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In the Nyitting Time: The Journey of Identity Development for Western Australian Aboriginal Children and Youth and the Interplay of Racism

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> Family is at the heart of Noongar[1] culture. Our family trees are vast. Noongar ancestral connections are like an intricate system of roots, reaching back to the Dreaming or Nyitting. Our people are connected by kinships, the way stars in the sky form intricate constellations, connecting points together to form a unique shape (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, 2016).

Identity is a complex and dynamic concept that is shaped by many factors. It is a social construct whereby the development of identity is a process that continues over time and where external sources of power impact upon identity construction. As Foucault (1975) puts forward, the individual's identities are shaped and dominated by the authorities in the higher social hierarchical ladder. If this is indeed the case for identity development, then what is the impact of ongoing racism upon the Aboriginal identity of Australian Aboriginal children and youth? In this chapter, we will explore young people and children's Aboriginal identity; the challenges of identification in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds; prejudice, racism and discrimination in Australia; the implications of racism upon the development of Aboriginal identity; and the protective factors of Aboriginal identity that impact wellbeing. We will conclude with implications for policy and service delivery. For the purposes of this paper however, racial identity will be used synonymously with Aboriginal identity and is defined as "a social construct that is shaped and determined by the interactions individuals share with others and with social structures" (Kickett-Tucker, 2009, p. 121). Racial identity also refers to an individuals' acknowledgement of sameness with a group of people who share commonalities (Johnson, 2002).

[1]Noongar is a collective term that comprises 14 language groups of Aboriginal people who are the traditional owners of the south-west of Western Australia (Council, S. W. A. L. a. S, 2016).

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Identity

Research shows that a strong sense of identity is critical to a functioning, well-rounded individual who has positive social and emotional wellbeing (Berry, 1999; Berzonsky, 2003; Erikson, 1994; Krysinska, Martin, & Sheehan, 2009; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004; Usborne & Taylor, 2010; Watson, 2006). A robust identity empowers an individual to acknowledge, respect and define their purpose and role in life, for example, identity is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 2).

Experiences with "others" and interactions with institutions and groups impact how an individual determines and evaluates his/her identity. Over time, there are different times in a child's life in which experiences with others and interactions with agencies are particularly more evident. During the transition of child to adolescence seems to be the most prevalent time for interaction with identity (Erikson, 1994; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). Cultural, geographic location and social determinants also contribute to one's identity (Kidd, 2002), thereby resulting in multiple identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

A strong identity has been shown to help individuals develop resilience which then promotes skills and knowledge that are required for that individual to overcome and cope with life's challenges (Jackson & Sellers, 1996; Niles, 1999). In doing so, individuals are in control of their own wellbeing which will then have a positive impact on their self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). More specifically, Chandler and Lalonde (1998), Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003) found in their study of First Nations young people in Canada that a strong racial identity is a protective factor against self-harm and suicide (Chandler et al., 2003; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998).

Research also informs us that identity forms across the whole lifespan. Children are able to recognise physical differences in people even before their language is developed (i.e. 6 months of age) (Katz & Barrett, 1997); a child can ascertain differences in others by skin colour from about 3 to 6 years of age (Quintana & Vera, 1999); children aged 6 to 12 years can determine the racial identity of others in terms of differences in traditions, customs, culture and languages. It is by 14 years of age, children start to comprehend their racial identity with the association of social class. At this age, pre-teen identity formation is significantly influenced by the images and messages used by parents, families and communities. During the teenage years, external sources (such as the media) and individuals (such as teachers, police, sport heroes, singers, actors) have a major influence on identity development. It is also during this critical development phase teen's images, expectations and perceptions of their Aboriginal identity frame their adult life (Erikson, 1994).

Aboriginal Identity

Prior to colonisation, there were approximately 250 Australian Aboriginal language groups and over 700 clans (Heath, Bor, Thompson, & Cox, 2011). Up until 51 years ago, Australia's Aboriginal people were not recognised as humans and thereby not counted on the population census but were categorised as flora or fauna (National Archives of Australia, 2018). Between 1910 and 1940, Australia's government determined an individual's Aboriginal identity by the colour of their skin. To do this, they concluded that the colour of an individual's skin equated with the quantity of an individuals' Aboriginal bloodline. The more dark the skin, the more Aboriginal blood; therefore the more Aboriginal they were. Hence, the government and wider society quantified Aboriginal identity and used labels such as full blood, a person with no White blood; half-caste, a person who has a biological White parent; quadroon, a person with a biological Aboriginal grandparent; or an octoroon, a person with a biological Aboriginal great-grandparent. Using such racist labels, the Australian government proposed and carried out legislations such as the Aborigines Protection Act of

1886[2] and the 1905 Aborigines Act.[3] They believed that they could "breed out" the Aboriginal blood of a race of people by forcibly removing children and babies from their parents and kinships and placing them in missions across Australia to assimilate and procreate with non-Aboriginal people.

Racially based government policies and acts over the years fostered forced separation of Aboriginal children and babies from their parents. People who were taken away from their families are known as the "Stolen Generation". These racially based acts forced Aboriginal children and babies to be brought up in non-Aboriginal and often religious missions and which painfully disturbed Aboriginal identities and connection with land, spirituality and culture. In Australia, Aboriginal identities have always been "devalued, disrespected, stigmatised and avoided" in the contemporary Western world which has led to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and hostility in members of Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people were forcibly removed from their lands and forbidden from undertaking traditional cultural practices (Trudgen, 2000). Such racially driven practices created feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, psychological stress and related illnesses (Trudgen, 2000) and are evidenced by the life stories of the Stolen Generation and their families. In the following quote by Stolen Generation survivor Mr. Chris Jackamarra (2002, p. 42), it is evidenced how the past has affected the present generations. Chris's parents were taken away by the government welfare officers and placed on missions. Subsequently other children, including Chris Jackamarra, were also being removed from their home and families:

> they [mission] taught us that we were white, but they never taught us to be prepared for what was out in the world. That there was racial prejudice, stereotype casting and things like that…we were robbed of our identity and culture and that bothered me, from that day to this actually. It is something that I was never taught and I am still just learning it now.

Critical to Aboriginal identity is a sense of place and sense of belonging not only what an individual possesses and demonstrates but also the individual feels towards their family, their kin, their community and wider Aboriginal communities. Hence, Aboriginal identity is related to self-identification; it also ensures that identity is being accepted by other Aboriginal people based on connection to kin, culture and country (Kickett-Tucker, 2009).

In Australia, the uncertainty, negativity and confusion are part of what has been written about Aboriginal identity (Bolt, 2009). Yet, most of the literature exploring the identity of Australian Aboriginal people is focussed upon the adult population and does not capture Aboriginal children or youth's identity and identity development process (Kickett-Tucker, 2009). Most of them are also from the academic domain (Bodkin-Andrews & Craven, 2006; Craven & Marsh, 2005; Kickett-Tucker, 2005, 2008; Purdie & McCrindle, 2004; Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000). We therefore know very little of what contributes to the development of Aboriginal

[2]The Aborigines Protection Act 1886 (Act no. 1886 (50 Vict. No.25)) was passed on 2 September 1886 and commenced on 1 January 1887. The full title of the Act is "An Act to provide for the better protection and management of the Aboriginal Natives of Western Australia, and to amend the Law relating to certain Contracts with such Aboriginal Natives". This Act established the Aborigines Protection Board and enabled the appointment of Protectors of Aborigines. It gave wide powers to the Board and Protectors to involve themselves in the lives of all Aboriginal people in Western Australia, including the care, custody and education of Aboriginal children. The Act also empowered Magistrates to apprentice Aboriginal children to work to the age of 21 years. Part of this Act were repealed in stages, from 1889. Retrieved from https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/wa/WE00403

[3]The Aborigines Act 1905 (Act no. 1905/014 (5 Edw. VII No.14) was reserved for Royal assent on 23 December 1905 and commenced in April 1906. It was "An Act to make provision for the better protection and care of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia". It governed the lives of all Aboriginal people in Western Australia for nearly 60 years. The Act created the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines who became the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child to the age of 16 years and permitted authorities to "send and detain" Aboriginal children in institutions and in "service" (work) (Find & Connect Web Resource Project for the Commonwealth of Australia (2011). Retrieved from http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/wa/WE00406)

identity across the children's lifespan. This knowledge is imperative because research shows that a strong self-identity is correlated with positive self-esteem, behaviour, sense of effectiveness of oneself as an individual and ultimately positive mental health (Corenblum, 2014; Dockery, 2011; Usborne & Taylor, 2010).

An exploration of Aboriginal identity in adulthood shows that it is not so linear or straightforward but is impacted by a complex interplay of social and environmental factors. Aboriginal adult identity is influenced by relationships with people and places of the past and present which then affects the future. Aboriginal identities have been challenged and attempted to be destroyed over decades such that Aboriginal identity today cannot be defined or interpreted independently of the history. Hence, discussion about Aboriginal identity must be told in light of the impact of non-Aboriginal Australia on Aboriginal people. Thus, identity often becomes a very subjective concept and will vary depending on who is telling the story about Aboriginal identity (Bolt, 2009).

Identity is also formed by the knowledge and feelings attached to family, kin, culture and country (Forrest & Kearns, 2001). In Australia, some Aboriginal people are content with their Aboriginal identity, and for others, it remains a constant challenge to be identified or be accepted as an "Aboriginal person". Therefore, identity can be a source of great pain and/or comfort for Aboriginal Australians. According to Erikson (1963), identity development during critical periods such as those during transition from teenage years to young adulthood, middle age and mature age is influenced by social structures and interactions with others. Aboriginal identity is also, without exception, continually influenced by external sources and agents, such as media, police and schools who construct Aboriginal identity in their own ways (Kickett-Tucker & Coffin, 2011). Such constructions are not necessarily positive, culturally appropriate or even true; yet these institutions serve as major socialising agents and continue to perpetuate misleading images and stereotypes about Aboriginal people. This information is not filtered, and those who are young or not in a position to question the authority or the content transmitted receive misleading and contaminated knowledge about their kin, culture and country, all of which can contribute to their negative perception of and feelings towards their Aboriginal identity. These contexts are particularly important to understand the identity development process of Australia's First Peoples.

Behaviours are influenced by a set of values, customs and cultural laws; however, for Aboriginal Australians, these were severely interrupted and impacted by historical events and imposed government policies. Values such as respect, responsibility, relationships and reciprocity were massively disturbed resulting in a break in cultural practices that weakened kinship networks, child-rearing practices, lore, rites of passage, traditions, decision-making, governance and order (Clark, 2000; Swan & Raphael, 1995).

Despite such devastating impact, Aboriginal people continue to survive and in some cases thrive. Aboriginal identity is reported to be a critical element of an Aboriginal person's sense of self (Kickett-Tucker, 2009) particularly children and young people:

> A strong [Aboriginal]… identity and related self-esteem is like a hub of a wheel. Because without the hub, the wheel can go nowhere. Like the hub, racial identity is the centre of a child's and youth's wellbeing…it is their spirit and without it, they can be steered by outside forces which determine how fast to go and which direction to travel. (Kickett-Tucker, 2009, p. 130)

A study of 35 Australian Aboriginal children aged 8–12 and 120 youth aged 13–17 years equated identity with being recognised as the first people of Australia (Kickett-Tucker, 2009). According to young children and youth, a strong sense of self, connection to family and kin, Aboriginal language, Aboriginal culture, inheritance, appearance and friends are important contributors to their racial identity. Attached to these contributors is a myriad of skills, knowledge, attributes, emotions, judgements and expectations about being Aboriginal.

The elements that comprise racial identity for children and youth are very similar in that culture, family, language and appearance were

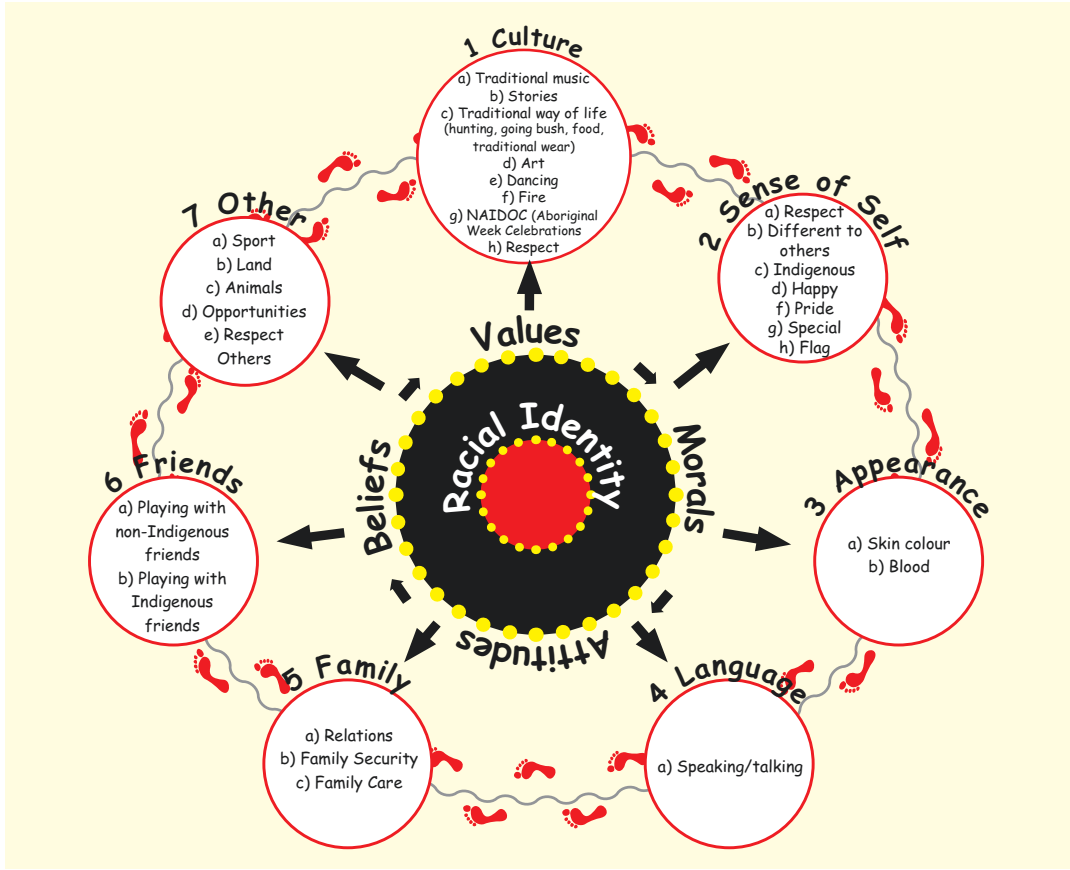

Fig. 11.1 Elements of racial identity for Aboriginal Australian children aged 8–12 years

consistently important for both age groups. For young children, culture was the most commonly reported element of their racial identity (see Fig. 11.1). In comparison, young people reported that having a strong, secure sense of self was the most important characteristic of their racial identity (see Fig. 11.2). In both Figs. 11.1 and 11.2, racial identity is considered the hub which is influenced by values, morals, attitudes and beliefs.

The most reported elements that comprise the racial identity for Aboriginal children include (a) respect, (b) difference, (c) Aboriginal, (d) Australian, (e) happiness, (f) pride, (g) feeling special and (h) Aboriginal flag. Being respectful of culture and gaining respect from others were important to the identity of young children (Kickett-Tucker, 2009):

> I like being Aboriginal because I meet like all different people and they all respect me. And respect your culture.

For other children, identity meant that they are different to others and this made them feel special:

> [It's good to be Aboriginal] because you are different to everyone else and you're not the same
> I'm different to everyone else. It makes me feel special.
> … it's good to be Aboriginal… It makes me feel happy
> Aboriginal flag … Aboriginal people… I'm not alone… I'm not like Chinese people or anyone else. I'm just Aboriginal. (Kickett-Tucker, 2009)

The most reported elements of racial identity for Aboriginal youth however are (a) pride about self; (b) shame, "having no shame to be yourself"; (c) appraisals from others, "how people

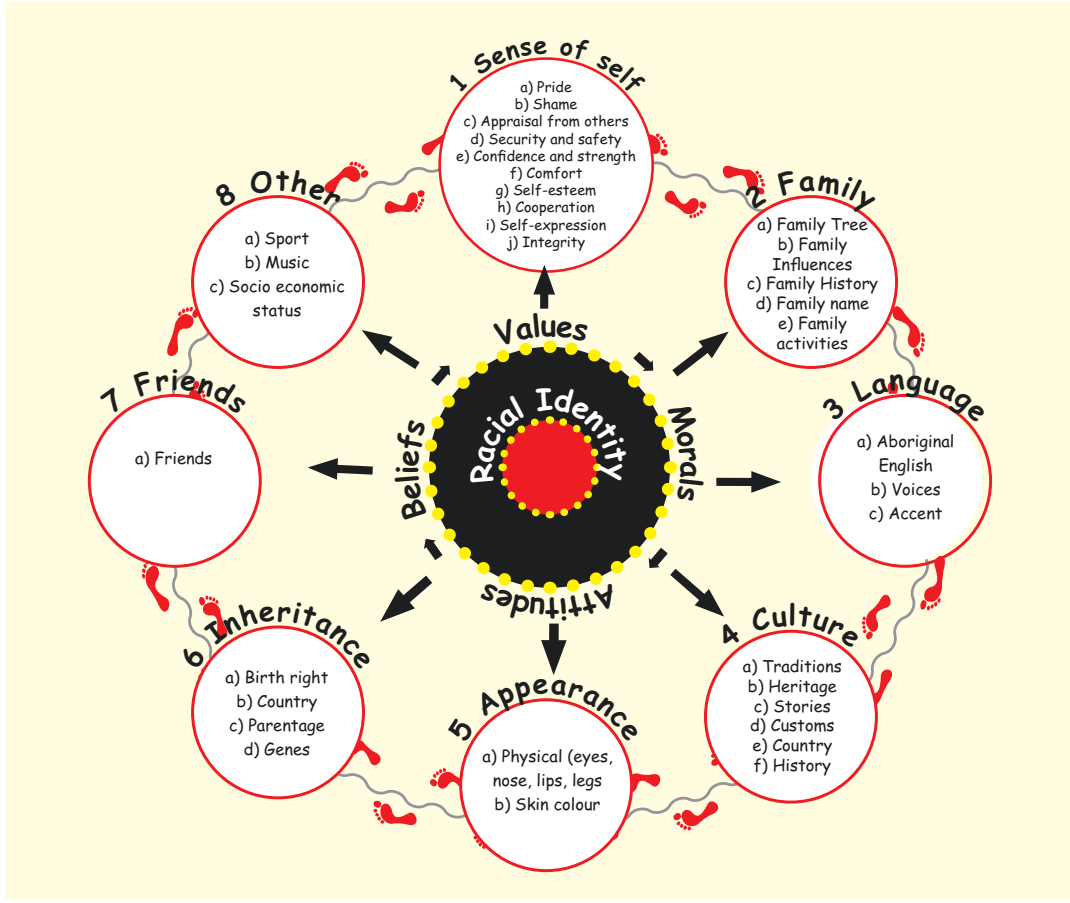

Fig. 11.2 Elements of racial identity for Aboriginal Australian youth aged 12–17 years

see you", "how you live", "how others perceive you"; (d) security and safety, "you feel secure", "you feel safe and part of the community"; (e) confidence and strength, "show others strength", "[be] self-confident"; (f) comfort, "being comfortable with it [racial identity]"; (g) self-esteem, "show others self-esteem [about identity]"; (h) cooperation, "teamwork"; (i) self-expression; and (j) integrity, "you are who you say you are".

The most valued item of Aboriginal identity for children is culture, consisting of traditional foods, music, stories, traditional way of life, art, dance, fire, National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebrations (NAIDOC) and respect for culture. Of particular importance to young children are traditional ways of life as these appeared more regularly than other items. Traditional ways of life included going bush, hunting, preparing and consuming traditional foods such as kangaroo meat, goanna, emu and damper. For youth however, culture is the fourth most valued item of their racial identity.

Family is the fifth most important contributor to the racial identity of young children and the second most important contributor to youth's racial identity. According to youth, family is important because "[you find] your background from belonging [to family] and this is how you find your identity". Language is the fourth most valued component of racial identity for children and ranked third for youth.

Identity Development in Two Worlds

Belonging to a minority community bears many challenges to one's identity, and for Australian Aboriginal people, there are two major challenges: (1) identity conflict and (2) coping with racism and discrimination. First, Aboriginal identity is impacted by two realities, one that is private and the other that is public (Beckett, 1988). What this means is that Aboriginal people, particularly those residing in urban areas, may develop an identity for the wider society and another for their own community. Grieves (2008) says that urban Aboriginal people have deeply held values that may be in direct conflict with modern, Western society and that often urban Aboriginal values are not recognised, articulated or respected. In fact, if we examine anthropological literature, urban Aboriginal identity is portrayed as not as authentic as identities of Aboriginal people living in remote areas or those who practice traditional ways of living. This is because external others liken such characteristics of Aboriginal identity to their perceptions of the "noble, primitive savage" (Broome, 2001; Kampmark, 2012). Unfortunately, this practice whereby external "expert" others determine Aboriginal identity continues today and this has a cancerous, sustained impact on the identity and wellbeing of Aboriginal adults, their children, families, kin and community. The result for many Aboriginal people is that they begin to believe and behave how they are being described and labelled and sometimes resign themselves to a state of "normal":

> After a life of continual stereo-typing, negative or inappropriate treatment by the dominant culture often goes unrecognised or becomes the 'norm' of an Aboriginal person's life (Coffin, 2007, p. 22)

When we consider urban Aboriginal children's identity, we find that it is confronting even at a young age because they have an awareness they are different from their non-Aboriginal peers (Coolwell, 1993; Sykes, 1994). This awareness is very prominent during the early years of attending non-Aboriginal schools, and as they grow older, they become more aware of their Aboriginality (Coolwell, 1993). Aboriginal youth, however, may be confronted with a conflict regarding their identity (Dudgeon & Oxenham, 1989; Partington & McCudden, 1992) and tend to be identified as having low or unfavourable self-esteem and more likely to suffer from an identity crisis (Coolwell, 1993; Dudgeon & Oxenham, 1989; Partington & McCudden, 1992; Sykes, 1994). This is because social and cultural pressures and expectations arise from both Aboriginal and mainstream surroundings and can pose significant challenges for Aboriginal young people. An example is that of education whereby Aboriginal youth and children enter a mainstream school and attempt to belong to the system that is alienating to their own values, beliefs and morals. Howard (1998) points out that Aboriginal children will continually ask themselves, "who am I?" Secondly, Aboriginal people whose racial identity may have been impacted by past trauma and who have low self-esteem may also possess limited coping strategies.

In a study of urban Aboriginal children (Kickett-Tucker, 2009) and youth who reported low levels of salience and knowledge about their racial identity, they also reported low self-esteem. In some of these cases, children who reported racist incidents (i.e. predominantly name-calling from a non-Aboriginal child at school) usually exercised only one strategy for dealing with the perpetrator, i.e. either to walk away (passive) or confront them using a physical act such as hitting or shoving. These reactions are supported by Johnson (2005) who asserts that limited racial coping strategies are indicative of low self-esteem. Unfortunately though, social and emotional struggles (mental wellbeing) are considered a major catalyst for many social, psychological and physical problems associated later in life for Aboriginal people. This has been recognised by all Australian governments in the last two decades who have acknowledged that Aboriginal Australians are

the most disadvantaged citizens across all socio-economic indicators including primary health indicators (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In fact, Aboriginal Australians are one of the most disadvantaged Indigenous populations in the world (e.g. Cooke et al., 2007).

Prejudice, Racism and Discrimination

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, 1969) defines racism as:

> Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. (p.2)

Many academics suggest that the use of the term "race" should be abandoned because the term refers to "an ideological construct, not an empirical category; as such it signifies a set of imaginary properties of inheritance which fix and legitimate real positions of social domination and subordination" [Cohen cited in Hollinsworth, 2006, p. 27]. Nevertheless, the concept has been ingrained in Australian government policy, legitimising the treatment of Aboriginal people, and has become a "lived experience" for Aboriginal Australians and has had an intergenerational traumatic impact on them (Bolt, 2009). The way the "primitive Aborigine" construct provided justification for the marginalisation and disadvantage of Aboriginal people in Australian society is beyond comprehension. It is based purely on an "inferiority-superiority binarism" and on a belief that Aboriginal people were "inherently inferior in terms of culture, intellect and genetics" (Bolt, 2009).

Racism allows for the dominant group to justify, validate and often legalise the rights and privileges they experience in a society. The privileged voice is a prime tool to control and to display power and supremacy in the Western world. In the West, the Eurocentric view dominates and supports a worldview where repeated efforts of silencing and marginalising of voices of Aboriginal people and other races continue.

Berman and Paradies (2008) identified racism at three levels which are interrelated and often overlap in practice: internalised racism, interpersonal racism and institutionalised/ systemic racism. Internalised racism refers to the acceptance of attitudes, beliefs or ideologies by members of stigmatised ethnic/racial groups about the inferiority of one's own ethnic/racial group. Interpersonal racism refers to interactions between people that maintain and reproduce avoidable and unfair inequities across ethnic/racial groups, and systemic racism refers to requirements, conditions, practices, policies or processes that maintain and reproduce avoidable and unfair inequalities across ethnic/racial groups.

Although prejudice and other forms of discrimination are emotionally upsetting for the sufferers, they become racism when it is supported and formalised by government laws and regulations and enforced by community attitudes and actions (Awofeso, 2011). Institutionalised racism has stronger likelihood of resulting in sustained adverse impact on the health, wellbeing and social standing of victims, and the impact often becomes enduring, ongoing and intergenerational.

Racism in Australia

Aboriginal people have been "by far the most 'outsider' group in Australian society" (Angelico cited in Awofeso, 2011). Aboriginal Australians are constantly challenged in the process of developing their "racial identity". The voices of the Government have always been dominated by people of White, Anglo-Saxon background. Aboriginal people have little representation and participation at the decision-making level:

> Because of our social position we [non-Aboriginal people] have the power to silence or interpret other people's voices and culture. (Howard, 2016, p. 61)

Case Study 1 illustrates this point in the context of Magistrate silencing the rights of an Aboriginal person.

Case Study 1: "Hard to See that Darkie"

Racist stereotypes continue to persist in Australian's minds, even if they are Magistrates, as the following story illustrates:

A man struck a woman with his car while she was lying on the ground in a parking lot. He was told by bystanders that she was drunk and would be okay. The man proceeded on his journey with the woman left on the pavement where she later died. In the Magistrate's Court, the man received an AUD $400 fine and was allowed to keep his driver's licence. In sentencing, the Magistrate said: *"It's clearly the case that the Aboriginal person in the dark on the bitumen or other places is extremely hard to see…It's easy to imagine how such an accident could happen"*. (italics added) (Korff, 2017, available at https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/racism-in-aboriginal-australia#toc11)

Other examples of racism in Australia include the study by Dunn, Forrest, Pe-Pua, Hynes, and Maeder-Han (2009) who undertook a telephone survey of 5056 residents in Queensland and New South Wales and gathered data on "racist attitudes". The rates of everyday racism experienced by Aboriginal Australians, those born overseas and those who speak a language other than English (LOTE) often double those for the nonindigenous, Australia-born and non-LOTE respondents, who experienced much higher rates of all types of racism (Dunn et al., 2009).

Paradies and Cunningham (2009) assessed racism across several dimensions in an urban Indigenous context by using the Measure of Indigenous Racism Experience (MIRE). They found that 70 per cent of the study participants experience interpersonal racism in employment and public settings. Of the 312 respondents, one-third had high levels of internalised racism, while two-thirds acknowledged the existence of systemic racism. Males are more likely than females to experience racism while engaging in sporting, recreational or leisure activities and from the police, security personnel and lawyers or in a court of law.

Sixty-three per cent of the respondents in a study conducted in Adelaide experienced racism often or very often in at least one setting; proportions reporting regular racism were similar for men (65%) and women (62%), particularly within the justice and education systems (Ziersch, Gallaher, Baum, & Bentley, 2011). One hundred fifty-three Aboriginal people were interviewed, and data on self-reported experiences of racism (average regularity of racism across a number of settings, regular racism in at least one setting) were reported. Regular racism experience led to poor mental health.

Mellor (2003) conducted a qualitative study of 34 Koori Indigenous Australians to investigate racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The data indicated that racism was pervasive in Australian society. Participants agreed that non-Aboriginal people hold negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people and that stereotypes become the norm and are generalised by individuals and the media. "Verbal racism, through name-calling, insults, and other remarks that are direct and indirect, purposefully racist and occasionally unintentionally racist, is widely reported" (Mellor, 2003, p.483). Evidence shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are frequently subjected to racially based bullying. An analysis of calls to Kids Help Line by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated that bullying was often racially based (Dobia & O'Rourke, 2011). Bullying of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children also appeared to be more frequent and more severe than that reported by non-Aboriginal callers. The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) found that 22% of 12–17 year-olds reported experiencing racism in the 6 months prior to the survey and that 19% of those who had experienced racism were at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties (Zubrick et al., 2004).

Kickett-Tucker (2009), in her urban-based study, found that 1 in 3 children aged 8–12 years reported verbal racist attacks at school. In most cases, Aboriginal children's responses were passive such that they walked away from the perpetrator(s), but for 10-year-old males, their reaction was aggressive, which then placed them in another cycle of victimisation and marginalisation.

A rural study in a Western Australian town revealed 75% of Aboriginal children, and young people aged 11–17 years experienced racism and did not want people to be racist to them. Similarly, 74% also said they were too scared to walk around the town. Some of the personal experiences show the extent of racism in their hometown:

> I think it's okay living in ABC[4] town, but I feel as though there is still a lot of racism…especially to the Elders. Hard with racism but you have to push through it and try your best in everything you do. I want ABC town to be a safe environment with no drugs and alcohol so that people can feel safe and we can walk around without feeling scared. It's boring because there's nothing in ABC town that help them pick their life up and rebuild their life.
>
> But I find ABC town to be a bit racist because whenever I do in a store the shopkeeper always follows me.…a lot of racism. Experienced it first hand at cinema, sports and in shops up town (been followed by security).
>
> Aboriginal children find it hard to live in ABC town without being shown act of racism. Aboriginal people get treated differently sometimes by others and police officers or even shop keepers. ABC town used to be a peaceful town but now it is very different.

Implications of Prejudice, Racism and Discrimination on Identity Development

It is important to examine the impact of racism on children and youth because adult identities are beginning to develop early in adolescent life. It is often said that a healthy start to life is a determinant of adult wellbeing and importantly it is the critical time that children and particularly youth begin to interpret their social worlds in order to bring meaning to their sense of belonging and to maintain their wellbeing. As Wu, Noh, Kaspar, and Schimmele (2003) point out, "…there are time points where a child maybe more vulnerable to the negativity created by discrimination than at others". Additionally, racial discrimination has been found to be significantly associated with a reduction of positive affect, sense of wellbeing and increased childhood depression (Study, 2008). Case Study 2 illustrates the impact of racism on a young 3-year-old Aboriginal child.

> **Case Study 2: "She Tried to Scrub Her Body to Remove Her Black Skin"**
>
> A 3-year-old Aboriginal girl who was traumatised after she was racially abused in a shopping centre tried to scrub her body to remove her black skin.
>
> Samara was in a queue with her mother when another mother and her two daughters began to verbally abuse the young girl, making comments about her black skin.
>
> "I asked the woman what she meant by the comment and then one of the woman's young daughters screwed up her face, she pointed at Samara and said 'you're black and black is ugly'", recalls her mother.
>
> Samara became upset and started to cry. She refused to attend Aboriginal dance classes and starting taking baths daily in a bid to scrub off her black skin.
>
> "She was requesting to bath every day and she was soaping up to make herself look white until her skin was red", says her mother.
>
> She had her Aboriginal dance classes to attend but she didn't want to attend them. I asked her why and she said, 'because black is ugly'. (Korff, 2017)

Continual negative forces such as racism have systematically undermined Aboriginal children and youth's racial identity. If racism is unchecked

[4]Fictional name used.

in the community, it may have a long-lasting impact which subsequently impacts mental health and wellbeing, as was the case in the rural study of ABC town in Western Australia where racism was the most reported issue by Aboriginal children and young people aged 11–17 years. The study found that one-third (33%) of the participants had high or very high levels of psychological distress, with 13% of these identified with very high levels. These results are concerning because a score within the "very high" category usually indicates the need for professional help. The impact is blatantly obvious to Aboriginal children and youth who report the following outcomes of racism:

> Hard to accomplish an education.
> I feel like as a young Aboriginal person we aren't heard. We are also targeted more.
> People don't understand what it's like to be Aboriginal and the pain we feel and what we've been through.
> … I stick to myself and close family…
> You can't do anything....

Aboriginal identity is linked to self-esteem and wellbeing particularly among "low status and minority group members" (Corenblum, 2014). If we turn this around, we see that for minority children and young people, a positive racial identity can result in positive self-esteem, academic success, low levels of substance and alcohol use and increased positive social behaviours. Importantly, racial identity and related self-esteem helps guard against racism, prejudice and discrimination (Corenblum, 2014). Further, those minority groups who speak their native tongue and participate in cultural events and celebrations are happier than others (Dockery, 2011).

Protective Factors of Aboriginal Identity upon Child Development and Wellbeing

Aboriginal identity helps individuals to evaluate themselves and to measure their self-esteem against specific sets and patterns of behaviour (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2002; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). The connection between Aboriginal identity and related self-esteem is important because it then generates a story and an image in an individual's mind about how and what to do as an Aboriginal person. In turn, these mind maps, stories and images influence their subsequent behaviour towards fulfilling their idea of Aboriginal identity. For children and young people, the maps generated of their identity and how they feel about their identity affects their life's journey and how they behave, react and thrive not only in their world but in the wider society.

Colquhoun and Dockery (2012) found the central aspect of the healthy and successful development of Aboriginal children is for them to learn about Aboriginal culture and understand and be assured that this culture and its connections have a place within the mainstream, Western cultural context.

Lohoar, Butera, and Kennedy (2014) found that if necessary social conditions are provided, culture can be a protective force for children, families and communities. They also documented that a community focus on child rearing, through a "collectivist" kinship system, interdependence, group cohesion and community loyalty, helps children to feel safe, happy and connected. This also generates a sense of security, trust and confidence in the knowledge that communities and families are always there to provide support. Aboriginal families and communities raise their children to be active contributors to the whole of community life, which is seen as a collective responsibility.

Communal child-rearing responsibilities enable children to feel safe, be confident in themselves, trust others, grow self-discipline and engage in learning via positive role modelling and, when things go wrong, enable them to engage a variety of people in their kinship who can help them overcome challenges (Lohoar et al., 2014).

A child's autonomy works as a protective factor in child safety and wellbeing. A sense of responsibility is seen as a priority for Aboriginal families and communities that is taught from a very early age in life. Aboriginal communities offer their children every opportunity to explore the world around them, to help them develop the

necessary skills to successfully negotiate their pathways to adulthood (Lohoar et al., 2014).

Spirituality helps families cope with challenges, and families and communities who engage in spiritual practices benefit from a greater sense of identity, and individuals are more likely to connect with, support and help protect one another. For instance, Chandler and Lalonde's (1998) work with Canada's First Nations youth showed that in communities where culture, heritage and identity were preserved, the suicide rates of youth were lower. In another country, cultural activities and preservation with Norway's Sami youth are related to improved mental health outcomes (Kvernmo & Heyerdahl, 2004).

The Aboriginal kinship system is an intricate system of relations between immediate and extended members of a clan/group/community. The kinship is a map that shows individuals who they belong to, where they belong (location) and the values, behaviours and traditions of the kin group. Kinships teach Aboriginal children and young people about their place in the world including identity, culture and language (Kickett-Tucker & Hansen, 2016):

> An Aboriginal person's racial identity is their truth and their truth lies in the connections they have to their kin and country. (Kickett-Tucker & Ife, 2018, p. 317)

Implications for Practice and Policy

> I observe many psychological strengths even in some of the most traumatised children. These include children's sense of autonomy early in life, their ability to understand psychological issues, their capacity for humour and their general creativity and playfulness evident in their love of drama, art and imagery. They have a strong sense of commitment to their siblings and family. The very fact that Aboriginal peoples are the oldest living culture and have survived the impact of colonization is testimony to their resilience and the Elders must have passed this on to the children of today. (*Milroy, cited in Zubrick* et al., 2004, *p.xxiv*)

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1997), education should ensure:

> … The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their **fullest potential**… [bold added]
> "…The development of respect for the child's own cultural identity, language and values…" (Article 29, 1997, p. 1.)

Keeping these human rights framework in mind, Table 11.1 suggests some pathways to develop the talents of Aboriginal children and young people given required respect to their identity, language and values.

Summary and Key Points

Identity is a complex phenomenon which is affected by multitude of social, cultural and environmental factors. A strong sense of identity is critical in a person's life which also impacts on the positive social and emotional wellbeing of that person. Australian Aboriginal peoples' identity development process, through many years of marginalisation, colonisation, racism and dispossessions, has been fragmented that has had severe implications on Aboriginal peoples' lives. A strong racial identity works as a protective factor and is critical for cultural safety and security. It also provides a base for positive self-esteem and prepares individuals by giving them practical skills of coping with racial prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. A strong racial identity gives the children and youth hope for a future, to be proud of who they are and where they belong, to be connected to something bigger than themselves and to be connected to a circle of strength, love and support. Thus, emphasis on developing a strong racial identity among Aboriginal Australian children and youth should receive paramount importance from an early stage of their lives which in turn will slowly dissipate all other physical and psychosocial adversities they encounter in their regular lives and promote healthy future for these kids. Numerous initiatives and supports can be initiated at primary and secondary schools and tertiary levels (suggested in Table 11.1), but the broader social, environmental and cultural disadvantages need to be considered and addressed at

Table 11.1 Contributors of racial identity and implications for 8–12-year-old and 13–17-year-old Aboriginal children and young people

Items that contribute to racial identity	What children said	Age group	Practical solutions
Culture	It is important to learn and know Aboriginal culture	8–12-year-old children	Incorporate activities such as traditional music, stories and storytelling, traditional ways of life, i.e. going bush and hunting, preparing and consuming traditional foods and wearing traditional clothes, art, dancing, fire, National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) For boys, incorporate traditional music, i.e. learning the didgeridoo Encourage participation in school- and community-organised NAIDOC activities For very young children (aged 7–9 years), read and learn "Dreaming" stories (in particular the Rainbow Serpent) in English and the local Aboriginal language(s) For very young children, develop the skills of children in the art of oral storytelling both in English and the local Aboriginal language(s)
	Aboriginal children want to respect Aboriginal culture Aboriginal children want non-Aboriginal children to respect Aboriginal culture	8–12-year-old children	Non-Aboriginal school and community to share and learn Aboriginal culture with Aboriginal children and the community side by side Involve the school and community in Aboriginal events such as NAIDOC activities. Invite Aboriginal people to the school and community to deliver and/or present cultural activities, such as storytelling, music, bush foods, etc. These activities must be regular and not only occurring during NAIDOC week activities but are part of the school and community yearly schedule
	Culture includes learning, knowing and experiencing customs such as traditional storytelling, knowing heritage, "country" (birthrights) and Aboriginal and family history	13–17-year-old youth	Include oral storytelling in teaching curriculum. For instance, instead of young people writing an essay that they provide an oral story of a topic using a variety of mediums such as dance, song, video documentary, play, poem, etc. Invite Elders or grandparents to activities to present an Aboriginal legend as an example of oral storytelling Provide opportunities for Aboriginal young people to explore their heritage, history and birthrights to "country" in class tasks and take-home assignments and during community events, etc. Include Aboriginal family members in class discussions and community activities about Aboriginal culture, history and heritage for instance. Or, if this is not always possible, assign homework or assignments that explore these topics so young people can work with family members at home

(continued)

Table 11.1 (continued)

Items that contribute to racial identity	What children said	Age group	Practical solutions
Identification as an Aboriginal Australian	Freedom and acceptance as an Aboriginal person: to be different to others to express an Aboriginal identity to feel happy to experience pride to feel special	8–12-year-old children	In order for children to experience freedom of their identity and be accepted, then the teaching and social environment at school and community events must be free from judgement and negative expectations and perceptions of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture In order to do this, the school and community must provide ample and regular opportunities for the free expression of Aboriginal culture and identity within the curriculum and activities For example, within the society and environment curriculum used in schools, the teacher may utilise the six Noongar seasons and how Noongar people used the seasons to understand the plants and animals of the bush
	Identification as an "Aboriginal" person means youth perceive they have the legitimate right to recognise and claim themselves as the first peoples of Australia Identifying as an Aboriginal person means youth can feel proud, receive positive appraisals from others, promote a sense of security and safety, provide feelings of comfort, experience positive self-esteem and provide opportunities for cooperation and self-expression, but it is vital that Aboriginal youth maintain integrity of their Aboriginal identity	13–17-year-old youth	True history of Australia needs to be told in schools. In particular, the Aboriginal history of Australia is important, and Aboriginal youth need to be taught this so that they continue to feel the legitimate claim as the Australia's First Nations In all subjects, opportunities must exist for Aboriginal youth to write, sing, dance and create positive images and messages about being Aboriginal. These opportunities must not only be available during special events such as NAIDOC week but should be developed as part of school curriculum and community activities. Children should be encouraged to learn and share about their history and culture so that they can freely express their racial identity in a positive and favourable way that will also ensure their integrity
Appearance – physical	Features such as skin colour that conform to the idea of what it is to "look like" an Aboriginal person	8–12-year-old children	Teach children that being Aboriginal is not about how you look but what you do, your family connections, your traditional lands, your values, beliefs (things that are unseen)
	Physical features such as the eyes, nose, lips and legs that are considered atypical for an Aboriginal person Need to consider youth who are biracial as this is a contentious issue among youth	13–17-year-old youth	Teach youth that being Aboriginal is not about how you look but what you do, your family connections, your traditional lands, your values, beliefs (things that are unseen)

(continued)

Table 11.1 (continued)

Items that contribute to racial identity	What children said	Age group	Practical solutions
Aboriginal language(s)	Opportunity to speak and talk an Aboriginal language	8–12-year-old children	Ensure the local Aboriginal language is taught in schools and community events by a local Aboriginal person Include more culturally relevant and geographically relevant resources in the school and community libraries, websites, etc. Have more incursions/excursions/activities focussed on culture and language (Aboriginal theatre groups or choirs, Elders telling oral stories, painting, weaving, etc.)
	Acknowledgement of Aboriginal-English as a language Aboriginal people have a voice and a distinct accent that is Aboriginal	13–17-year-old youth	Aboriginal-English must be recognised as a common form of language utilised among Aboriginal youth. This can be celebrated in the production of songs, comics, plays, stories, movies, etc. that are created and/or produced by Aboriginal youth. In this way, youth have the opportunity to express their voice as a distinct group and can promote what they want to say in the way that they want to say it. Encouragement and respect of the different accents of all Aboriginal groups must be highlighted through song, dance and yarning
Family and kin	A family and kinship system provides "unconditional" acceptance, security and care	8–12-year-old children	Schools and community must encourage families to attend and be part of their children's interests in Aboriginal culture and identity. This can be done by accessing families by utilising the expertise of the kinship systems, Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers at schools, Elders and grandparents Aboriginal families are well experienced and talented in a number of areas including and not limited to music, art, cooking, storytelling, speaking Aboriginal language(s), sport, etc. Other families have carers who have excelled in particular jobs and careers. The school and community need to access this expertise Other activities with families include developing family trees, history, mapping of traditional lands, building a bush garden, developing family albums and cooking traditional foods
	Family is the key to find where one belongs and consequently one's identity Family includes knowing the family tree, having positive family influences, knowledge of family history, having a distinct Aboriginal family surname and participating in activities with the family	13–17-year-old youth	Refer to practical solutions above for 8–12-year-old children However, with youth, it is imperative that activities at school and the community involve their families Youth need to learn about their family history because it links them to their identity and enables them to have a sense of ownership and belonging

(continued)

Table 11.1 (continued)

Items that contribute to racial identity	What children said	Age group	Practical solutions
Friends (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)	Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal friends are important for play and socialisation Non-Aboriginal friends are viewed as positive influences in which Aboriginal children can share culture	8–12-year-old children	Social scenarios need to be constructed so that Aboriginal children can share their culture with their friends and peers. An example is an Aboriginal child teaching a class in school or an activity in a public community event such as weaving a basket, yarning, painting or making a damper (Nanna's way)
Inheritance	Having birthrights to "country" and having parents who are Aboriginal	13–17-year-old youth	Aboriginal youth need to understand that there are some of their peers who are biracial and therefore don't always have two parents who are Aboriginal, but this does not mean that they are not Aboriginal. In order to provide this education, youth need opportunities to express this issue in a safe and secure environment and without repercussions Some practical solutions include showing family linkages of Aboriginal kin, while including other cultural members in the family. This can be done by developing a family map which can show the racial linkages of a family and where they were born. Children need to realise that Aboriginality is not about skin colour but it is about identification, culture, customs, heritage and upbringing

Adapted from Kickett-Tucker and Coffin (2011)

the same time. Most of all, Aboriginal children and youth are to be valued, respected, encouraged and empowered.

- Racial identity refers to an individuals' acknowledgement of sameness with a group of people who share commonalities.
- Racial identity is a complex phenomenon and is influenced by multitude of social, cultural, historical and environmental factors.
- In Australia, Aboriginal identity is related to self-identification being accepted by other Aboriginal people based on connection to kin, culture and country.
- Racially driven Australian policies and practices have created and still create feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, psychological stress and related illnesses over many generations.
- Racial discrimination results in the reduction of positive affect, sense of wellbeing and increased childhood depression.
- A strong racial identity provides a base for positive self-esteem and prepares individuals by giving them practical skills of coping with racial prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.

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