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*Public Perceptions, Gang 'Reality'  
and the Influence of the Media.*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in  
Psychology at Massey University.

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## ABSTRACT

This research was designed to address the hypothesis that there is a wide disparity between how the public perceive gangs and the 'reality' from the gang's perspective and; that in part, the New Zealand media are responsible for this difference, portraying a negative image of gang members. Sixty members of the Horowhenua public and seven gang respondents were interviewed. The small sample size of the gang respondents made it impossible to statistically compare the two groups. Analysis was carried out on the spoken discourse of the public and gang respondents and the printed discourse of the news media. Chi square analysis was used on the public respondent sample. Demographic characteristics of the public respondents such as gender, ethnicity and employment status resulted in observable differences in the public's perceptions of gangs. In particular, feelings of having a gang resident in their neighbourhood, estimates on the number of people involved with gangs in New Zealand and perceptions of the media accuracy in reporting about gangs. Previous contact with a member of a gang was also found to influence respondents' perceptions of media accuracy. Increasing the sample size is likely to clarify these findings. Ethical and practical implications in conducting research on gangs are discussed and suggestions for future research are identified. Some practical implications of the present findings are mentioned.

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