which she said 'gave me a sense of feeling part of the community'. Experiences with other passengers were mixed. Big groups of 'certain people' were said to bully others and make racist comments. One participant had been helped by an elderly woman who intervened when a young boy was harassing her. She thought these incidents had reduced over the six years since she had arrived in Australia.

Parks and public places were also places where young people had encounters with members of the majority population that affected their sense of belonging. One focus group reported only good

experiences in this context. Participants attributed this to Australia being a multicultural country, so you 'don't get judged'. Members of another focus group described how there had initially been a lot of distrust between 'Afghan' and 'Australian' boys in a local skate park. They thought this had been brought on by the fact that the Afghan boys would sit at a distance rather than joining in, making the Australian boys uncomfortable that they were being watched. The Australian boys, they explained, felt that they 'really belonged there because they grew up in that park'. Notably, the newcomers were left to make the first move. As the Afghan boys began slowly to join in, relations improved and the groups got to know each other: 'Now we all play soccer together. Anyone can join in.'

Views about shopping malls as sites of belonging or non-belonging divided the groups to some extent along gender lines. In previous research conducted in Melbourne, young women of Muslim background had raised safety as their key concern (Hunter et al., 2015). For a number of female participants the major mall in their area was a place of fear with a history of violent crimes and a resident population of homeless people and drug users. It had also been the site of a 'prank with an ISIS flag' that had 'made everyone scared'.[vi] Some older female participants said they were happy to go shopping there, and several male participants said they still went there after school on Fridays with groups of friends. Rather than being afraid of victimisation, some of the young men were more concerned at being treated like suspects. One said he was made to feel uncomfortable on a daily basis since staff members followed him around whenever he entered a store 'as if they expect me to steal or do something'. Feelings of belonging or not belonging could be tied to even more specific contexts. One young man who said he otherwise liked spending time at the mall noted: 'One place where I feel like I don't belong is the ATMs. I'd rather go to Coles or Safeways to get cash out. I feel uncomfortable at the ATM. People are staring, looking in from the outside to where the ATMs are. I feel like I don't belong'.

Places of worship featured as locations where many young people said they felt accepted, relaxed and safe. In some cases young people said they felt at ease even in places of worship that were not of their own faith. Although there were a few dissenters who said gossip within these tight-knit communities made them uncomfortable, most of the comments pointed to the universal acceptance that participants believed was common across religions. One young person said of her Buddhist temple 'everyone can go and have the food there … I belong with all of the people there, not just the Thai people'. And another expressed the view that 'We all come from God, so going to church feels more safe'.

Finally, participants were asked about the internet as a (non-geographical) site of belonging or non-belonging. Many of the young people from the leadership group were virulently opposed to spending time on social media, describing it as a 'waste of time' or 'fake' and preferring to interact with people in person. Others thought it was good for keeping in touch with friends and family overseas,

**'If they tell me I am this person, I wonder if I am this kind of person.'**

although seemingly in relation to practical matters, and not so much about reinforcing transnational ties of belonging. Some held disparaging views about 'fleeting' online news media, but thought some specialist websites they knew about were good for multiculturalism. Several participants reported negative experiences on social media. One reported feeling unsafe because there were so many generalisations about Muslims being terrorists, and other racist and anti-immigrant sentiments by people who were 'not understanding things'. Highlighting the immense power of experiences of acceptance or non-acceptance by others, one young man hinted that being personally targeted online could even make him question his own identity:

> Sometimes I feel I belong to social media, but a couple of times things happened with strange people messaging me - I don't know who they are - trying to put me down. If they tell me I am this person, I wonder if I am this kind of person? It may affect me, but I try not to let it affect me. I block them.

## 3.4 Scales of belonging

The focus groups also yielded insights into different levels or scales of belonging. At the local and inter-personal level, young people found a sense of belonging, and sometimes experienced threats to their feelings of belonging, through membership of groups such as schools, sporting clubs, youth groups, families and peer groups, and in one-off contexts on trains, in cafes or other public places. One participant explained: 'Hanging out with my friends makes me feel like I belong. We all have the same connection together … We think the same, have shared interests and values'. Sometimes powerful experiences of inclusivity and acceptance came from unexpected places like the internet. Speaking about a sympathetic post in an otherwise negative discussion about 'Muslims', one young woman observed: 'There was understanding. I showed my Mum, and she thought they were good people. Even though they are not Muslim and they see bad things about Muslims, they still think we are good people and that brings us peace'.

Young people also commented on their feelings of belonging to their local community, their own cultural community, and the Australian nation. As one participant explained:

> Dandenong is so multicultural, I don't feel judged … even by the Australian community. At first I didn't feel like I belonged. Now I feel more like I do, even from other cultures living in Dandenong. I don't think anyone feels isolated in Dandenong because of multiculturalism. [What if you leave Dandenong? Do you feel you belong?] It's different if you leave Dandenong, it doesn't feel like you belong there.

On the other hand, negative experiences, especially deliberately targeted actions, could extend messages of non-belonging through entire religious or culturally defined communities: 'When Afghan ladies walked at night time, a group of bogan boys used to sit with a crate of eggs and throw them at Afghans in the Muslim area. It didn't happen to me, but I heard of it'.

Another participant added: 'Our house got egged late at night. I went to confront them and the culprits ran. I wonder who it is and why they did this? What have they got against us? Only my house got egged.'

Sometimes social interactions carried messages of non-belonging, not just within the local community, but also within the nation as a whole. One young man gave this example.

Six months ago, me and my family went to the Dandenong Mountains for a picnic when an Aussie woman approached swearing at us. 'You don't belong, fuck off'. I said, 'What have I done to you?' and she said, 'It's not your place, go back to where you came from'. I was talking English to her because my parents don't speak English. Then the woman said I was showing off speaking in English.

The young man explained that this experience had given him the feeling of 'being judged' as if he had done something wrong. He had continued to think about these events for a long time. Another participant explained after a bad experience on the train: 'It made me feel like I wanted to go back to Malaysia and not stay in Australia. People in Australia are really rude. Mum told me not to take the train. It doesn't make you feel good or accepted when people are rude like that'. Another participant described sitting with friends in a fast food outlet, when a woman approached them and asked for change:

We didn't have it. An Indian man looked over at us, and the woman went to him and told him to go back to his own country when he didn't have change either. He said that he had a British passport. If a person can say that to the Indian man they can say it to an Afghan. People think that Australia is theirs. This country belongs to Aboriginal people.

Even more pervasive and commonplace were repeated questions about origins. Although polite queries were sometimes accepted as indicating genuine interest and friendliness, these interventions

were more often experienced as a form of everyday racism or 'micro-aggressions' (Sue et al., 2007). Nunn (2014) found from her empirical research with Vietnamese migrants in Australia that even seemingly innocuous statements such as 'Where are you from?' functioned as potent reminders of 'constant liminality'. Amongst this group, several young women who wore hijabs were particularly sensitive to intrusive enquiries that they judged to be hostile and ill informed. They said they resented the stereotypical assumptions that were made about

their servility and oppression, and felt their culture was being questioned. In some cases, the hostile overtones of enquiries about origins were subsequently confirmed. A young woman who had offered her seat on the train to a woman with a pram recounted being asked by the woman where she came from. When she had answered 'Afghanistan', the woman had refused to accept the seat.

Although local, sub-cultural and religious communities were clearly a prime source of belonging for these young people, national belonging was still important. One young woman said that belonging for her meant 'being part of a western country' and added that she no longer felt that she belonged in her country of origin. This well-travelled young woman showed a remarkable capacity for 'multiple belongings' when she described community as being 'anyone who treats you well'. When asked how they would sum up their feelings about belonging in Australia, one focus group participant said that it depended on the situation and the time: 'Sometimes politicians make comments, like speeches from Pauline Hanson, saying 'go back to where you come from'. But then there are good politicians who say Australia is a multicultural country and that we should welcome people'. Overall, however, it was noticeable that the language used by the young people in all these preliminary focus groups contained an implicit assumption, at least in the contexts we were discussing, that the term 'Australian' did not normally refer to them.

## 3.5 Negotiating belonging

The focus groups provided many examples of strategies used by young people to respond to messages of non-belonging. Some participants, notably young women, said they chose always to go out with a friend, so they felt safe, especially when venturing beyond their own communities. Solidarity with other young people seemed also to act as a buffer against exclusionary encounters, for example, from 'racist' teachers. Accommodation was another strategy used to manage the impact of messages of non-belonging, although it had a limited protective effect. One participant said: 'Maybe it doesn't get better, but you adjust to things, you go with it. [But it can still have an impact on you?] True'. One young man who complained about being constantly followed around in shops explained 'After a while you don't mind, you get used to it, nothing is going to come out of it … I used to get pissed off and confront them but now I'm used to it and just avoid them'. However, he admitted: 'It makes me very uncomfortable'.

Avoidance was a common response, such as walking away when altercations occurred. However, generalised avoidance of situations where encounters of non-belonging might occur could come at a cost. A young woman who recounted negative experiences on the train said these occurrences made you 'lose your confidence' and 'feel scared', but that deciding not to use the trains then made her feel 'isolated'. Another young woman explained she only went to

**'We shouldn't let these things stop us from trying new things. We should have the courage to stand up for ourselves.'**

restaurants now where she felt welcome and didn't use trains anymore, in order to 'avoid feeling uncomfortable'. However this, in turn, made her feel 'restricted' and 'not free'. Isolation and not being free had earlier been identified by the young people as feelings associated with non-belonging. Therefore, young people's responses to experiences of non-belonging, could reinforce, rather than redress, the feelings associated with the original experience.

Some of the more vocal young people appeared to be extremely resilient and claimed to be capable of challenging or dismissing efforts to make them feel unwelcome. One young woman observed that avoidance could stop people trying new things, and preferred to confront the issues head-on: 'We shouldn't let these things stop us from trying new things. We should have courage to stand up for ourselves. I go to different restaurants with friends each weekend. If bad things come up, I push them away. I don't let these things get to me too much'. As Nunn (2017, p230) observed in her research with Vietnamese Australians: 'Being asked 'where are you from?' was at times experienced as an encounter with ignorance rather than an unsettling of their own position'. Young people in my focus groups used a variety of methods to take control of situations where members of the public assumed they had a right to make judgements about belonging. Examples included turning the 'where are you from?' question back on the questioner (in the example given, a 'racist' teacher), or confronting people directly about the reasons for their actions (such as following the person concerned around a store). Labelling their accusers as being racists and/or in the wrong was another example of these strategies of 'rejecting the rejector': 'I've done nothing wrong and the security guards are wrong. I don't let anybody else make me feel how I feel. I am in control of my own feelings and stand up for myself. I will tell them that they are being racist and that I don't want to talk to you'.

These young people showed deep insights and capacity for agency through these acts of citizenship. As Mansouri and Mikola (2014, p35) have observed: 'Migrant youth not only have the potential to contribute to, but also to broaden the discursive scope of Australian identity, belonging and the role of the citizen as a political agent of change'. In some cases, these young people displayed their capacity for leadership, stepping in when others were being bullied and trying to change the course of events. As one of these incipient young leaders explained: 'I don't like people making someone feel sad. We have been through a lot coming by boat and struggling. I don't like people judging us when they haven't been in our shoes'.

Although their responses differed, what young people were looking for in the circumstances they described, was to be treated with fairness, respect and courtesy. Acts of understanding and acceptance by members of the wider community, although nothing more than they should expect, were deeply appreciated, while hostile encounters often communicated messages of non-belonging. Enforcement agents on public transport and private security guards in retail outlets were the closest encounter that

most of these participants had experienced with forms of policing. Since these authorities had in some cases been employed explicitly to reassure the safety of 'the public' in public places, the experiences of unfair targeting described by some young people had the effect of communicating to them that they existed outside the boundaries of 'secure belonging' (Loader 2006).

The discussion about place-based experiences provided insights into all three dimensions of belonging identified in the Introduction. The ways in which teachers, public authorities and members of the public were said to assume roles as arbiters of who does and does not belong exemplifies the phenomenon of *governmental belonging*.  Examples where messages of non-belonging were met with responses of rebuttal, avoidance or solidarity with other targeted groups, identify the boundaries of belonging as sites of struggle in ways that resonate with the *politics of belonging*.  In addition, participants also articulated the deeply subjective feelings of belonging or not belonging that result from these experiences, providing a language that will be used to examine *affective belonging* in the later stages of the research. In the following section, I explore how encounters with police potentially impact on belonging at each of these levels.

# 4. Police encounters and experiences of (non)belonging

## 4.1 Phase Two Focus Groups

Since very few encounters with police were identified in the first round of focus groups, a different approach was needed, necessitating a rethink about the data collection methodology. Several new youth organisations were approached to help broker contacts with these hard to reach young people, either through focus groups, individual or group interviews. This eventually led to four further focus groups involving 33 young people, two with young people from Pasifika communities in Casey and two with young people of primarily South Sudanese origin in two locations within Greater Dandenong. Three of the focus groups had a mixture of genders, and the fourth had all male participants. In three of the groups, most participants had had some contact with police, usually via street or traffic stops, while one or two members had experienced higher levels of police intervention. The fourth group comprised young men who were participants in an organised program and all had high levels of contact with police, primarily for minor offences such as public drinking and fare evasion. Since these young people had all experienced some level of contact with police, tended to be older than the young people recruited in the first phase of the study, and in some cases were well acquainted with each other, the researcher was advised that the focus group format would be appropriate. In addition, youth workers brokered interviews with five young people from a variety of African backgrounds, including one group interview involving three young men who had high levels of police contact. While freely admitting to some offending, these young men were visibly angry

about some aspects of their past and ongoing contacts with police but also provided deep insights into their predicament. Several of the interviewees and focus group participants, from both Pasifika and South Sudanese backgrounds, had been linked, rightly or wrongly, with the Apex gang.

In this phase, the questioning concentrated on eliciting accounts of policing encounters, and belonging was discussed only indirectly. Participants were first asked to identify the locations in which they had experienced encounters with police as a group exercise using flashcards (see image inset), and then participated in a brainstorm about what was good and bad about these encounters. They were then invited to use post-it notes to specify how they had felt in these situations, and were finally asked whether these good and bad experiences changed how they thought about the police,



themselves and the society they lived in. There was less opportunity in this format to discuss personal feelings of belonging explicitly, but the vocabulary identified from the first phase was useful in connecting the reported experiences reported in this phase with conceptions of belonging.

These interactions with young people were supplemented with five interviews with 19 adult members of Pasifika and South Sudanese communities in the research areas, some of whom were community workers, others of whom represented the perspective of the parental generation. Although the primary intention in interviewing adult community members was to obtain further insights into the experiences of young people, many adults also reported personal experiences with police that were relevant to their own perceptions of belonging, and to their perceptions about acceptance within the wider community.

Findings from this part of the study are discussed under three sub-headings. The section on *police as arbiters of belonging* recognises the relational nature of public encounters with the police. It focuses on reported police practice and the judgements made by young people about police actions. The section on *policing and affective belonging* focuses on the experiences, views and responses of young people and other community members following these encounters with police. And the section on *police and the politics of belonging* considers broader issues of effective citizenship and how police actions communicate messages about status and belonging to the wider community. Further findings from this phase of the study will be presented in a second report that will focus on police organisational practice.

## 4.1 Police as arbiters of belonging

The most direct way in which police can demonstrate they are not merely enforcing the law but are also conveying judgements about who does and does not belong is to make open statements of the 'go back to where you came from' variety. Although this behaviour has been reported in previous research (Smith and Reside, undated, p9), in this study, these explicit statements of non-belonging were more often attributed to actors other than police.

Far more prevalent were other forms of racial vilification and targeting that had the effect of isolating parts of the community for differential treatment. One focus group participant said: 'I don't know why police are stopping me, just for being a black person. If I'm nice to them, they are nice to me. They have stopped me five times'. There was said to be a lot of stereotyping based on

> **'If I am seen by the cops, I know I'll be looked at in a certain way … they stereotype people.'**

racial appearance: 'It's more like you're conscious of what colour and nationality I am. If I am seen by the cops, I know I'll be looked at in a certain way … they stereotype people'. One community worker challenged stereotypes that he claimed were held by many police of young Pasifika people as bullies: 'You can't paint all young people with the same brush, you can't. Maybe for those that are committing the crimes and that, then that's a different response. But when you're assuming that you're approaching every Pasifika young person with that sort of perception then it does affect the way the young people feel'.

One young woman described a former partner being stopped by a large group of police and falsely accused of stealing a car and carrying drugs: 'It came out of nowhere; he's not known to police. I think they picked on him because of his skin colour'. The young men who took part in the group interview said they were routinely 'racially profiled', giving examples of being singled out from mixed-ethnicity groups in shopping centres, train stations and on the street:

> They just racially profile us kids … Let's just say you see 12 white kids walking around at 12 am and you see a group of Sudanese kids walking around at night. Like it's more than likely that the Sudanese kids are going to get pulled over instead of the white kids, you know what I mean? And, like, I just think that is bullshit because, like, how is that fair?

It was conceded that 'some cops are more discriminatory than others, some are more fair'. However, one focus group participant feared that the targeting of whole sections of the community was becoming more prevalent: 'Because they are vulnerable, police can intimidate them … "The person who committed these offences is African, so you being African fit the description of the criminal, so it must be you"'.

Accounts of police selectively targeting young people of African heritage were corroborated repeatedly by both young people and older community workers from Pasifika backgrounds. One focus

group participant reported hearing a police officer say: '"You know how those Sudanese people are." And I was just like "Woah, well how are they?" They are always going to have an outlook on a certain race as being criminals'. Another participant from a Pasifika background described attending a party that was broken up by police:

> I was with a guy who was big and black, and there were a lot of people there, and out of all the people they stopped and pulled over to talk to, it was the black guy who was the only sober one of the group. They harassed him and threatened to take him to the station when there were other fights going on around him.

One interviewee explained: 'Like, don't get me wrong, I'm not being racist or anything, but the Sudanese, you know, they're always targeting them, or the Afghans … I mean, there's other people out there, they are doing a lot worse shit than what they are, and I don't like that. It's always a specific targeted race'. These observations about racialized targeting were confirmed by an experienced community worker with a Pasifika background: 'You have like, Sudanese kids here. You've got our kids there. You've got the Australian kids and they all walk straight past the Australian kids and head straight for the Sudanese to start harassing them and moving them on. [You mean the police?] Police, security, all of them'. She noted that her own community 'were there first' as prime targets for police. However, in an apparent reference to the post-Moomba media onslaught (see Bernier et al, 2018), she observed that the 'stigma' now associated with the South Sudanese community was only 'created a few years ago'.

Participants from South Sudanese backgrounds also acknowledged this 'hierarchy of discrimination'. One said: 'There is a lot of discrimination. There used to be fights between Africans and New Zealanders at Dandenong train station. When the African gets beaten up they don't do anything. When it is the other way round they follow up'. Another argued: 'It's reasonable to be stopped. They are doing their jobs; we understand that. But we get picked due to the colour of our skins. They looked bored. They don't care about the white or Asian who is doing the same thing. They come straight to the black person'. The hierarchy based on skin colour was even observed to operate within cultural groups, and appeared to be echoed in the young people's own behaviour. In a group interview involving two young men of South Sudanese descent and one from Mauritius, the Mauritian young man was noticeably quieter. When he tried to tell his own story, the other two shouted him down good-naturedly, teasing him that he wasn't 'really black' so that these things didn't happen to him. Admittedly, these young men had reported overt and extreme racist treatment at the hands of some police. One of them reported that a police officer with whom he had had many negative encounters had once whispered to him (apparently mistaking asylum seeker boats for 18th century slave trade vessels): 'Do the cuffs remind you of when you were back on the boat?'

At worst, expressions of non-belonging might be enacted through violence. When the young man who was the target of the verbal assault reported above responded with: 'Mate, I came on a plane bro …You came on the boat' the response was said to be an escalation of the abuse and a beating. In a focus group with Pasifika young people, one named officer was said to be known for 'bashing Samoans' until he had been moved on to a new posting. Fears of targeted police brutality were rife amongst the South Sudanese mothers interviewed in the study. As one said chillingly: 'They will beat you, beat you, beat you to the death'. Other mothers in the group nodded and voiced their agreement – adding later that they believed only some police did such things: 'It's what we know.  Some, they are good.  Some, they are bad'.

> **'It's what we know. Some, they are good. Some, they are bad.'**

In addition to feeling they were treated as perpetual suspects, many participants reported experiences where their victimisation had not been taken seriously or had been met with hostility from police. Their complaints of being treated with disrespect and disdain when seeking police services, aligned closely with accounts provided by Vietnamese Australians in previous research by this author (McKernan and Weber, 2016) in which not being listened to, or having the information provided by an Anglo-Australians favoured over their own, featured strongly. A South Sudanese mother lamented that police 'don't listen to black people, only white people'. She recounted a story where she had slightly touched another vehicle in a car park. After checking there was no damage to either car she had driven off, only to be chased by the male driver who had yelled at her and called the police. When the police arrived, she claimed they were not interested in looking at the lack of damage or listening to her, but instead gave her a fine. On the other hand, she noted that police had done nothing about the racist abuse directed towards her by the occupants of the other vehicle, which had been very upsetting for her children.

A young man recalled an altercation in which he believed he was the aggrieved party, but said 'the police made me feel like I wasn't a victim, but like I was doing something wrong'.  Another research participant said she had gone to the police station to report a stolen phone but 'felt like I was annoying them'. Another focus group member had her phone stolen by a 'white girl'. She said she had a reliable witness and a photograph of the thief, but when she reported the theft at the police station, they had done nothing. She commented that police 'always check young African people, and if they have anything in their pockets, even cash, it's assumed they stole it'. One young man expressed a similar, more personalised, sentiment: 'They take a long time to come to your assistance, but if I've been causing trouble, they come quickly to pick me up'. Another young man took this claim further, noting the lack of police assistance when South Sudanese young people were harming each other: 'They want us to kill each other off, true'. A group of South Sudanese mothers said they desperately wanted to see police protecting their children, and were dismayed that this was not happening: 'We see the police is the one that

> **'I think police are good for some people, but not for us.'**

have the authority for everything. Police is for protecting you and then, it's like, we could believe the police are doing something good'. One woman summed up the feelings expressed by many others with these simple words: 'I think police are good for some people, but not for us'.

Many young people interpreted the discrimination and racial targeting they reported to be communications of their non-belonging, as expressed by this interviewee: 'You guys are aliens. You don't belong here … That's how they end up treating us'. Being singled out by members of the public and other authorities when doing nothing wrong, discriminated against or isolated because of their skin colour or cultural identity, and being castigated or treated with suspicion merely for expressing their culture, were themes that were identified by participants in phase one of the project as conveying messages of non-belonging. Both young and older participants reported these experiences at the hands of police in phase two of the study, although not all police were said to behave this way. In addition, the reported accounts of unequal treatment when seeking police services are likely to undermine feelings of being 'safe', 'cared for' and 'understood' that were identified in the first phase of the study as important aspects of belonging. While all the research participants acknowledged variations in the behaviour of individual police, this data supports the view that certain officers conceive of their role as enforcing 'governmental belonging' through the judgements they make about who does and does not belong in public space, and within the nation.

## 4.3 Police encounters and feelings of (non)belonging

The words used by young people to describe how they felt after positive experiences with police tended to be straightforward; they said they felt good about themselves, safe or happy. The terms used to describe their feelings after negative experiences were far more varied, and fell into a number of different categories. Some young people described negative feelings that were directed towards the police such as 'angry', 'annoyed', 'frustrated' and 'furious'. Others described their own internal feelings as 'bad', 'upset', 'unhappy', 'traumatised' or 'shocked'. The terms used by others reflected their relationships to others, with examples such as 'isolated', 'let down', 'mistreated', 'misunderstood', 'not heard'. Some others focused on what might happen in the future, with descriptors such as 'worried', 'paranoid', 'anxious', 'scared', 'stressed', 'unsafe' and 'frightened', suggesting that negative encounters with police may have long-lasting effects.

A very large number of terms suggested that young people's sense of their social standing had been challenged by their experiences. This category included 'offended', 'awkward', 'uncomfortable', 'humiliated', 'belittled', 'like a joke', 'not taken seriously', 'disrespected', 'ashamed' and 'powerless'. Another group of terms also suggested differential treatment, but with an emphasis on the process itself, when young people felt they had been 'judged', 'discriminated against', 'picked on', 'targeted', 'profiled', 'stereotyped' and 'stigmatised'. Some comments implied that negative

interactions with police had prompted young people to reflect on how they were being perceived by others. One young person noted there was a 'bad image on Africans because of some crimes others have done'. Others said their experiences with police had made them feel 'not trustworthy', as if they 'could be seen as a bit of a threat' or to 'think about my appearance and my image'.

| Terms used to describe feelings after negative interactions with police | |
| --- | --- |
| **Affective dimension** | **Relational dimension** |
| Internal feelings - *bad, upset, unhappy, traumatised, shocked* | Relationship to others - *isolated, let down, mistreated, misunderstood, not heard* |
| Feelings directed towards police – *angry, annoyed, frustrated, furious* | Social standing threatened - *offended, awkward, uncomfortable, humiliated, belittled, like a joke, not taken seriously, disrespected, ashamed and powerless* |
| Future orientated feelings - *worried, paranoid, anxious, scared, stressed, unsafe, frightened* | Focus on process - *judged, discriminated against, picked on, targeted, profiled, stereotyped, stigmatised* |
| | Self-perception – *bad image, not trustworthy, threat to others* |

When asked directly about circumstances that made them feel like they didn't belong, one focus group participant said: 'At a [train] station, why would [the police] come and talk to you out of all the people around. They come straight to you. It makes me feel like shit'. An experienced community worker of Pasifika origin described the impact on young people of negative interactions with police in terminology that participants in phase one focus groups had associated with not belonging:

> When they see a police officer they start to feel anxious, they feel awkward because they've had some past experiences with police officers. And when you're out in public the last thing you want is to feel anxious. It's a public space so, I suppose, you should feel safe.

One young person made a direct connection between a long history of negative experiences with police and feelings of not belonging: 'My interactions with police have mainly been bad, so when I get mistreated and not taken seriously, it makes you feel like you don't belong'. Focus group participants were asked to write post-it notes about how their experiences with police had made them feel about the society in which they lived. One participant who had clearly had good experiences with police said s/he had felt 'welcomed'. Others whose experiences were not so positive said they felt

'like an outcast', 'alienated from society', 'marginalised, 'vulnerable, 'unsafe, 'disadvantaged, 'discriminated against, 'not welcome, 'rejected by society and as if 'no-one cares'.

It is likely that many factors other than experiences with police have contributed to these responses. However, on more than one occasion, participants expressed concern for the next generation based specifically on their experiences with police, with statements such as: 'I'm scared for the children younger than me because of how we Africans get approached by police'. One young man who still believed that Australia was 'one of the best countries in the world', despite reporting ongoing racial vilification and physical mistreatment by police, nevertheless made this undertaking: 'My kids won't fucking grow up here … They might be born here but they're not going to grow up here, no way, not with the hatred'.

> **'My kids won't fucking up here … They might be born here but they're not going to grow up here, no way, not with the hatred.'**

The responses reported in this section indicate a variety of impacts of negative encounters with police on 'affective belonging'. Some of the responses reported reflect not only personal feelings of non-belonging but also changes to self-perceptions, including the realisation of being seen by others as a threat, not trustworthy or criminal. These effects are suggestive of the 'looking glass self' that is the cornerstone of labelling theory in which, under certain conditions (that are, as yet, poorly defined by the theory), labels assigned by others, including police, may over time be incorporated into a young person's identity in enduring ways. This small cross-sectional study cannot examine these longer-term impacts, but from a developmental point of view it seems reasonable to conclude that being consistently met with negative self-imagery is likely to be counterproductive at a number of levels.

A strong sense of belonging is likely to be protective against the corrosive effects of negative encounters, but this raises the question of 'belonging to what?'. It has been observed that 'bonding relationships with one's own ethnic community are important for a sense of belonging, for learning from others 'like them'  … However, bridging relationships with the broader host community are essential for youth in their belonging – being at home – in their new country' (Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p1406). Young people from both Pasifika and South Sudanese backgrounds often said that they felt the strongest sense of belonging around others 'like them': 'I feel like I belong when I am with my friends and family, it's a warm nice feeling knowing that you fit in'; 'For me, if I see people of my own culture around, I feel like I do belong. It's a comfort for everyone. If you see Afghan culture and food, then as an Afghan you feel comfortable. If I see South Sudanese food, for example, then I feel like I belong'.

Establishing bridging relationships with the host community seemed to be more problematic. One Pasifika community worker argued that children tended to seek safety within their own group because

'they don't feel safe in society … what does that say about the society or the culture?'. Another Pasifika parent saw it as a parental responsibility not to 'coddle your kids away from society, because that's wrong. They're going to get isolated when you let them go. They're going to grow up someday'. But some young people seemed to be doing this for themselves, generally through their participation in multi-cultural contexts. As one focus group participant explained: 'I feel I belong at parties. It's when I see my friends, we're always in a big group together and there's a mix of us, not just Islanders, but white people, other people, a mix'. A group of South Sudanese mothers expressed the view that fitting in was particularly difficult for them because 'we can't create something to belong in this country'. They felt that if they had more opportunities to mix with the wider population in workplaces for example, others would 'get a surprise' and come to know 'Oh, they are really good people'. Meanwhile, they agreed that churches were the places that had offered the most support.

It is difficult to say definitively where encounters with police fit into this complex web of bridging relationships. A community worker from a Pasifika background offered this observation about police interactions with young people:

> You should not have to experience some of the things that police can make you feel when they are pushing you or they stop you and they ask you questions … And if you can't feel safe in public spaces, that impacts on how you meet people in public spaces, your friends and all of that. And if you're singled out, how does that impact on your friends that are standing around you?

The impact on others, including unrelated bystanders, of negative encounters between police and young people from identifiable minorities, raises questions about the police role on the 'politics of belonging', to which we now turn.

## 4.4 Policing and the politics of belonging

As Yuval-Davis (2010) has noted, a 'politics of belonging' arises whenever boundaries of belonging are contested. To explore the role of police in the wider politics of belonging we need to consider how police actions in relation to minority groups might be perceived by various audiences in the wider community. I put that proposition to an experienced community worker from the Pasifika community who had this to say:

> When you're having police talk to young people and there are people that are there in that space who are witnessing all of this, that impacts on the way they perceive that. And if that person's innocent, hasn't really committed – done anything and they are being picked on by police officers, then you can imagine what type of conclusions people are drawing as to what type of person that young person is … I mean, I see them, people in the public spaces

when they see groups of certain kinds of young people standing together, they'll cross the road.

Focus group participants from South Sudanese backgrounds also said people would hold onto their handbags or cross the road when they saw them approaching. Examples included: 'You feel like they are going to look at you like you did something wrong'; 'People are scared to sit next to us on the train'; and 'If you walk up to people. They walk the other way. They put their phones in their pockets. No one thinks that you are innocent'. One participant said that these kinds of experiences made him worry that some sections of the community might 'take things into their own hands' because they think that a 'group of black youths are a threat' or 'loud teenagers are dangerous'.

> **'They walk the other way. They put their phones in their pockets. No one thinks that you are innocent.'**

While these criminalising images have been reinforced by a variety of means, most prominently through hostile media commentary that senior police have, at times, attempted to counter[vii], some participants argued that police actions often reinforced these stereotypes. A community worker accused police of 'fearmongering' by telling 'white people' not to park in certain areas. One young person explained that 'when other people see black kids being stopped by police, then it gives them an idea that black people are not good, that they are bad'. Another participant suggested: 'People from my community feel like they don't belong. It relates to Apex. People at shopping centres assume that black young people will take stuff from them and don't feel safe'. And a South Sudanese mother said that unwarranted visits to her house by police had prompted her neighbours to complain to the housing association that their home was a 'gangster house'. Another group of South Sudanese mothers collectively reinforced the significant role that police could play in conveying their acceptance or non-acceptance in the community: 'The police they know what they are doing exactly. But we don't think that we belong. We don't belong to this community'.

While experiences of police were the focus of our discussions, participants often acknowledged that police actions depend on, as well as influence, wider community factors. These factors included the attitudes of shopkeepers, teachers, train passengers, and anyone from the wider community who felt they could call on police assistance to intervene in their favour. One focus group member summed it up simply: 'Police make you feel like you don't belong because they are influenced by society'. The most notable and negative social influence by far was said to be the media. One interviewee observed astutely that: 'The media make it sound like the cops aren't doing their job, and then the cops react to that and

then they go harder'. Another participant argued 'I feel like those feelings don't come from the cops, it's more from society, from the news and social media, pointing out Africans and Sudanese etcetera. It makes you feel like you don't belong'. Another cited allegations made by particular politicians and promulgated via sections of the media that the South Sudanese community doesn't integrate: 'We are not getting acceptance in the community. You have to be something special to get acceptance'.

One interviewee noted that different waves of immigrants had been targeted for negative reporting over the years, and questioned the impression being created that the South Sudanese posed a unique social problem.

> How long have Sudanese been in Australia? Not long man. How long have criminals been in Australia? Way longer … We've had different sorts of immigrants, we've had the Greeks, we had the Islanders, we had the Italians, the Vietnamese, the Cambodians. All them have come in, had their problem. As if this is new. They're acting like this is new bro, that's such a sin?

**'The media makes it sound like the cops aren't doing their job, and then the cops react to that and then they go harder.'**

A Pasifika community worker agreed that the media 'needs to be held responsible for what they report' and reserved particular criticism for reportage that singled out Sudanese youths:

> If you watch those videos, it was just the Sudanese kids. It wasn't funny, because our kids were there, the Australian kids were there, everyone was there, but they only put on the television the Sudanese kids … If you dealt with the media as much as you're going to deal with the Police, you'll take away half of that fire. Because that's where it all starts, is the media reporting.

## 4.5 Citizenship, rights and security

The connection between belonging and the protections of citizenship – often present within the academic literature - was also apparent to the participants in this study. This was particularly so amongst older participants: 'If the police do listen to you then that means they value you as a human or as a citizen, and when they don't it's like they're telling you "you're not one of us"'. One interviewee from South Sudan framed the issue of her community's relationship with police in terms of rights: 'So nobody has rights. They don't have rights in the street. What if [the police] don't do it right?' Another made this impassioned plea for members of her community to be supported as equal and full citizens.

> When we come here we think we belong here. We are citizens here, not just come and go back. But not any more because of the crisis created by media and government. The government should treat us as their own people. But they give authority to police more

than us … We are good people. We take care of this country. If this country accommodate us well we need to do something good … We get no help for us to see what we can do for ourselves. If we have job we will pay tax to help another person.

Security scholar Lucia Zedner observed more than a decade ago that populations are increasingly divided into those who are included or excluded from the 'orbit of protection' (Zedner, 2006, p427). Being excluded from the protections of citizenship due to poor relations with police was keenly felt by many of the research participants. One South Sudanese mother said: 'We brought those kids in this country to have a good future. Now we feel sorry because didn't get what want … We came here because we know this country is secure. Now we don't have any security.' Another mother who said that police terrified her children when they came to her house in a 'shock way' looking for a 'white boy', said she had challenged the police with what amounts to a demand to be included in the protections of citizenship.

> **'We came here because we know this country is secure. Now we don't have any security.'**

> So my son was really crying and he couldn't understand what's going on.  And he asked me, like, "Mum, is that the way the Police always do?" What I know is if maybe someone try to come and enter your house to do whatever, or you're not feeling safe, you have to call the Police.  If you call the Police and they will come in this way, do you feel safe?  Do we feel safe?  And they couldn't answer the question, you know … So, we need them to treat the people in a good way.  We need to feel safe, because it's their job to look after us and protect us.

Viewed from the perspective of citizenship, deportation is perhaps the ultimate expression of non-belonging. Individuals who are not legal citizens face the extra threat of deportation under s501 of the *Migration Act 1958* following criminal convictions or on other 'character grounds'. Although deportation was not an explicit focus of this research, it occasionally emerged in discussions about policing and belonging. Previous research by this author established that police in New South Wales were beginning to recognise this option as a way of 'getting rid' of undesirable non-citizens (Weber, 2013) and that Pasifika communities were at particular risk because of the protracted insecurity created by their visa type (Weber et al., 2013).  In this study, one experienced community worker from a Pasifika background proposed that police were 'trying to get rid of as many of us as possible', for example by charging groups of young people with affray. Participants from South Sudanese backgrounds also raised deportation as a source of anxiety in their community. As one interviewee noted: 'They can take your citizenship. They can strip it. They have power'. And a focus group member observed: 'They are starting to dispose of people … They are deporting people from my community. They are being hard on crime and they are reporting the figures'. Another adult member of that community explained:

Now in this country we are really worried … Because our 'back home', we don't have a 'back home'.  If our country is good enough, all of us, we can say we need to go back.  It's not just the kids.  Because now the government, they start something.  They say, 'You need to send the kids back home'.  Where do they send them?

As well as noting the danger and injustice of these policies, opposition to the politics of deportation was also expressed through claims of belonging. One South Sudanese mother told me: 'Our young people are white like you. I tell the community they are not ours any more. They are white.  We cannot agree to send them back'.

# 5 Conclusion: Young people, policing and belonging

## 5.1 Phase One: Young people and belonging

This study adds to previous academic and applied research that has identified recurring themes in relation to young people and belonging. Positive factors include the importance of being welcomed, valued and accepted by the wider community and a preference for multi-cultural environments over contexts that are dominated by members of the majority community. Experiences of discrimination, cultural stereotyping and intolerance, whether expressed through open hostility or multiple 'micro-aggressions' including queries about origins that signal perceived liminality, are almost universally agreed to exert a detrimental impact on perceptions of belonging. Although their responses differed, what all young people were looking for in the circumstances described in the focus groups was to be treated with fairness, respect and courtesy.

In this study, as in others, belonging was found to be context-dependent and applicable at different scales, from the level of family and peer groups, to institutional settings, to the cultural group, wider community and nation. Schools and religious communities were often experienced as sites of belonging, although inevitably with some exceptions. Almost all of the young people who participated in the first phase of the study reported discrimination and harassment at the hands of officials and members of the public on public transport, which affected feelings of safety and belonging in those crucial public spaces. A few identified shopping centres as sites of insecurity or non-belonging, in some cases because of fear of victimisation (primarily amongst young Muslim women), in other cases because they were routinely subjected to high levels of surveillance and suspected of wrongdoing when entering retail outlets.

Although these experiences applied to particular times and places, there were some indications that context-specific messages of non-belonging could have wider and ongoing implications for young people's ability to feel and express their sense of belonging in society. Responses such as avoidance of particular situations might be effective at improving a sense of safety in the short term,

but young people were also aware that such tactics unfairly restricted their ability to explore new experiences and enjoy the sense of freedom that they associated with acceptance and belonging. Accommodating the words or actions of others by choosing to ignore them might help to avoid escalation, but left some young people with unresolved feelings that reportedly remained with them long-term. Most disturbing of all were indications (merely hinted at here, and which could not be fully examined in this exploratory study) that for some young people, experiences of being discriminated against, misunderstood, mistreated or rejected because of their skin colour, religious or cultural background caused them to question fundamental aspects about their own identity.

Some particularly articulate and resilient young people reporting using negative experiences, such as cultural stereotyping, as opportunities to educate perpetrators about their culture – be they teachers or members of the public - and sometimes even about Australia's history as a settler society. Other young people deployed cognitive techniques such as 'rejecting the rejector', whether or not these sentiments were expressed to the persons concerned. In the first case in particular, these 'acts of citizenship' marked these young people as active agents of change, and definers of their own sense of belonging. Even so, it was noticeable that much of the language used in these preliminary focus groups, regardless of how confident the participants seemed of their capacity to deal with communications of non-belonging from others, contained the implicit assumption that the term 'Australian' did not refer to them.

## 5.2 Phase Two: Policing and belonging

Placing policed communities at the heart of the second stage of this inquiry has revealed a number of ways in which police enforce, reproduce and sometimes contest the dynamically changing boundaries of belonging. Police assume a role in the *governance of belonging* when they select individuals for unwarranted intervention based on their racial or cultural appearance or fail to extend courtesies and protections to members of minority communities when they seek police assistance. Police become actors in the *politics of belonging* when they convey to wider audiences that members of minority groups present a generalised threat and are not deserving of the protections accorded to full citizens. On the other hand, inclusive policing that extends respect, courtesy and understanding as far as possible to all sections of the community potentially expands the boundaries of belonging, and can be a powerful force at the individual level for *affective belonging*.

While many factors, including encounters with other authority figures and community members, and hostile media reporting can profoundly affect perceptions of belonging, the special powers exercised by police, such as the capacity to intervene through stopping and questioning, and to selectively order individuals to move on from public places, carry particularly strong messages of being singled out, unwanted and perceived as a threat to others. It is antithetical to building a sense of belonging in public space when these powers are exercised in discriminatory ways, as has been

reported in this and other studies. Similarly, as the perceived representatives of both the government and the majority population, inclusive actions by police such as showing respect, understanding and a preparedness to listen can have a particularly powerful effect in communicating messages of belonging. Some adult research participants, in particular, made explicit connections between the treatment of their community by police and their standing as citizens in their adopted country.

Compared with the first phase of the study, young people who had experienced more police contact used an even more extensive repertoire of terms to describe their personal responses to negative encounters. Some responses, such as feeling 'angry' or 'frustrated' towards police, demonstrate the potential for bad experiences to lead young people to question police legitimacy. This important topic, which has been widely researched in the academic literature, will be discussed more fully in a later report from this study. Disturbingly, other terms indicated the destabilisation of young people's perceptions of where they fit in society, such as feeling 'isolated' and 'misunderstood', and of their perceived status within that society, such as feeling 'humiliated', 'disrespected' and 'powerless'. These relational responses are likely to have broader implications for social cohesion. Moreover, some indications were obtained about the potential for long-term impacts on identity, as when young people reported that their experiences had prompted them to think about the negative ways in which others perceived them. The study was not designed to determine the longer-term consequences of these encounters, but further research might draw on psycho-social theories of identity formation in young people and on criminological theories dealing with 'societal reaction' and 'labelling' that refer specifically to the impacts of police intervention on young people's self-perceptions and subsequent offending behaviour.

To some extent, this report has presented the impact of police contact in conveying messages of belonging and non-belonging as a matter of individual differences. Indeed, many participants noted that some officers were more or less fair or discriminatory than others, more or less likely to listen and treat them with respect, and more or less inclined to use violence. While these observations clearly have some validity, the next report will balance out this somewhat individualised analysis by concentrating on systemic and organisational influences. In doing so it will present a richer picture of how policing can convey messages of inclusivity and belonging or of discrimination and exclusion, not only due to individual differences between officers, but through routine policing protocols and practices.

Finally, although this study did not set out to investigate the complete range of factors that are relevant to belonging, it became apparent that inclusive policing is just one element, although a very important one, of the determinants of 'secure belonging' (Loader, 2006). As mentioned in the introductory literature review, discourses of 'failed integration' (Kortweg, 2017) that situate these apparent 'failures' within individuals and migrant communities, are counterproductive where they fail to consider crucial factors in the host society that affect these outcomes. This includes levels of

welcome (including media representations), practical support and equal access to social goods such as employment, education and housing. This perspective necessitates a shift away from seeing marginalised migrant communities, such as South Sudanese and Pasifika communities in Melbourne, as 'the problem' for which they must be held responsible, and towards acknowledging the discrimination members of these groups often face across all facets of their lives – in employment, everyday social interactions, and in their relationships with police. An integrated focus on all these aspects of the host community could create a foundation of security and belonging so that participants in a future study might respond that police are 'good for some people, *including us*'.

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# Endnotes

[i] Organisational and systemic aspects of policing and their impacts on communities in Greater Dandenong and Casey will be the subject of a second report from this research.

[ii] http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA22670

[iii] http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA21610

[iv] The research design was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee, project number CF15/4284 – 2015001838.

[v] Incredibly it seems that these civilian inspectors are authorised to arrest if they have reasonable suspicion that a public transport offence has been committed, although it is not clear whether failing to give up your seat would qualify as an 'offence' https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/public-transport-offences/public-transport-inspectors

[vi] This could be the incident to which she is referring https://dandenong.starcommunity.com.au/journal/2014-09-29/dead-mans-dandenong-link/

[vii] See  https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5216327/Victoria-Police-insist-dont-African-gang-issue.html but also http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-02/street-gangs-are-a-problem-in-melbourne-police-admit/9297984