



Belonging and Social Identity Among Young People in Western Sydney, Australia

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Abstract This article explores young people’s everyday life in multiethnic Australian communities. The focus is on interethnic social identity and belonging to the Australian society. The research gives an insight into social relationships, social networks and attitudes to the Australian culture among young people living in multiethnic neighbourhoods. Conceptually, the research is framed around Bourdieu’s habitus discourse and the influence of social and cultural capital on young people’s perceptions and attitudes. A survey of 339 young people residing in Western and South Western Sydney, Australia, was undertaken in 2007. Ninety-five percent of the young people were from minority migrant backgrounds, and two thirds were born in Australia. The majority of them feel good about living in Australia, while only a small percentage rarely or never share this feeling. The findings demonstrate a more positive atmosphere and contradict evidence highlighted by pessimistic predictions of anti-immigrant and anti-multiculturalism critics. For many people of minority ethnic backgrounds, the Australian multicultural society works in a cohesive and inclusive way most of the time. The findings, even when sometimes contradictory, emphasise that the Australian multicultural society was working well in 2007. The young people in the research acknowledged to be influenced by the Cronulla riots, but it had a minor influence on their perception of social identity, social networks or feeling connected to Australia.

Keywords Social identity · Young people · Multiethnic neighbourhoods · Multicultural policy · Ethnic riots

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Introduction

The Australian society prides itself on being multicultural with a long tradition in migration from diverse nations and cultures. Sydney, Australia, is one of the world's most multicultural cities with approximately 58% of its population being first- or second-generation migrants from most corners of the world. The Sydney suburbs dominated by residents from ethnic minority groups are the Western and South Western suburbs.

The research explores ethnic tension in Sydney, which culminated with the Cronulla riots in 2005 (11–12 December, named after the suburb of the riots). It was a conflict about access to the Cronulla beach between young people who classified themselves as Australian-born Anglo-Australians and people of non-Anglo-Australian heritage; nonetheless, the majority of the latter are also born in Australia. The conflict was about acceptance of ethnic diversity. The riots were the culmination of tension that had been simmering for several years between young people of Anglo-Australian and ethnic minority heritage. At the time, the riots were sparked by a confrontation between multiethnic groups and Anglo-Australian youths at Cronulla beach, a beach situated within a residential area dominated by the people of Anglo-Australian heritage and culture. The beach is located 30 min' drive south of Sydney, New South Wales. The Cronulla beach is a favourite seaside for people coming from the multiethnic Western and South Western areas of Sydney. It is easily reached by public transport, thus making it accessible to people without private transportation.

The research was undertaken to explore the influence of ethnically underpinned riots, which prompted questions about the success of the Australian multicultural society. Questions about inclusion, safety and societal belonging were raised again in Australia in the aftermath of more recent incidents classified as terrorist-related instances: in Sydney, for example, in 2014 [15/12] the Sydney Siege and in 2015 [2/10] the Parramatta shooting of a police employee; and in Melbourne in 2014 [23/09] the Endeavour Hills stabbing and in 2015 [25/04] the ANZAC Day plot (cf. Australian Government 2016; National Library of Australia 2016). These incidences have been linked to 'terrorism affiliations' and 'radicalisation' of young people. These incidents have been extensively reported in mass media and raised questions about the status of the Australian multicultural policy framework. The focus in this paper is on how young people living in multiethnic Sydney suburbs describe their social identity, social networks and belonging to the Australian society. The research findings are analysed from Bourdieu's social and cultural capital and habitus discourses (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1979:101–102, 171).

The research, a pilot study, provides a snapshot of attitudes and perceptions of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds living in Western and South Western Sydney in 2007, where the riots had highlighted a perceived conflict between the majority Anglo-Australian population and the minority ethnic groups in Greater Western Sydney.

The research focused on (1) gaining an understanding and insights into young people's everyday life in multiethnic communities, (2) exploring the nature of inter-ethnic social networks, and (3) knowledge about the experiences of minority young people's social identity in multiethnic neighbourhoods and attitudes to the Australian society. A neighbourhood is here classified as the local residential area where the

people live. There are commonly several neighbourhoods in a community, and within the geographical boundaries of a suburb, there are distinct community settings.

Literature Review

The concept 'belonging' is often used to indicate affinity, togetherness, recognition, acceptance and safeness in social relationships. It is conveyed through membership of social networks, community or societal organisations, where group affiliation is a recognition of acceptance, as expressed in relations between self and other, and self and society (Goffman 1967). Belonging is beyond the individual, as it is formed between the interplay between the subjective self, collective agency and structural positioning. Social belonging is multifaceted, as people can have a sense of belonging as individuals, but also experiencing a collective belonging to the local community or the nation as well as having a transnational sense of belonging (Douglas 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). In this research, the young people were living with their families in residential areas where their ethnic minority group was dominating. The young people's belonging is interconnected with their local neighbourhood and family culture. It is based on the specific place, common ties and social interaction (Hillery 1955; Farahani 2016:358). Belonging to a neighbourhood is not excluding placeless cyberspace networks, but their daily life circled the residential neighbourhood, family, friends and the school, all in close geographical proximity (Wellman 2005). Their social identities, as well as their self-identity, are products of the neighbourhood milieu. Outside areas are visited intermittently, but their formative years are spent within their local neighbourhoods (Hogg and Abrams 1988).

Social cohesion and solidarity within diverse societies are shifting according to Beck (1999). In a break with the past, which was influenced by the welfare state, the modern society has become increasingly individualised with a decline in traditional institutions and social networking systems which have weakened traditional solidarity. Bauman (2001) has a more pessimistic society view. He stresses that nationalism and individualism are undermining our capacity for solidarity and unanimity direction has become difficult to predict.

It might be assumed that people migrating to a new country would take on the roles of the new society's social identity and social and cultural traditions, but this implies that the migrants should absolve themselves from everything they identified with before migration. Loyalties and social identities are not necessarily single-focused as it is possible to have more than one identity, without being contradictory.

Guamizo et al. (2003:1238) emphasise that the 'number of immigrants who are regularly involved in cross-border activism is relatively small'. This conclusion is contested by De Haas (2005:1276) who stresses that 'it is important to recognise that migrants increasingly live in a transnational world, in which they simultaneously work, do business or participate in public debate in two or even more countries'. The significance of social identity is also stressed in Dutch research (Snel et al. 2006), regarding British Pakistanis (Hussain and Bagguley 2005:408), and research by Wilcox (2004:576). They note that migrants and 'ethnic minorities will find it difficult to identify with the central institutions and practices of a polity if they are excluded' (Vasta 2013:200).

Australia's ethnic diversity has a long history with waves of migrants coming both in encouraged migration from Europe and skilled migrants from other parts of the world, as well as refugees from current war zones, most recently from Syria. The Australian larger cities, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, have a proportionally higher concentration of migrants than the rest of the country.

Interethnic relations and issues of social cohesion are of significant concern in culturally diverse societies like Australia (Jupp and Nieuwenhuysen 2007), although social conflicts between people of different ethnic backgrounds—as witnessed in the Sydney Cronulla beach riots—are the exception and not the rule (Collins 2007). Notwithstanding, the multicultural framework, divisive policy and the introduction of terrorism laws, which, if not explicitly, have at least implicitly identified minority ethnic groups as possible feeder groups for terrorist acts. Ethnic diversity divides communities and creates a risk scenario with a perception that some citizens are prone to undermining the Anglo-Australian cultural fabric. Jupp (2007:16–18) proposes that Australia is mostly a cohesive society, where divisions are more pronounced concerning generational conflicts, religious and secular Australians, educational levels and social class positions. Markus (2011) in supporting Jupp's assessment notes that Australia is a cohesive society underpinned by financial satisfaction, future expectations and sense of belonging and that Australia presents opportunities for migrants to gain an education, employment and a secure economic future. In schools, the students are taught core Australian values; integrity, excellence, respect, responsibility, cooperation, participation, care, fairness and democracy, but also to respect the Australian flag (New South Wales Department of Education 2017).

Schools are powerful sites of socialization through which children learn about cultural diversity and understand their own cultural identity and sense of belonging in a multicultural society ... processes ... known in the literature as 'ethnic-racial socialization'. (Walton et al. 2014:112)

There is a perception that Western and South Western Sydney, the most culturally diverse regions in Sydney, are melting pots for radical political ideas (Collins and Poynting 2000). The assessment and perception of risk zones for youth radicalisation are missing the underlying cause of dissatisfaction among minority ethnic young people as being socially and economically excluded, failing to gain equal access to education, employment and a secure future in the Australian society.

Longitudinal studies such as the 'Life-Patterns Project' have examined the progress of young Australians since leaving secondary school, with attention to the changing and uncertain nature of the global labour market and the importance of flexibility in career prospects (Dwyer et al. 2003). Even if these surveys have noted some variables relating to ethnicity and issues of cultural diversity, they have not been a central focus. The Mission Australia youth survey (2014:13) reported that 'Around 80% of young people ranked education and hard work as the top two factors they believe will influence their career opportunities in the future'. Friendships were highly valued by 76.9% (extremely important 37.1% and very important 39.8%). The next issue of importance was social relationships: family relationships highly valued by 74.4% (extremely important by 41.8% and very important by 32.6%).

Devinney et al. (2012):20) noted that issues around ‘minority rights, societal social well-being, worker/employment rights and equality of opportunities’ were more a concern of the young people than older people. Mission Australia (2014:19) summarises:

The top three issues identified in 2014 were politics and societal values (28.0%), the economy and financial matters (27.1%) and alcohol and drugs (23.2%). These compare to the top three issues in 2013 of the economy and financial matters (26.2%), politics and societal values (24.6%) and equity and discrimination (24.1%).

In the 2012 research, mental health, education, politics and societal values were the key issues in the Australian society, while there was a decrease in the significance of population and environmental threats, crime, violence and safety concerns.

Migration experiences and societal unfamiliarity influence traditional lifestyles and engagement in civic activities. These experiences can coincide with uncertainty in the trust of nation state’s experts, politicians and political institutions. It becomes a society where personal choices are interlinked with individual responsibilities (Beck 1992; Putnam 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001, 2009; Bennett 2003). Individual responsibilities create a need to focus on personal well-being and individually tailored quality of life values (Inglehart 1990); hence, migrating to a neighbourhood with familiar social and cultural traditions gives comfort to new arrivals. Even if the young people in the research were mainly born in Australia, the majority of their parents were born outside Australia. Nonetheless, young people will cultivate new relationships without parental supervision, engage in intellectual, social and physical adventures and explore diverse social and cultural lifestyles (Harris and Wyn 2009), not necessarily be reflecting their parents’ traditions.

Nevertheless, an individual’s social and cultural capital are entrenched by family, social, cultural and religious affiliation and neighbourhood habits. In this setting, the family’s formulated ‘habitus’ accentuate the influence of the social environment as it amalgamates the social ambience with the processes of social identity formation (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 126; Wacquant 2004). Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as ‘socialised subjectivity’: the state where cultural structures exist in people’s bodies and minds and where these structures shape a wide variety of behaviours, beliefs and thoughts (Bourdieu 1977: 72, 76).

The young people in the research live within a family environment. Their social milieu is focused on interactions and social activities within the neighbourhood with parents, siblings, extended family and friends. This local community-based social environment fashions and cultivates their social attitudes and perceptions, and it will influence their social identity, attitudes and behaviours, the family’s created ‘habitus’. Bourdieu’s habitus discourse proposes that young people’s internalised social and cultural milieu, as created within the family’s social and cultural environment, guides their way of living and how they interact with friends. Furthermore, the family’s culture and created habitus will affect the selection of educational institution, where the school milieu also reinforces the family’s cultural and social values (Walton et al. 2014; f. Lieten et al. 2007; Johnson Kirkpatrick et al. 2005). Minority ethnic groups with sizeable populations have established ethnic and faith-based schools to give the

families opportunities to choose a school that supports their social, cultural and religious heritage.

Young people are chiefly dependent on the family's social and cultural environment and what the community can offer them. Young people will not leave their local neighbourhood until they have attained social and economic independence, which is commonly not achieved until after the completion of their education and skills training, well into their mid-twenties (Jones 2009; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Until this independent stage (cf. Nagel and Wallace 1997; Rudd and Evans 1998; Arnett 2004), they are reliant on the family's social and cultural capital, social standing in the society, social networks and the community environment. Hence, the young people's social network can be understood as constellations within boundaries 'drawn around each particular cluster' (Mol and Law 1994: 643), creating a community setting underpinned by an array of social networks (cf. Urry 2010).

The young people in the multiethnic urban communities live in a social environment, which is dominated by extended family groups and relatives within the community. This situation does not necessarily encourage engagement with young people outside their extended family group, even if they have this opportunity. Social networks are based on members' commitment and engagement to be sustainable, and people choose to belong to social networks where they feel comfortable and accepted. Thus, commitment and belonging to social networks are part of shaping the individual's social identity and community identification (Wellman 2001; Putnam 1993, 1995, 2000; Bourdieu 1993: 32–33). Discourses about social networks and social capital creating structures are developed around adults, rather than about young people (Morrow 2001: 38, Morrow 2004), but young people, like adults, develop social networks through their local neighbourhood and educational institution: social networks that can be lifelong. While the family is the grounding environment for social networks and the main place for communicating intergenerational social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1993: 32–33), the young people will also develop their specific social networks. Although the internalised habitus, social and cultural capital will govern the young people's behaviour (cf. Coleman 1988: S98; Bourdieu 1993: 143; Portes 1998; Chiveralls 2006). The youths will act in situations without consciously reflecting over reasons or questioning how they become to behave in a particular manner.

Research Design

The research was focused on the Western and South Western suburbs of Sydney and young people living in multiethnic communities. The sample was selected from the main ethnic minority groups in each community. The majority of the young people are born in Australia. They are second- or third-generation migrants. Australia is their home country, with most of them considering themselves as Australians and having English as their first language (Collins et al. 2011). Many of the young people have lived in the communities their whole lives and are well familiar with the environment of the neighbourhood, activities and the benefits and confinements of community living (Collins et al. 2011; Fabiansson 2005, 2006; cf. White and Wyn 2004).

A stratified sampling technique was developed to ensure that the research included the voices of young people across a range of minority ethnic, linguistic and religious

backgrounds. Multiethnic researchers interviewed participants from their ethnic background and gender. Within each ethnic group, the sample was collated through the snowballing methodology. The aim with matching interviewees with interviewers was to enhance the understanding and trust between the interviewer, the young people and their parents. Parent consent was sought before the interviews. The interviews were confidential with non-identifiable personal information, except ethnicity, age and gender. The research assistants were recruited through our social networks in the migrant community and ethnic community organisations in Sydney, including the Canterbury Bankstown Migrant Resource Centre and from the University of Western Sydney.

The questions were structured, semi-structured and open questions, about social acceptance in the community, social networks and community belonging, social identity and feeling safe. The multiethnic sample includes young people from Tongan, Lebanese, Vietnamese, Somalian, Sudanese, Indian, Chinese, New Zealand, Pacific Islander, Korean and Filipino heritage, and a small sample of Indigenous Australians and Anglo-Australians.

The sample is based on a snowballing technique, thus a sample of convenience, which does not necessarily represent other young people's attitudes and experiences, beyond the researched group.

Sample Structure

The gender distribution of the sample of 339 young people living in Western and South Western Sydney was 195 (57.5%) females and 144 (42.5%) males. They ranged in age from 13 to 18 years old with the majority between 14 and 17 years old. The sample only includes three 13-year-olds and two 18-year-olds, and they are grouped with the 14-year-olds and the 17-year-olds, respectively (Table 1). There is no significant difference between gender and age groups.

Table 1 The birth country of students, mothers and fathers in the multiethnic communities in percent

Birth country	Student (%)	Mother (%)	Father (%)
Australia	66.8	4.3	4.4
New Zealand/Tonga	8.8	25.6	26.2
Sudan	7.6	10.4	10.9
Korea	6.5	13.7	13.8
Sri Lanka	3.5	7.9	7.6
India	1.8	3.2	4.0
China/Hong Kong	1.2	8.3	7.3
Lebanon	–	10.8	10.5
Vietnam	–	7.2	7.6
Turkey	–	3.2	3.3
England	0.9	–	–
Other	2.9	5.4	4.4
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0

The parents and the young people represent the immense diversity of the Australian metropolitan population with Western and South Western Sydney. Only 4% of the parents were born in Australia (Table 1). The parents come mainly from neighbouring countries. They arrived in Australia as students, skilled migrants, through family reunion, and as refugees. Sixty-seven percent of the sample was born in Australia with 33% born outside Australia, mainly from New Zealand, from the neighbouring Asian countries and from Africa, mainly from Sudan.

Two thirds of the young people are born in Australia. In everyday life, many of these young people see themselves as belonging to and identify with the Australian society; however, in the mainstream community setting, they are more likely to be seen as non-Australians, because of their ethnic background. The preferred language among the young people within the multiethnic communities is English. More than half (57.8%) prefer to speak Australian-English at home, even if they have a family language other than English, but as the majority of the young people are born in Australia, their first language is likely to be Australian-English. They also attend nearby English-speaking public schools, hence the language preference. However, the language preference was not carried over to an 'Australian' identity; only one third of the respondents identify as 'Australian', one in ten identifies as Tongan, and about the same number identifies as Korean.

The number of people living in the same household is slightly larger (2.6 people/household) than the average Sydney household (2.5 people/household). Most of the respondents live with their parents, 91.7% with their mother and 87.6% also with their father. Half have at least one sister (52.5%) and a brother (53.2%). More than half live with one other relative and nearly a quarter with three or more relatives, as well as unrelated household members.

Fifteen percent of the young people surveyed responded that they have no religious affiliations; one in ten was Catholic or belonged to the Church of Tonga, followed in descending percentages by Hindu, Muslim, Anglican Uniting, Buddhist, Baptist, Methodist and unspecified Christian.

Research Findings

Friendship

Friendship and social networks are essential for most people and especially for young people. The respondents indicated that they have a diverse group of friends. The friendship networks span over all ethnic groups, but with a preference of friends from within their ethnic minority group (Collins et al. 2010). The group of young people who responded that they do not have any friends are proportionally largest among Koreans (12%), followed by the Sudanese and the New Zealanders (8%, respectively) and the Australians (4%). Loneliness is more prevalent among the non-Australian-born youths than the Australian born.

Sixty-seven percent of the young people are born in Australia, but only 36% identify with their Australian country of birth. None of the Indigenous Australians identified with Australia, but with their ancestors. The Koreans are more likely to identify with Korea than Australia, the same for respondents with a Chinese, Tongan, Vietnamese,

Lebanese, Turkish, European and American heritage. The young people from New Zealand, Sudan, Sri Lanka, England, Switzerland, Africa and Canada are identifying more with Australia than their family's cultural heritage; however, in these groups, the number of students is low.

Fifty-nine percent of the Australian-born respondents are always feeling Australian, a quarter sometimes and 16% rarely or never (Table 2). More than half of the New Zealand-born young people seldom identify as Australians. The New Zealand-born respondents might not have any incentive to affiliate with Australia, due to the similarities and closeness between the countries and minor differences in social, cultural and political backgrounds. The situation is different for people coming from Sudan. They come from different social, cultural and political society settings to settle into a mainly Anglo-Australian environment. The migrants from Sudan come from war zones and are going through a challenging transition stage. The respondents from Korea feel least Australian of all the groups with 77% rarely feeling that they belong to the Australian society.

The Korean society in Sydney has approximately 30,000 residents. Thus, there is an active Korean community cultivating their own culture and social setting. The need to associate with mainstream Australia might not seem meaningful as they already have access to a culturally fulfilling life. The respondents' profound preference to speak Korean at home also emphasises their family's cultural affiliation and social identity.

Nearly two thirds of participants have lived in the residential area 5 years or longer, and 37% have lived in the community less than 5 years. About the same percentage, 36%, thought that the neighbourhood always feels like theirs, 48% say it sometimes feel like their community, and 16% do not identify with the community and their neighbourhood.

If the length of stay in the community is compared with identification with the neighbourhood, the time of residency did not influence the respondents' attitudes towards the local community and their neighbourhood. Social networking in the local community is a further indicator of social identification with the local community, such as visiting friends at each other's home, meeting up to go shopping, talking over the phone, sending SMS and getting help from friends. The last 2 weeks before the research week, nearly two thirds (64%) of them had visited a friend in their home, 70% of the males and 59% of the females (sign. 0.021).

Table 2 Identify as Australian by country of birth

Identify as Australian/country of birth	Always	Sometimes	Rarely/never	Total
Australia	59.1	24.4	16.4	100.0/225***
New Zealand	11.1	33.3	55.6	100.0/27
Sudan	32.0	16.0	52.0	100.0/25
Korea	22.7	0.0	77.3	100.0/25
Sri Lanka	27.3	63.6	9.1	100.0/11

Pearson chi-square; level of significance: > 0.001***—strong; 0.001–0.009**—moderate; 0.01–0.05*—weak

About half (48%) of the youths meet up when shopping. More than half (51%) of the females say that they will always run into friends when they are out shopping in the local community. The corresponding percentage for males is 44% (not significant).

Social Networks

The social networks the young people have developed are diverse. They mentioned friends among their own ethnic culture, but also extensively seek friendships outside their ethnic minority group. For example, the respondents born in Australia referred to friends with an Anglo-Australian, Lebanese, Chinese, Tongan, Korean, Greek, Vietnamese, Indian and Italian heritage. New Zealand-born youths mention friends from mainly Tongan, Cook Island, Samoa, Maori, Pacific Islander, Chinese, Anglo-Australian, Lebanese, Vietnamese, African, Fijian and of Philippine heritage. Sudan-born respondents seek friends from Sudan, Anglo-Australian, Egyptian, Indian and Sudanese Lebanese ethnic groups, as well as, the Korean, Anglo-Australian, Egyptian, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Lebanese ethnic groups. A maximum of nine friends was counted. The 339 respondents reported a total of 1139 friends.

The Australian born report on average the highest number of friends, 4.1, followed by Korean with 3.8 friends, New Zealand-born 3.5 and Sudanese only one friend. The findings indicate that it is easier for the larger ethnic groups, which have been born in or have been in Australia for a longer time to establish social networks, while the Sudanese, the latest arrivals, have fewer network friends.

To get help is an essential part of friendship, and it is a significant indicator of how close friends are and how they trust each other. Two thirds (64%) of the youths said that they always can get help from friends. Seventy percent of the females and 56% of the males said that they can always get help from friends. Only 5% of the respondents said that they rarely or never can get help from friends (6% males and 4% females) (sign. 0.029).

Nearly two thirds always feel valued by their friends. More females feel valued by friends than males, 68% compared to 58% of the males. Thirty percent sometimes feel valued, while about 6% of the young people in the research say that they do not have friends that valued them. Unexpectedly, it is more females than males that indicated they do not have friends who value them and their friendship. If feeling valued by friends is extensive, it does not extend in the same way to feel valued at school. The research shows that about half of them always feel valued at school (48%), 52% of the females and 42% of the males, while 40% sometimes feel valued (42% males and 39% females). However, 12% rarely or never feel valued at school, 16% of the males and 9% of the females (sign. 0.068).

Social Identity

Associating with the Australian social and cultural environment, accepting Australian values, such as the flag, and cheering for Australians in sport events can indicate social identity and national belonging. However, the attitudes to the Australian flag have been altered since the Cronulla riots in 2005. Use of the Australian flag was prominent at the time of the Cronulla riots, and it has since become a prominent symbol in anti-immigrant demonstrations.

The respondents were not presented with a definition of what it meant to identify as an 'Australian', but throughout their school education, they have studied Australian values and the anticipated responsibilities as a citizen. As noted above, the majority of the respondents are born in Australia. The responses are divided about the flag; one third think the flag is always important, a third sometimes important and a third rarely or never important.

Additionally, the importance of the flag was explored as a national symbol, if the young people identify themselves as being 'Australian'. The respondents who identify themselves as Australian are more positive to the Australian flag. They are more likely to stress the importance of the flag than the respondents who do not identify with Australia. Nearly 60% of the respondents, who feel the flag is always important, consistently identify themselves as Australian. As many as 65% do not identify with Australia and do not feel the flag is an important national symbol (sign. 0.001) (Table 3).

Discrimination is a worldwide phenomenon, and no country is without its share of discrimination, socially, legally, politically and economically. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents always feel good about living in Australia, 27% sometimes and 6% rarely or never.

Even if the young people have reservations about living in Australia and their level of content, the majority of them still acknowledge that it is their most preferred country. The second choice is the USA, which might relate to entertainment media's portrayal of the USA.

The young people list honesty, truthfulness and friendship as the most important values. Some of these values overlap, but the list gives an indication of the respondents' thoughts about significant values. There is no significant correlation between the nominated Australian values and the Australian flag (Table 4).

Discussion

The issue of national identity in the Australian multicultural society has long been a contentious issue (Castles et al. 1988; Sheehan 1998; Hage 1998; Castles 2000, 2010). Social identification is not merely related to being born into society; it is about ethnic, faith, social and cultural traditions, social identity and social networks.

Table 3 Importance of the Australian flag by Australian national identity

Australian national identity/importance Australian flag	Always identify	Sometimes identify	Rarely/never identify	Total (%/N)
Always important	58.6	25.6	11.0	37.6/126***
Sometimes important	26.5	50.0	24.2	31.6/106
Rarely/never important	14.8	24.4	64.8	30.7/103
Total (%/N)	100.0/162	100.0/82	100.0/91	100.0/335

Pearson chi-square; level of significance: > 0.001***—strong; 0.001–0.009**—moderate; 0.01–0.05*—weak

Table 4 Values important to the respondents

Students' voicing of values	N-mentioned	Per cent	Students' voicing of values	N-mentioned	Percent
Friendship	109	15.1	Caring	33	4.6
Honesty	88	12.2	Love	32	4.4
Respect	75	10.4	Religion	30	4.2
Trust	73	10.1	Cultural values	30	4.2
Family	66	9.1	Freedom	28	3.9
Loyalty	46	6.4	Kindness	27	3.7
Education	35	4.8	Other	16	2.2
Peace and justice	34	4.7	Total	722	100.0

The research shows that the respondents identify with their parent's ethnic group rather than with their country of birth. The influence of Bourdieu's habitus and social and cultural capital is shown in the significance of the families' social and cultural milieu in the perception of the Australian society. Nonetheless, they are well integrated into Australian activities. They are 'out and about' in the local shopping centre, meeting friends, they invite friends to their houses, they are active in the local community, shop locally, and they engage with the local community.

To belong to the society, the community, the neighbourhood and social networks give people confidence and security. There are everyday natural occasions of connections depending on life cycles and experiences. The research shows that the majority of the respondents feel they belong to their neighbourhood. Only a small group of respondents do not feel at home in their residential area. The respondents feel valued by friends, and they trust that their friends will help them if in need. They also list friendship as the most important value (cf. Mission Australia 2014).

Overt nationalism is viewed from different perspectives. The use of the Australian flag has since the Cronulla riots been a symbol of anti-immigrant sentiments. The respondents, in their community or at school, do not experience these anti-immigrant sentiments. Nonetheless, even if Australia is considered a tolerant society, it depends on from which angle it is presented, from an Anglo-Australian, Indigenous Australian, Italian, Greek, Chinese, Lebanese, Vietnamese or Sudanese perspective. National symbols, such as the flag, are significant for the participants in the research, mainly, for the respondents who identify themselves as Australian. For others, there are mixed feelings about the flag. Overwhelmingly, they value honesty, truthfulness and friendship, which are values there is agreement about by most people.

Two thirds of respondents are born in Australia, and they overwhelmingly prefer Australia as their home country, albeit the males are more favourable than the females.

The respondents' and their families demonstrate social cohesion; they socialise in each other's homes, where the parents will have some control over their activities, but it also shows that the parents are actively involved and take an interest in their children's social network. A significant finding is that the respondents' social network is inter-ethnic; they socialise with the diversity of nationalities and ethnic groups, or as noted by respondents, with other Australians.

Conclusion

The research focuses on young people living in multiethnic communities and close-knit ethnic minority neighbourhoods in a time when multiculturalism and the success of multiculturalism are questioned in the aftermaths of the Cronulla riots and later terrorist acts. Multiculturalism is still disputed in 2017 with the current policy and security focus on terrorist actions and the perception of imminent threats to Australia.

What today's situation shows is that the research and the findings are as relevant today as they were in 2007. The same issues are debated and strategies for more control orders and penalties. The underpinning issues about social belonging and social identity, opportunities, inclusion and societal cohesion are still highly relevant concerns in the Australian society.

A conclusion to draw from this pilot study is that more research is needed to understand young people living in multiethnic suburbs. The respondents articulate very well and know what is happening around them. They were not directly involved in the Cronulla riots, but they know people who were involved. Nonetheless, it affected them. It is articulated more directly by the parents, in them being more security minded about safe places their children visited, what they can do and with whom they can socialise.

The research demonstrates, together with other research, that social identity, belonging to the community and the Australian society are significant issues for young people, where exclusion opens the door to seek alternative social networks and to create a self-identity and a social belonging not found in the mainstream Australian society.

A limitation of the research is the convenience sample. The findings represent the young people who responded. To comprehensively understand the issues of social identity, social cohesion in and belonging to the Australian society, research needs to include representatives from diverse minority ethnic groups, with different lengths of stay in Australia. It also should include young adults, the age group 18 to 25 years, people in education, in the workforce as well as people who are outside the education and employment market.

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