

Reviews

Rob White (ed), *Australian Youth Subcultures*, Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, 1999, ISBN 1 875236 46 5.

Australian Youth Subcultures is a collection of twenty two essays on various aspects of contemporary youth subcultures in Australia. The collection works on a number of levels. First, it is a compendium of constantly changing youth subcultures. The descriptive detail is interesting in itself, particularly for those of us increasingly removed from the multiple meanings and symbols of youth *style*. Need to know something about skateboarders, street machiners, hip hop, techno or how the Spice Girls were created?

Second, a theme which runs through many of the chapters is the relationship between young people, subculture and legal regulation. This often conflicting relationship emerges in many forms. In some cases it is the unambiguous and direct conflict between young people and the police, although several of the chapters also show that intelligent policing can mediate particular situations. For example, contrasting styles of police intervention are presented in discussions of police interaction with 'street machiners' in western Sydney. Attempts at the legal control of subcultures can take many forms including the use of local government regulations (to close dance parties), environmental changes ('skate plates' to prevent skateboarding) and legislation (move-on laws, etc). Regulating the use of public space can include a range of interventions. For example, the Skate Safe policy developed by Melbourne Council includes both education and awareness programs as well as local government provisions for infringement notices for contravention of Codes of Conduct. The punitive approaches of law towards young people was also evident, such as the use of riot police at free public dance parties. I was particularly taken aback by a reference to UK public order legislation which criminalises 'sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats' (p 53).

Third, the collection offers a range of theoretical insights on issues including methodology, concepts and processes. How do we do ethnography with youth subcultures? What does the concept of 'gang' mean? Does it have any validity in social science research or as basis for thinking about law and regulation? What theoretical tools has postmodernism offered us for understanding representation and meaning - particularly given that representation goes to the heart of subcultures? Also running through the chapters is a concern with the relations of gender, ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, sexuality and class. What is the relationship between 'grrrl power' and second wave feminism? How can the concept of 'hybridity' help understand the way Arabic-speaking young men move between and construct identities particular to their age, gender and location?

Finally, the last couple of chapters raise some issues about values and politics. Healy shows that the notion of Generation X does a gross disservice to the activist politics of many young people. As one example he cites the large scale school walkouts held as a demonstration against One Nation during July and August 1998 (p 201). Many young people are engaged in struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of exploitation. Eckersley, in the last chapter, raises the contentious issue of the espousal of extreme violence which can be found in the lyrics of some rock groups. As an example he refers to a song by The Prodigy, 'Smack my bitch up', which incites violence against women (p 221). How should we respond: is it all relative, harmless rebellion, as some writers on youth subcultures would argue? Or are there core values of respect and tolerance that should be promoted?

This is a fine collection of essays and should be of interest to many readers of *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*.

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