6. Insights from the Literature

We live our lives in the taken-for-granted world of everyday interaction and activities. This taken-for-grantedness characterises the stable and predictable nature of our environment through which we can go about the everyday business of living our lives. Research shows, however, that Islamophobia unfairly denies many Muslim-Australians the comfort and security usually afforded to most Australians. Apart from the sense of harm such negative views and actions cause, it is evident that Islamophobia acts to limit the capacity and opportunity for Muslim-Australians to go about the business of and to participate in everyday life. After reviewing the empirical research on Muslim-Australians' experiences of Islamophobia, it is necessary to canvass some of the concepts and ideas that can help to explain and generate understanding about the divide between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians and how to address it. The final section will examine some of the elements of community and neighbourhood level interventions that have met with success.

Negative Experiences of Muslim-Australians – Islamophobia

The term Islamophobia is used to capture a range of sentiments towards the religion of Islam and its adherents - from fear to hatred, from anxiety to disgust, from misunderstanding to denigration. In this sense, manifestations of Islamophobia are best described as *prejudice*, which is here understood to be

> 'an avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he (sic) belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to that group.' (Allport 1954: 7)

The sources and content of the prejudice that underlies Islamophobia, while obviously pertaining to Islam, are quite varied. By looking at recent research on experiences of Muslim-Australians, we can examine both the effects of Islamophobia and what form it takes. There are three broad and sometimes overlapping categories of experiences that constitute Islamophobia: *social incivility*, *discrimination*, *violence and intimidation*.

Social Incivility

Social incivility is usually experienced in everyday face-to-face interactions. Social incivility is in stark contrast to the civility - indifference and reserve – we grant strangers in our day-to-day interactions. This 'civil inattention' (Goffman 1963) in fact is an implicit recognition of the non-threatening status of strangers (Noble 2005: 112). Social incivility, however, takes the form of verbal abuse and behaviours that are perceived by the recipients to be rude and insulting (Poynting and Noble 2004: 9; Noble 2005: 112). For Muslim-Australians, it is an undesirable form of attention that marks out their differences as threatening and unwelcome.

Much of the reported abuse has been directed at Muslim women, especially those who veil. While driving, a pregnant Muslim woman reported how she was verbally abused and spat at by another commuter (Dreher 2005: 13). While crossing the road another woman

was yelled at and told to ‘go back home’ (Dreher 2005: 13). A Lebanese-born woman recounted how a man had been making obscene hand gestures at her and calling her a ‘bloody wog’ (Poynting and Noble 2004: 9). Other women had reported similar incidents while walking to their cars in carparks (Poynting and Noble 2004: 9-10). Sometimes the abuse is subtler and comes in the form of uncomfortable stares or ‘dirty looks’ (Poynting and Noble 2004: 9). These incidents were not reported to have been due to provocation.

However, the many incidences of social incivility reported in these studies do seem to have been provoked by current events of the day. The events of September 11, 2001 had the effect of increasing Islamophobia and adversely affecting relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians. Immediately following the event, the New South Wales Community Relations Commission (CRC) established a ‘hotline’ to handle reports of problems experienced as a consequence of the terrorist attacks (Dreher 2005: 3). The CRC Hotline received, at its peak on the 13th of September 2001, 41 calls relating to adverse experiences suffered as a result of the attacks, which dropped to only two calls within the month of November (Dreher 2005: 10-11). The Muslim-Australian participants in the study by Poynting and Noble also reported higher levels of racism following the terrorist attacks (2004: 6-7). Furthermore, the use of terms such as ‘terrorist’ in such instances shows the strong association between Muslims as a whole and the attacks of September 11 almost to the extent that they become synonymous (Poynting and Noble 2004: 9; Dreher 2005: 13).

Sometimes social incivility is not experienced directly, but rather through the media. Discussions within the popular media and talkback radio have been cited by Muslim-Australians as hurtfully misrepresentative (Dreher 2005: 17-18; Poynting and Noble 2004: 11-12). There was one reported case where the perpetrators harassing a Muslim woman made direct reference to a current affairs program that had contained stereotypes about Muslim youth (Poynting and Noble 2004: 12).

Discrimination and Vilification

Discrimination constitutes the unequal treatment of an individual based on criteria that are deemed inappropriate and unjust. In the case of Islamophobia, Islam itself acts as the criterion for treating those of that faith in a different and unjustifiably unequal way, such as:

- Not being granted time and space to pray in the workplace has been reported (Dreher 2005: 16).
- Similarly, in shops, Muslim-Australians have encountered discriminatory treatment (Dreher 2005: 13, 15).

Profiling by policing agencies has also been highlighted as being marked by unjustified discrimination (Noble and Poynting 2004: 12-13). Many Mosque developments in Sydney have experienced difficulties both in dealing with the members of the surrounding area, elected officials and bureaucrats as a consequence of being Muslim (Dunn 1999: 299-407). What marks these particular experiences is that, more often than not, the unequal treatment is dubiously justified on other instrumental grounds. In some cases the discrimination eventually becomes obvious, as was the case with the Minto Mosque in Campbelltown whose opponents resorted to vilification once the development and building had been approved and planning issues could no longer be used to disguise Islamophobic sentiments (Dunn 1999: 392-393).

Violence and Intimidation

At the more extreme end of Islamophobia, Muslim-Australians have been subjected to physical assault, damage to property, threats and intimidation. For one young Muslim woman, a series of incidents with a hostile group from her neighbourhood that started with being hit on a tram, verbally abused and having her 'scarf' pulled off, eventually led to serious physical injuries to herself, a bystander who had come to her aid and her brother (Poynting and Noble 2004: 10). These incidents, coupled with abusive phone calls, having a brick thrown through the window of her home and having her lawn set on fire, led to an apprehended violence order (Poynting and Noble 2004: 10). However, since this did not stop such attacks, this woman and her family were ultimately left with no choice but to move (Poynting and Noble 2004: 10).

Pervasiveness of Islamophobia

There are two dimensions along which to understand the extent of Islamophobia. In the first dimension, there are social attitudes towards Muslim-Australians that can be found in experiences of Islamophobia. The second dimension concerns the sites in which Muslim-Australians experience Islamophobia. Taken together, these two dimensions give some indication of the pervasiveness of Islamophobia in Australia today.

While social attitudes do not necessarily translate into Islamophobia, they do give some indication as to what extent Islamophobia is generally present and accepted. An earlier national study on ethnic prejudice conducted by McAllister and Moore (1989: 7) showed that Muslims faced the highest levels of prejudice in terms of people's attitudes towards them. Twelve years later, Dunn et al (2004: 414-415) conducted similar research, with respondents in New South Wales and Queensland, into racist attitudes and found similar results –Muslims rated highest in terms of prejudice where Muslims were ranked highest amongst groups of people who were believed to not fit into Australian society. While such surveys only measure the extent of such attitudes, rather than their quality, the generality of sentiments across the Australian population is often felt by Muslim-Australians as a consequence of experiences of Islamophobia.

In examining the sites or locations where Muslim-Australians have experienced Islamophobia, its pervasive character becomes clearer. As has already been indicated, most of the experiences of Islamophobia have occurred in shared or common public places, such as shopping centres, on public transport and on the streets. Many experiences reported occurred within the victim's own neighbourhood and homes (Dreher 2005: 11). Sometimes, such experiences occur within more institutional settings, such as at work and school (Dreher 2005: 11) or even in contact with government institutions (Poynting and Noble 2004: 12-13). On other occasions, Islamophobia is experienced indirectly through the media or directly because of media reporting (Dreher 2005: 11, 17-18; Poynting and Noble 2004: 11-12). The spaces and places in which Muslim-Australians may potentially experience Islamophobia are quite widespread.

While not every Muslim-Australian experiences Islamophobia directly, the extent of such attitudes and the places in which they manifest themselves can generate a sense of its pervasiveness.

Conclusions: Consequences of Islamophobia

While the experience of Islamophobia generates feelings of harm and disrespect, there are more practical consequences for Muslim-Australians. Patterns of *discomfort and fear*, *distrust* and *exclusion* amongst Muslim-Australians emphasise a general sense that their whole way of life is not only devalued, but not to be accommodated. Comfort, or ontological security, is understood as 'the confidence or trust we have in the world around us, both in terms of the things and the people with which we share our lives, and hence which provide stability and continuity to our identity' (Noble 205: 113). What a pervasive sense of Islamophobia creates for Muslim-Australians is discomfort and fear (Dreher 2005: 1; Poynting and Noble 2004: 13-14) that affects their sense of belonging both to the nation (Dreher 2005: 22; Noble 2005: 117) and to their neighbourhoods and spaces of everyday life (Noble 2005: 117).

Coupled closely with discomfort and fear is distrust – the lack of confidence in one's social setting. Distrust, in effect, reduces the sense of social competence and efficacy of many Muslim-Australians that represents a taking away of their capacity for social action (Noble 2005: 116). This reduced capacity can affect the way people conduct their everyday lives as well as affecting important perceptions and relationships of public institutions, like the police (Poynting and Noble 2004: 13).

Islamophobia has the general effect of marginalising Muslim-Australians from the very activities that would allow them to be full participants in Australian society. This exclusion is sometimes the result of discrimination (Poynting and Noble 2004: 14; Dreher 2005: 21-22). On other occasions it manifests itself as a retreat from public activities, such as not leaving the home or not making use of certain services (Dreher 2005: 19; Poynting and Noble 2004: 16-17). To some degree, the Muslim-Australian community feels under siege and they sometimes seek relief from the consequences of Islamophobia by closing themselves off (Dreher 2005: 23-25). Islamophobia not only creates a divide between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians but produces in Muslim-Australians a retreat into their own communities.

Theoretical Insights into the Divide

Certain ideas and concepts can be usefully employed to explain and understand this divide between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians. They act as 'lenses' through which to view the conditions that create such a situation and, therefore, provide insights into ways in which the issues may be addressed.

Recognition and Tolerance

Tolerance is sometimes used as a description or as an idea. This is usually the case when we think of tolerance as a virtue (cf. Heyd 1996). However, whether or not tolerance is inherently virtuous remains contested (cf. Williams 1996). While discussions of the idea of tolerance are useful in developing an understanding of what it means, tolerance can also be examined as a practice – as something that people do.[4] In this sense, tolerance is

[4] It should be noted that Cohen distinguishes between toleration, the practice, and tolerance, the attitude. The terms tolerance and toleration have been used here interchangeably to refer to its practice.

seen to be intentionally not acting coercively against something objectionable when that one feels they have the power to do so (Cohen 2004: 69).

This raises the classical paradox of tolerance: why should we tolerate something that is objectionable (cf. Horton 1993; Mendus 1989: 18-21)? For example, why should people who object to veiling allow this practice? Many have appealed to other liberal virtues such as respect or freedom of speech as good enough reasons to tolerate under certain circumstances.[5] More broadly speaking, the reasonableness of tolerance is cited as adequate justification (cf. McKinnon 2006: 67-80). Importantly, the justification of tolerance usually involves some sort of communication about what makes it right and/or acceptable. This involves another understanding of tolerance as a discussion norm (Dewey 1999 in Johnson 2000: 301-302), or a way of disagreeing in a civil manner. Jurgen Habermas illustrated an important aspect of this last view of tolerance – that it necessarily involves all participants in this discussion to try to understand the situation from one another's perspective (Habermas in Borradori 2003: 36-38).

This sort of understanding that tolerance involves requires some level of mutual recognition. Whether this is recognition of what is different (e.g. as Muslims or non-Muslims) or that which binds (e.g. as neighbours or citizens) is a contentious point (cf. Jones 2006).

Indeed, the theory of recognition, the core reference for which is the work of Axel Honneth (2007, 1995, 1996) provides a comprehensive model, which explains not just the structure of feelings of injustice, but accounts also for many other dimensions of the overall experience of Muslim-Australians. To list some of the most important dimensions, recognition theory also accounts for: the cultural and social conditions that make it possible for individual feelings to be perceived as representative of a group experience; the specific logic of social movements, their relation to initial feelings of injustice and disenfranchisement, and their practical and normative dynamics (Deranty 2005).

However, it is generally agreed that recognition requires a basic respect for or acknowledgement of others as fully human in their capacity to act morally as members of one's community (Noble 2005: 116). It is only in this way that tolerance could produce the sorts of insights necessary for any sort of harmony or solidarity and, therefore, acceptance of difference.

At the same time it is important to note that tolerance and intolerance, like Islamophobia, are mutually exclusive. This means that tolerance may not be an adequate response to intolerance. When Islamophobia manifests itself as violence, should we respond with tolerance? Or, for that matter, more intolerance? What is important in advocating tolerance is that it requires recognition of others at some basic level – as fellow commuters, shoppers, workers and citizens – such that intolerance is avoided, despite harbouring certain objections. In other words, tolerance is no substitute for respect. And while tolerance necessitates recognition, in a culturally plural society like Australia where certain ways of life may be very unfamiliar, we are not immune to disagreement and misunderstanding. In other words, tolerance and recognition remain important to producing the sort of understanding to combat the misunderstanding involved in

[5] The justification of tolerance is by far its most widely debated aspect and can be accessed through any of the material cited here on the topic.

Islamophobia, but also as a mechanism for dealing with any legitimate disagreements in a civil manner.

Inter-group relations: Contact and Conflict Theory

Contact Theory is a key reference point for those activities which aim to tackle prejudice by bringing groups together in face to face contact situations. *The Nature of Prejudice* (Allport 1954) has proven to be an influential study of inter-group contact and the conditions that can lead to a reduction in prejudice. Specifically, Allport highlighted four conditions that were important to more positive inter-group relations (1954: 287):

- *equal status between groups*
- *common goals*
- *inter-group co-operation* and
- *support or sanction of the authorities, law or custom*

Importantly, Allport recognised that in-group preference did not necessarily imply negativity or hostility towards out-groups (1954: 42). In this way, Allport suggested that we could conceive of belonging at one and the same time to many wider and more inclusive in-groups ranging, for example, from one's family to humanity (1954: 43-44).

Contrary to the contact thesis, an alternative view, known as Conflict Theory suggests that inter-group contact can produce conflict rather than a reduction in prejudice and a more positive regard for out-groups. Ethnocentrism, for example, may simply lead to a devaluation of out-groups despite contact (Hewstone and Greenland 2000: 136-137). The way in which groups may have incompatible goals and be competing for scarce resources also undermines contact theory and favours conflict theory (Hewstone and Greenland 2000: 137). Social identity theory makes further claims that contact may simply serve to reinforce 'a positively valued psychological distinctiveness of the in-group' (Hewstone and Greenland 2000: 137). Nevertheless, the conflict model of inter-group relations has not served to undermine the contact model. It challenges many of its assumptions by raising different conditions and processes that shape inter-group relations.

In any case, since Allport's original study, other studies of inter-group relations have successfully supported his thesis (Pettigrew 1998: 67-8). At the same time, various criticisms and limitations of Allport's thesis have emerged, many of which have sought to address the challenge of conflict theory.[6] Such limitations and qualifications have borne fruitful insights into how to understand inter-group relations and how they can be fostered. One key insight was that prejudice tends to make those who hold such views avoid inter-group contact and that a reduction in prejudice may in fact not be a result of contact but may be a factor in there being any contact in the first place (Pettigrew 1998: 69). Another issue relates to whether or not the effects of contact can be generalised beyond any specific situation in which it is observed and how this might happen (Pettigrew 1998: 70). In light of such issues, Pettigrew points towards four processes that cut across the conditions in Allport's thesis and may better serve to explain and understand how positive inter-group relations may emerge (Pettigrew 1998: 70-73):

[6] For example, Forbes' extensive analysis has supported Allport's thesis at the level of the individual while aggregate-level analyses tend to demonstrate conflict that undermines the supposed benefits of proximity (Forbes 1997).

- *learning about out-groups that corrects negative views;*
- *positively reinforced behaviour modification that leads to attitude changes;*
- *generating affective ties, such as friendship;*
- *and, in-group reappraisal of their existing norms and customs to be more inclusive of out-group worldviews*

Discourses & Stereotypes

The term discourse refers quite broadly to communicative exchanges that are logically connected and socially relevant. In this case, the various manifestations and forms of Islamophobia can be understood as a discourse. Although, not all instances of Islamophobia are directly connected to each other we can understand the common stereotypes that underpin Islamophobia by examining it as a discourse. Importantly, discourse is seen as an important way in which we come to understand ourselves and the world we live in.

Discourses are usually linked to relationships of power. In regards to dominant discourses around Islam, many Muslims feel that they are powerless to define themselves and, therefore, subvert the kinds of negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims which have gained currency in recent years. Similarly, when we see how Islamophobia manifests itself in response to events like September 11 and media reporting on Muslims, we see how stereotypes have adverse consequences and how these stereotypes connect to other discourses, such as the ones on terrorism. In other words, Islamophobia as a discourse inextricably ties together the idea of 'Muslim' and 'terrorism' such that Muslim-Australians are at pains to disentangle such associations and the blame that comes with it (Dreher 2005: 20).

Moreover, stereotypes perpetuated by such discourses as Islamophobia, remain quite powerful vehicles for prejudice because of their ambiguous character. For example, many Sikhs, by virtue of their appearance, were targeted in Islamophobic attacks subsequent to the events of September 11 because they seemingly fit the stereotype of 'Muslim' by the perpetrators (Dreher 2005: 9, 25-26). What is important about Islamophobia as a discourse, is that it continues to reproduce the divide between Muslim (as well as other minorities) and non-Muslim-Australians because the stereotypes act as substitutes for understanding.

Social Capital

The term social capital has had various meanings and applications in social scientific research (cf. Portes 1998; Portes 2000). However, its use and application has been popularised in the work of American political scientist Robert Putnam (cf. 2000). For Putnam, social capital essentially entails 'social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness' (2007: 137). While social capital may not necessarily be beneficial under all circumstances (Putnam 2007: 138; Portes 2000: 15-18), there are three broad functions of social capital: '(a) as a source of social control; (b) as a source of family support; (c) as a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks' (Portes 2000: 9), with the third function usually being seen as its most common function (Portes 2000: 12). Importantly, Putnam sees social capital as an attribute of communities and nations (Portes 2000: 18).

In a more recent study, Putnam found that communities marked by ethnic diversity contain lower levels of social capital (2007: 146-151), even after accounting for various other important contributing factors (2007: 151-153). This suggests that people living in ethnically diverse communities are not comfortable with such diversity and what results is a ‘bunkering down’ or social isolation where people retreat from civic engagement (2007: 149-151). This is compounded by the fact that these results seem quite pervasive when considering both bonding and bridging types of social capital that acts within, for example, an ethnic group, and bonding types of social capital, that acts between ethnic groups (Putnam 2007: 148). Nevertheless, Putnam suggests that such discomfort with diversity and its negative effect of social isolation is a temporary phenomenon that occurs while people, over time, reduce the social distance between themselves (2007: 159-164).

However, several characteristics about this study must be noted in order to properly appreciate the extent to which it can be used:

- This research is a correlational study – it examines the relationship between the presence of ethnic diversity and social capital. However, it has limited use in explaining the *causes* of social isolation. For example, it is possible that prejudice, such as Islamophobia, causes erosion in social capital – *not* diversity itself. To this end, research has shown how the difficulties encountered by Chinese migrants attempting to start businesses were not due to a lack of financial or social capital, but rather because of obstacles resulting from normative issues, like prejudice and discrimination, that are neglected in the concept of social capital (Ip 2003 in Vasta 2005: 61).
- The notion of ‘community’ that Putnam employs is one that is contentious. Firstly, it implies predominantly face-to-face relationships (e.g. trusting people in your neighbourhood (Putnam 2007: 147)) without accounting for the wider effects of discourses and the presence of mediated social relationships. Secondly, this type of community can be characterised as a ‘thick’ conception of community – his measures refer to a very specific notion of social networks, trust and civic engagement, such as: lower confidence in local media and government officials; lower political efficacy, lower frequency of registering to vote, less likelihood to volunteer or give to charity, more time spent watching television for entertainment (Putnam 2007: 149-150). Importantly, this seems to belie Putnam’s own understanding of society as dynamic and organic (2007: 159-160).

Everyday Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism has mainly been thought of in terms of policy (cf. Vasta 2005; Lopez 2000) or as an ideology that attempts to establish how we ought to live in a culturally plural society (cf. Zevallos 2006: 1). Nevertheless, the very object of multiculturalism is a concern with different ways of life. Everyday multiculturalism presents a different approach to understanding diversity in an everyday, lived sense (Wise 2007a: 1). It is an approach characterised by trying to understand and explain how we ‘do multiculturalism’ as place-sharing (Wise 2005: 172), by exploring ‘forms of locality, belonging, affinity and disjuncture among local residents’ (Wise 2007b: 1). It is an acknowledgement of the important and complex connections between everyday practices and experiences of multiculturalism and for that matter racism (cf. Essed 2000)) with ideological and policy prescriptions and developments.

While the consequences and experiences of Islamophobia described have been located in the realm of the everyday, so can we similarly make some suggestions about the location of its causes. Increasing cultural diversity tends to change the landscapes of our cities, towns and suburbs. For those witnessing the changes dissonance, dislocation and disorientation occurs as the once familiar becomes less so. In her study of Ashfield, a suburb in Sydney, Amanda Wise notes how the changing physical environment of local areas eroded the memories of 'paths well trodden' such that they produced 'bodily revulsion and neurotic bitterness' (2007b: 32). The bodily in this case refers to the intimately sensory, sensuous and affective relationship we have with our environments, such that we can examine and understand how, for example, the role of smell can cause inter-cultural frictions (Wise 2007b: 19-26). Not only are our cross-cultural experiences embodied, but so are our practices: the subtle, yet significantly different gestures (Wise 2007b: 11-12), mannerisms (Wise 2007b: 13), looks (Wise 2007b: 14-15), forms of body contact (Wise 2007b: 17-19) and understandings of them between cultures can have profound effects on cross-cultural relationships making them more prone to difficulty or avoidance.

Nevertheless, our everyday practices, exchanges and their meanings are typically negotiated through which positive cross-cultural understandings and solidarities can emerge. Such encounters, that Wise calls 'hopeful moments' (2005: 178), can involve substantial and prolonged neighbourly relationships of care (Wise 2005: 178-179) or more ephemeral and less intimate encounters such as tending to watering the plants in an apartment block (Wise 2005: 179-180). These types of interactions create a sort of 'interethnic social capital' that contains possibilities for opening up to others that produces forms of interethnic belonging, security and trust (Wise 2005: 182). Further more, these sorts of interactions rely upon 'transversal people' and/or 'transversal places' through which the tensions and discomfort of everyday experiences and practices are smoothed over and resolved (Wise 2007a: 9-13).

This, however, does not mean that such positive relationships are immune to misunderstanding and misrecognition (Wise 2007a: 14-16). Nevertheless, Greg Gow's study of cross-cultural neighbourliness in Fairfield exemplifies how a situation of conflict and tension – sharing the common space of a car park in an apartment block – can also unify neighbours in meaningful ways beyond a common instrumental interest (2005: 393-397).

Everyday multiculturalism seeks to explain and understand the lived experience of cultural diversity. Importantly, it shows how people's life circumstances are intricately woven at a local, state and federal level and how concrete relationships can be shaped by as well influence abstract discourses on how to live in a multicultural society. It demonstrates both how multiculturalism can be a 'lived ideology' (Zevallos 2006) and how the lived reality can inform better policies and services.

Addressing the Divide: Evidence from the Literature

Grass-roots Initiatives

Multicultural policy at a local level in Australia has largely been concerned with access and equity policies and 'multicultural festivals' (cf. Thompson et al. 1998). In the United Kingdom, however, approaches to community relations have moved towards incorporating both *cohesion* and *integration*. A recent study for the Communities and Local Government and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in the UK defines these two notions as separate but interconnected ways of improving community relations:

> 'cohesion is principally the process that must happen in all communities to ensure different groups of people get on well together; while integration is principally the process that ensures new residents and existing residents adapt to one another' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007: 38).

One of the core components of fostering cohesion, integration and, therefore, positive community relations, is the encouragement of *meaningful interaction*. This is seen as a component of cohesion that is particularly suitable to local government and grass-roots level interventions, approaches and policies. While such approaches are vitally important for everyone, research has demonstrated that special effort is necessary to involve and target the disengaged members of a community, such as youth (Communities and Local Government 2007: 68-72) and those involved in anti-social behaviour (Communities and Local Government 2007: 92-94), since they typically 'have most concerns and least trust or sense of a stake in society and institutions' (Communities and Local Government 2007: 9). Outlined below are some of the key aspects from these studies of how local governments and grass-roots initiatives can foster meaningful interaction within their communities.

Mutual Understanding and Shared Understanding

Understanding is key to positive engagements and a sense of wellbeing in communities.[7] On the one hand, mutual understanding incorporates ways in which people understand each other in their uniqueness and particularity. On the other hand, shared understanding defines the sort of common ground upon which people can appreciate their shared fate or futures (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007: 46-47).

A vital function in developing understanding within communities is to develop myth-busting programs, campaigns and activities that subvert the sorts of stereotypes and myths surrounding particularly stigmatised groups (Communities and Local Government 2007: 73-77). Such stereotypes and myths are usually at the base of tensions and social isolation within communities.

Moreover, approaches that build a sense of commonality around real life issues at the local level help to foster trust, respect and positive relationships (Communities and Local Government 2007: 8). Approaches based on engagement and participation are

[7] Research in the United Kingdom found that fostering understanding resonated more than abstract values because it took into account the life circumstances of the people involved (Community and Local Government 2007: 8).

particularly important in this area (see section below on ‘Cohesion and Integration From Below’) since they allow members of a community to learn from one another.

While it is important to note that inter-faith dialogues, in particular, provide productive ways in which to develop the sort of understanding being discussed (cf. Cahill et al 2004), they do entail certain limitations when it comes to community cohesion and integration because, primarily, it is not reasonable to expect people of different faiths to have meaningful interactions on the basis of religious doctrine. That is to say, that while inter-faith dialogues may expand participants’ horizons about other religions and what they mean to their adherents, it cannot be expected that people of different faiths actually share religions. In other words, inter-faith dialogues appear quite constructive for building mutual understanding, but limited when it comes to shared understanding. Nevertheless, knowing more about different religions can help to foster meaningful interaction that is more inclusive by accommodating different religious practices and values (cf. Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia 2007).

Avoiding and Responding to Tensions

Tensions can arise in communities due to differential treatment, injustices and prejudices between different groups. Myth busting (see above) and effective communication about community cohesion and integration (see next section) can help avoid such tensions. However, there is the need for on-the-ground responses to prevent further escalations. While policing is important, so are rapid and comprehensive responses that involve the community and mediators and are supported by longer-term initiatives (Communities and Local Government 2007: 89-91), whose crucial function is to gradually facilitate meaningful interactions in neutral settings (Communities and Local Government 2007: 8).

Effective Communication

The UK Communities and Local Government and Commission on Integration and Cohesion research, in developing their definition of cohesion and integration, consulted widely (Communities and Local Government 2007: 21-24). This led to a definition that was easy to communicate, understand and to embed and apply within policies and projects at a local level (Communities and Local Government 2007: 32). It is important that the ideas are accessible enough such that nothing is lost in the translations of these ideas between theory, policy and practice.

Cohesion and integration rely as much on targeted approaches as they do on universal ones (Communities and Local Governments 2007: 43) in their commitment to social justice and tackling long-term inequalities: ‘[t]his means a sense of equality and fairness for settled communities, just as much as positive action to close gaps in outcomes for minority and ethnic groups’ (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007: 98). In order to avoid tensions and conflicts that may arise from targeted approaches, social justice has to be made visible, by communicating and addressing the fairness and justifications for such approaches (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007: 100-107).

Cohesion and Integration From Below

For cohesion and integration to work, it has been found that the initiatives and approaches have to be community-led, including: consultations and involvement in decision-making and management (Communities and Local Government 2007: 45-47); ensuring service and policy staff are representative of their communities (Communities and Local Government 2007: 45-48); by utilising community-led delivery through, for

example, voluntary and faith sector organisations (Communities and Local Government 2007: 49-52), and; creating effective partnerships with other organisations and between government agencies of different levels (Communities and Local Government 2007: 52-58).

Such engagement and participation in one's community has many benefits:

- Improvements in the quality, appropriateness and responsiveness of local services (Communities and Local Government 2007: 86)
- It encourages 'trust in services and institutions and a sense that [the community's] needs are represented and they have a stake in what is going on' (Communities and Local Government 2007: 85, 87)
- It 'provides arenas in which people from different backgrounds interact meaningfully and with a common purpose breaking down misconceptions, encouraging understanding, trust and a sense of common purpose amongst participants' (Communities and Local Government 2007: 85, 87).

While cohesion and integration emphasise building bridges between such groups (e.g. religious and/or ethnic groups), it is just as important to recognise the limits to which cohesion and integration at the level of local government and grass-roots activities and organisations can be achieved. Cohesion and integration in the wider local community must also leverage existing networks within and across such a community to be effective[8]. Sometimes, such networks stretch beyond a local or grass-roots level, such as transnational networks (cf. Velayutham & Wise 2005). Moreover, these networks need space in which to flourish and develop as communities distinct from wider communities. For example, many young Muslim-Australians volunteer within and for their own communities and see it as a vital part of their lives (Australian Multicultural Foundation & Volunteering Australia 2007: 7). As has already been noted, volunteering is an important component in developing social capital and, more generally, is seen as a positive contribution. The challenge for any approach to bridge-building is to ensure that smaller communities do not get subsumed into a greater whole, since much of what is meaningful for them are the activities that they undertake for and amongst themselves.

[8] Cited in various parts of Section 4 of Communities and Local Government (2007: xx).