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HOW ABORIGINAL PEER INTERACTIONS in UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL SPORT SUPPORT ABORIGINAL IDENTITY

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■ Abstract

This ethnographic study tested the hypothesis that positive social interactions in sport will contribute positively to the Aboriginal identity of urban, Australian Aboriginal children. Nine male and female children aged 11-12 years were observed and interviewed. Significant responses were extracted and meanings were identified and grouped into various themes (Colaizzi, 1978). Interactions between Aboriginal participants were different from interactions with non-Aboriginal children and each provided different sources of information toward children's Aboriginal identity. The hypothesis was supported because the outcomes of interactions in sport among Aboriginal children enabled them to positively express their Aboriginal identity together in a group, speak an Aboriginal language and interact with each other in ways that further affirmed their Aboriginal identity. In comparison, non-Aboriginal peers contributed positively to Aboriginal student's self-esteem because of the positive feedback they provided in school sport. Furthermore, non-Aboriginal students' social interactions with Aboriginal peers were purposeful for making friends, acceptance and respect between each other.

■ Introduction

There is very little literature about Aboriginal children's racial identity particularly the role social interactions Aboriginal children engage in with other children and how these impact. The scope of the present literature is limited to the Aboriginal identity of adults (Cadigan, 1989; Coolwell, 1993; Goolagong-Cawley & Jarratt, 1993; Hawke, 1994), especially those forcibly removed from their families and raised on missions (HREOC, 1997). For this paper, racial identity will also be referred to as Aboriginal identity and consists of self-descriptions and self-evaluations Aboriginal children have towards their identities as Aboriginal people (Kickett-Tucker, 1999). Racial identity is one of many components that comprise a sense of self (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2002; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004) and it is "this single component [that] is consistently positively related to individual's self-esteem" (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004, p. 139).

The importance of understanding social interactions and their influence upon an individual's sense of self and self-esteem has been highlighted by several authors (Campbell, 1990; Cooley, 1970; Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1978, 1980, 1985; Hattie, 1992; James, 1890; Mead, 1934). James (1890) for instance, determined that a sense of self is comprised of four elements, of which the social self is influenced by the interactions engaged with "others". For the purpose of this study, the social self is dependent on social interactions and will therefore be highlighted. According to James (1890), the social self consists of the images projected by "others" with whom an individual has contact. "Others" refers to people as well as institutions that provide a source of information for Aboriginal identity including "generalised others" and "significant others". Generalised others may consist of members of the justice system, education, religious orders, tourism, media, general public, peer group(s), government and sport institutions. Significant others refers to those individuals that Aboriginal people deem as salient providers of information for their sense of self and self-esteem. Significant others therefore, may include school peers, teachers, friends, family, and sports role models. A sense of self is a "looking glass" where individuals concern themselves of the images they presented to "others" (Cooley, 1970). Individuals

engage in a cognitive process to assess the way they look towards others and the impression they are making of themselves. Information is provided by others to individuals who in turn use it to form and judge their sense of self. This feedback is considered to be the main source of information used in the processes of self-judgment (Cooley, 1970). For children however, the most critical element of a sense of self is not feedback, but reinforcement and modeling from others who they consider to be "significant" (Harter, 1978, 1980, 1985).

The descriptive component of a sense of self is termed self-concept and is formed by the interaction of trial and error, with which values, behaviours, roles and identities are learned. The importance of one's culture upon self-concept therefore, is vital to the development of racial identity, values, behaviours and roles. The identity for a collective group of people has an influence upon an individual self-concept and individual racial identity (Day, 1994; Dudgeon et al., 1990; Hattie, 1992; Issacs, 1988; Myers, 1979; Wright, 1985). Since an Aboriginal person is attached to the group by their racial identity, then essence of the group's identity impacts the individual's identity. This is not to say that all Aboriginal people all have the same identity, but rather it is argued that racial identity connects all Aboriginal people regardless of the community in which they belong.

Self-esteem is the evaluative component of sense of self and is formed from the "reflected appraisals" provided by others. Reflected appraisals are the attitudes and values held by others for an individual. Within these appraisals contain criteria that are employed by "significant others" to judge the individual and refer to both verbal and nonverbal feedback. Nonverbal feedback consists of body language, tone of voice, speech patterns and modeling, whereas, verbal feedback refers to reinforcement, praise, instruction and encouragement. The distinction between the two forms of feedback in reflected appraisals is important especially in the case of Aboriginal children because the communication protocols are often imbedded in non-verbal processes (Chadbourne, 1984; Partington & McCudden, 1992). According to Mead (1934), children internalise these criteria, then observe how significant others judge their own self and then regard their own self according to these reflected appraisals.

Sense of self is not only developed from experiences with significant others, but is also influenced by sources within the physical environment. Individuals react to signals within the environment so that they may behave in the manner appropriate for that environment. This is where social processes and cultural patterns are learned (Mead, 1934). Another source for sense of self are the evaluations individuals make of their own performance and achievements. In this process, individuals appraise their worth by utilising their "self-referent" (or internal) standards and values to assess

their own performances, attributes and capacities. Individuals also engage in another self evaluation, by comparing themselves with others using "external criteria". This is termed social comparisons and forms part of the sources individuals use principally to determine their sense of self in particular domains of achievement such as academia, sport, art, and music. In the case where individuals are children, they try to determine which interactions are significant and which are not by attempting to "weed out" irrelevant information and "sort" among relevant information. The "weed and sort" processes have a developmental nature and children aged 7-10 years are capable of comparing themselves against others, but it is not until they reach 11 or so that they begin to use it fully (Horn, 1985; Horn & Hasbrook, 1987).

Information from social engagements inform Aboriginal children about their sense of self, including their identity, self-concepts and self-esteem (Purdie et al., 2000). For urban Aboriginal people, their sense of self may be comprised of two Aboriginal identities because of their minority status in a western dominated society. Minority status in this paper refers to people who share a common cultural characteristic such as ethnicity, race, customs, language, or religion (Skutsch, 2004). Beckett (1988) goes on to state that urban Aboriginal people may possess a public and private identity. A public identity is presented to the western dominated society, whereas a private identity is presented to the Aboriginal community. It has been argued therefore, that urban Aboriginal people may develop two racial identities, and thereby they are more likely to develop a conflict (Dudgeon & Oxenham, 1989). What this means for children is that the Aboriginal community informs a child what it means to be Aboriginal, but that at the same time, the child also receives information from the wider community (via stereotypes and the like) and that these contributors may differ significantly at different points in time and at different locations. For example, in mainstream schools, Partington and McCudden (1992) argue that Aboriginal children who enter mainstream society via the education system may have problems with their Aboriginal identity because they may attempt to affiliate with several social groups whose members may expect conformity to their own values, behaviors and morals and which may differ considerably from those of urban Aboriginal social networks. Howard (1998) agrees such that the mainstream school environment is an inhibitor for the expression of Aboriginal children's "private" racial identity, which may result in confusion for the child in terms of the behaviors and morals needed towards the maintenance of a healthy sense of self. Howard (1998) goes onto to state that urban Aboriginal children may continually ask themselves and others, "who am I?"

The purposes of this study therefore, were to examine the interactions of urban Aboriginal children

in a given achievement domain and to explore the sources they used to determine and evaluate their racial identity. In keeping with the theme described by Beckett (1988), school sport was chosen as a platform for the construction and maintenance of a "public" racial identity. Sport was nominated because Aboriginal people consider it a valuable tool in their children's socialisation with each other (Atkinson, 1991; Health Department of Western Australia, 1989; HRSCATSIA, 1992) and with members of mainstream society (Coolwell, 1993; Goolagong-Cawley & Jarratt, 1993; Hawke, 1994; Perkins, 1993; Roberts & Rijavec, 1988). Moreover, participation in sport has been identified as a positive contributor to the sense of self of Aboriginal children (HRSCATSIA, 1992). In contrast, a "private" racial identity consists of the knowledge, beliefs and feelings attached to Aboriginal identity, family, heritage and Aboriginal culture (Coolwell, 1993; Day, 1994; Hattie, 1992; Kickett-Tucker, 1999).

We need to identify the salient sources as well as settings and individuals Aboriginal children rely on to develop and understand their sense of self. An understanding of this information will assist Aboriginal children to: (a) learn what and who impacts their knowledge and understanding of their Aboriginal identity and how to relate to this, (b) make sense of their world, (b) interact with others, (d) develop an understanding of prejudice and racism, and (e) develop appropriate racial coping strategies. The following paper therefore, will present the results of a study conducted with urban Aboriginal children aged 11-12 years and who attended a coeducational state school. Non-participant observations were conducted to explore the social interactions experienced in a school sport setting. In-depth personal interviews were also conducted and which examined the influence of social interactions upon Aboriginal children's sense of self.

■ Methods

Design

The following study is best described as qualitative research that was conducted in a naturalistic context, employed an interpretive paradigm and utilised ethnographic methodology. Ethical approval for this project was attained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University.

Non-participant observations were conducted in order to capture urban Aboriginal children's perspectives and experiences of school sport, including their perceptions of their sense of self. Observations of the students in the school sport setting were preceded and followed by the personal interviews. Interviews were conducted with students and significant others. In this study, significant others who were interviewed included class teachers and sport teacher of each

student, school principal, primary carer for each student and Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO) who are support staff for Aboriginal students. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants and will be used throughout this paper.

Participants

Participants were selected utilising purposeful sampling approaches (Sandelowski, 1995) and were consequently selected on the following criteria: (a) the parent(s) of the students were of Aboriginal descent, and (b) the students were involved in the school's sport program (that is, intra school sport, inter school sport and/or physical education).

Participants were aged 11-12 years, and were enrolled in Year 7 and 6. Five females and four males were participated and all of them resided in an urban suburb and attended the same coeducational public primary school. Eight of the nine participants were the eldest or second eldest siblings in their families. All but two students were presently involved in a club sport outside of school.

Research instruments

The data were collected from self-reports (personal interviews) and non-participant observations of urban Aboriginal children's experiences and perceptions of school sport. In order to obtain appropriate responses that were deemed accurate representations, the researcher developed rapport with participants over 16 months (4 months prior to data collection and 12 months during data collection) and collected and analysed data over a nine month period.

Interviews conducted with significant others, particularly AIEOs and carers, were performed in the same manner outlined for the Aboriginal students such that an interview guide was used and topics were explored in a conversational manner. For interviews conducted with non-Aboriginal interviewees (such as the Deputy Principal, class and sport teachers), the interview guide however was used in a more direct way whereby questions were asked word for word so that a direct response for each individual question was attained. All student interviews were conducted in the school setting. Interviews with significant others however, were conducted in an environment decided upon themselves and this mostly occurred on the front lawn of their home or in the school library. A written record regarding observations made by the researcher during and after the interviews was scribed into the Participant Interview Notes, Summary and Evaluation Form (PINSEF).

Non-participant observations were made of students as they engaged in school sport. The researcher observed each student during practice (physical education) and competition (intra and inter

school sport). Observations took place at the school grounds on the designated sporting fields during class time. Social interactions between the students and "others" in the sport setting were observed and were recorded by making descriptive field notes as well as retrospective comments (Evertson & Green, 1986) onto students' Personal Observation Record Sheet (PORS). Observations were made of: (a) the students and their overt behaviors; (b) the students' social interactions; (c) routines associated with sport, such as the game outcome and rules; (d) the social organisation of the sport and its setting; (e) any interpretations made by the researcher, and finally, (f) any unusual occurrences, such as injury (Adler & Adler, 1994; Denzin, 1989). Preceding the student observations, were the first set of student interviews. These interviews were subsequently analysed and particular attention was given to characteristics that described and highlighted students' sense and self and racial identity. Consequently these interviews then informed observations that related to, or further described students' sense of self and its characteristics. Observations which led to the researcher making an assumption of participants' sport competence, were subsequently tested with the relevant sports teachers for comparison and accuracy.

In this study, 24 formal observations were conducted over a period of four and a half months. Formal observations consist of those conducted during school sport sessions. Students were arranged in school sports sessions according to their classroom. The duration of observations differed depending on the session. For instance, the physical education session entailed no more than an average of 25 minutes duration, whereas the intra school sport session lasted one hour and the inter school sport sessions were an average of 1 hour and 45 minutes duration. A set of data for each individual participant consisted of a minimum of: (a) two interviews with the participant, (b) four individual interviews with four significant others (class teacher, sport teacher/coach, AIEW and carer) and, (c) three observations.

In all, 20 interviews were conducted with nine students and another 20 interviews were conducted with care givers and various school staff. The interviews were performed over a period of five months and varied in duration from 45 minutes to one and half hours. Interviews were transcribed and returned to interviewees for reliability and validation.

Pilot study

To test the assumptions and methods of data gathering employed in this research, a pilot study was conducted involving collection and analysis of a full series of data from a female Year 7 student. Two observations were conducted during physical education and intra school sport sessions. An initial interview was completed

after the observations. When pilot data were collected, two informal question sessions were employed with the pilot student regarding the appropriateness of the processes for the interview and observations. In particular, the following items were assessed by the pilot student for suitability for subsequent student interviews: (a) style, (b) duration, (c) format, (d) venue, (e) process and, (f) difficulty of questions.

The first interview conducted with each individual student was also tested to ensure suitability for that particular student because it was found that although students were classified in Year 6 or 7, most of them (all but three) were working at lower academic levels (Year 3 or Year 5), particularly for English and spelling. The interview questions therefore, were manipulated for each student to reflect their current academic level so they were able to comprehend the questions. The focus and content of the questions remained the same although the vocabulary reflected some alteration so that they student could understand what was being asked of them. An example question is: what club sports do you play? If this question was not understood by the student, then the words "club sports" were changed for example, and then the question was asked in the following way: "what sports do you play after school"?

For student interviews, items regarding sport were left until at least one or two sport observations were completed. The observations provided a basis for the researcher to validate what was observed and a basis for a "shared experience" between students and researcher, thus assisting in the establishment of rapport.

Data analysis

Data was generated from several sources for each participant: (a) self reports from the students including interview notes scribed on PINSEF, (b) interview responses from significant others, (c) field notes from observations recorded on PORS, and (d) researcher's journal. Field notes and information contained in the researcher's journal were reviewed, commented and classified into appropriate nodes on QSR NUD. IST, version 3.0.5 (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1995). Analysis of each item of data was performed in accordance with Colaizzi's (1978) steps:

1. Each set of data (transcripts, field notes and journal entries) were read twice so that the researcher had knowledge of all data sources in order to generate a full perspective of the phenomena.
2. Significant participant responses that directly related to the phenomena were extracted and coded using QSR NUD.IST. Direct responses were underlined and notes made in the margin of the transcripts. Significant responses included, but were not limited to: (a) memorable events or phrases, (b) a summation of events and/or people, (c) examples

of any emerging themes, (d) any negative responses or ones that contradict the researcher's ideas (i.e., researchers' thoughts, opinions and assumptions that emerged as a consequence of reading the data), and (e) a variation of any emerging themes (Riley, 1990).

3. Meanings were formulated by attempting to spell out the significance of each statement by way of "creative insight". Colaizzi (1978) stated that creative insight means to leap from what the participants say to what they mean. All sources of data were reviewed several times in order to develop meanings.
4. Meanings were formulated for each set of data and grouped into the relevant themes. The researcher's comments from each set of data were arranged into commonalities. Themes were then examined in the light of the original data to identify any discrepancies and to ensure relevant information from the original data was included.
5. A very detailed account of the themes and their meanings were prepared.
6. A detailed description of the structure of the phenomena was made.
7. The data were returned to the participants for verification in order to validate the construction of the themes and subsequent meanings. Any amendments or new information were included (Colaizzi, 1978).

Evaluations of students' sport and physical education performances and skill levels were assessed jointly by the researcher and students' respective sports teachers, thus adding to research validity and reliability. These assessments were based the collaboration of the researcher's observations and journal entries as well interviews conducted with sports teachers. Agreement was reached between the researcher and the teacher in regards to students' level of demonstrated sport and physical skills as well as their overall sport performance (particularly for inter and intra school competitions). In order to show rankings of Aboriginal students' skills and performances in school sport, comparisons were made with other students' skills and performances. These comparisons were also made jointly between the researcher and sports teachers.

■ Findings

The interactions in the school sport environment will be discussed in two parts. Firstly, the interactions Aboriginal students experienced with their non-Aboriginal peers will be presented and secondly, the interactions performed among Aboriginal students themselves are detailed. In particular the common characteristics, including the nature and role of the interactions within each group are provided.

Common techniques of peer interactions with non-Aboriginal students

Aboriginal students provided verbal feedback in the form of instruction to non-Aboriginal peers whilst participating in sport. Aboriginal students demonstrated skills to non-Aboriginal students so that they could complete tasks. In contrast, Aboriginal students were recipients of verbal praise from non-Aboriginal students.

Instruction and assistance

The instruction and assistance provided to non-Aboriginal students were consistently supplied by Aboriginal students who: (a) were competent at sport, (b) held or had previously held a position of authority (captain) in their sport teams or, (c) possessed leadership qualities. The instruction and assistance was provided during structured games conducted for inter school and intra school competitions and Chris, Carl, Heather and Kellie (all 12 years of age) were most likely to assist non-Aboriginal student peers. It was also revealed, however, that Aboriginal students who perhaps were not as competent at sport (such as Wendy and Trevor) also assisted non-Aboriginal peers. Trevor and Wendy (both 11 years of age) for instance, helped others in sport also but it was not given as consistently as the more sport competent Aboriginal students. Trevor for example, assisted a non-Aboriginal student named Jordan (11 years of age) kick a football:

I try and tell 'em how to kick, kick [inaudible] put the ball on ya hold the ball and then just drop it but you gotta drop it where how [inaudible] you don't you don't just drop the ball and kick it. Or drop the ball on your foot and then you kick you kick you kick your foot. So they done that and then it and he went coonyie way (meaning silly or clumsy). And then I told him to do it again, do it again do it again til they got better and better (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 193).

No observations of instruction and assistance were recorded for Sean (11 years of age) and Taylor (11 years of age).

Physical interactions

Verbal communications with non-Aboriginal students were often accompanied by overt physical interaction such as wrestling, chasing, play fighting and messing with another's hair and rubbing and patting each other's heads. This form of interaction was mostly demonstrated by males and performed prior and after physical education and intra school sport sessions. Three of the four Aboriginal males performed some form of physical interaction. Physical interactions were

displayed while the teacher/coach was organising the sport session and Chris and Carl instigated the physical interactions toward other sport competent male peers. Sean however only retaliated against non-Aboriginal peers' physical interactions.

During football skill activities and modified football games, Carl displayed a greater intensity than other Aboriginal males when tackling, wrestling and play fighting. The intensity he displayed was not targeted at non-Aboriginal males, but rather at all males. The display of assertive sport skills (tackling) and social skills (play fighting, wrestling) were often confused with rough play and his peers (especially non-Aboriginal peers) discouraged the intensity of Carl's physical contact and thereby their participation. Carl was well aware of his physical impact and the reaction from non-Aboriginal students:

Interviewer: What are things you don't like? What is the biggest things you dislike? Or people or things or whatever?

Carl: This boy.

Interviewer: Which boy?

Carl: Heaps of em, they're stupid.

Interviewer: They're stupid? Are these little Wadjallah (non-Aboriginal) boys or Nyoongar (Aboriginal people of south-west of Western Australia) boys?

Carl: Wadjallahs.

Interviewer: They're all Wadjallah boys. How many of them are there?

Carl: About 10.

Interviewer: 10? Are they all at this school?

Carl: Yeah.

Interviewer: And why don't you like them?

Carl: I don't know they don't, they don't want me to play footy and all that, they think I'm too rough (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 194).

It is clear that Carl is aware of his display of "rough play" and the consequences of his actions because he has stated his peers didn't want him to play football with them. During inter school sport competitions, males praised one another by patting each other on the back and rubbing each others' heads with a closed fist. At times, they would verbally praise one another and the sport coach (Mr Davin) encouraged this form of positive interaction.

Consequently, the football team modeled their coach's behaviour. Aboriginal females rarely engaged in physically interactive acts like their male counterparts, rather they possessed a more verbal approach (such as providing instructions and feedback) when interacting with non-Aboriginal students. Sport competent Aboriginal females Kellie and Heather did not initiate social interactions with non-Aboriginal students, unless they were their friends. Heather and Kellie interacted mostly with each other off the field. During intra and inter school netball games, both Heather and Kellie interacted with Netti (a non-Aboriginal girl) and sometimes Netti accompanied them off the field. Miss Quill (physical educator) made the comment that Heather and Kellie believed they were better than other students and thereby they did not have to extend themselves to interact and make friends unless they wanted to:

Miss Quill: They [Heather and Kellie] talk a lot and they think they are you know?

Interviewer: Just good?

Miss Quill: Yeah and they sort of run the team and if they weren't in the team they wouldn't sort of win attitude (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 195).

Less sport competent females (Taylor and Wendy) interacted both on and off the sport field with a best friend only. Taylor and Wendy rarely instigated social contact with school peers who were not their best friend but, they were more willing than Heather and Kellie to accept fellow non-Aboriginal students' efforts of friendly interaction.

Feedback

Non-Aboriginal students' responses to Aboriginal students' performances in sport consisted of general, positive, verbal feedback such as "oh, they're good" (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 196) and which was usually given directly after a performance. Feedback from non-Aboriginal students was common for sport competent Aboriginal students (such as Carl, Chris, Kellie and Heather) whom were applauded regularly for their performances. Aboriginal students who displayed average or below average level of sport competence (such as Trevor, Taylor and Wendy) received feedback only from their friends. Trevor said for example:

Some of my friends. They like, cheer me on when I when I for a hoop in the basketball. When I win, when I get a home run, when I get a homer, when I hit the tee ball, when I play soccer and I score (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 196).

Sean did not report any positive feedback from non-Aboriginal students and observations supported this.

Aboriginal students provided similar positive feedback to non-Aboriginal students however, this occurred mostly during inter school sport competitions and were a common practice for sport competent Aboriginal males. For instance, Aboriginal males engaged in positive, encouragement and praise toward non-Aboriginal males but usually this was targeted toward the team as a whole and comments included "come on you boys", "let's go" and "good job" (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 197). Similar communications were not reported nor observed with Trevor and Sean. Furthermore, social interaction off the sport field was limited to Aboriginal students and Chris, Sean, Carl, Stuart, Trevor and Bob (who comprised the Aboriginal members of the inter school football team) interacted with one another off the football field. They played kick to kick, chasey, joked, laughed, pushed each other and talked but rarely interacted socially with non-Aboriginal peers from the football team.

For Aboriginal females, positive feedback received from non-Aboriginal students was the most consistent form of interaction. Praise was often given for above average individual performances on the sport field and was often directed only at Heather and Kellie. During a game of intra school tee ball for instance Heather reported:

When we was playing against the Year 5's, me and Kellie hit a big one And they were saying "*oh they're good they put all their power in it [batting]*" [italics added]. [For instance] ... Kellie was standin' in the middle being the pitcher ready to get her out. And every time Kellie got them out that girl said '*Ob ... Mrs Zenith can't you just move Kellie?*' [italics added]. She was sooking, cause we kept on getting her out (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p.197).

Kellie claimed she received praise from non-Aboriginal students because "some of the Wadjallah kids think that I'm better because like if I get a home run or anything they cheerin' and shoutin' and all that" (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 197). In contrast, Aboriginal females who were less sport competent (Taylor and Wendy) did not report any positive and verbal feedback from their non-Aboriginal students in regard to their sport performances. Observations did not reveal verbal comments either.

Collectively, Aboriginal females employed group feedback similarly displayed amongst the males, but it was not demonstrated as consistently. Also, competent female Aboriginal athletes (Heather and Kellie) were more likely to cheer non-Aboriginal females who were also competent at sport. Like their male counterparts, females gave general feedback (in the form of cheering) which was directed at the team as a whole and was employed mostly during inter school sport competitions, rather than during intra school sport

and physical education sessions. Heather, Taylor and Wendy rarely gave feedback to individual students for their performances. Although Aboriginal females verbally encouraged their team mates whilst on the sport field, social interactions were confined to their friends off the sport field. Just like male Aboriginal students, the Aboriginal females' interactions off the field were experienced with other Aboriginal friends.

Cooperation and sharing

Taylor and Wendy (less competent at sport than Heather and Kellie) were more likely to seize an opportunity during physical education classes to assist their non-Aboriginal students and cooperate with them. Interaction however, was often instigated by non-Aboriginal students since Taylor and Wendy possessed quiet and reserved personalities (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 198). A shy or reserved personality was determined by teachers and based on the student's behaviours. A student with a shy or reserved personality expressed consistent difficulty initiating and maintaining relationships with peers at school. Observations of students participating in sport verified teachers' judgments of the students' personalities. Mrs Curry (Aboriginal student support worker) for instance, reported the following example of Taylor's shyness which impacted her ability to initiate cooperation and sharing during competition:

I'm sure if she had a bigger voice, and she could yell, "here here here I am". They would throw the ball to her more often and and she could, play really well but, at the moment she just sort of, stands back (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 199).

Heather and Kellie however, were more likely to assist others when they were competing in intra and inter school sports competitions. They offered assistance by demonstrating to non-Aboriginal peers where to position themselves so that they could participate fully in the game. Heather for example, adjusted the height of the tee to the height of the batter, so that the ball was hit. Additionally, verbal instructions were given in order to execute a skill correctly, for example Kellie urged a non-Aboriginal female to step closer to the goal ring so that she had a better opportunity to score a goal for the team.

Similarly, Aboriginal males often instigated cooperation and sharing with non-Aboriginal students and these interactions were common during physical education and inter school sport competitions. Trevor however, was the recipient of assistance from non-Aboriginal members of the school football team. At the commencement of the Eagles Cup competition (Australian Rules Football school sport competition), Trevor did not possess football boots or the correct school football uniform and his non-Aboriginal team

mates borrowed boots, shorts and socks to ensure Trevor's participation in the inter school football games. Football coach, Mr Davin reported the following scenario involving Trevor:

I think you know the kids [non-Aboriginal team mates] been pretty good. They've lent shorts and things like that and then his his Mum's sort of like you know got somehow and got some shorts and things and that for him. And I think that made him made him a little bit more happier too you know? But the boots were the real problem. I think you know it's got nothing to do with you know like that he couldn't get 'em, like the kids in the team sort of helped out which was really good. You know when he when he didn't have the the socks that was required they went and got 'em and give it to him (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 200).

It was a common practice amongst the more confident Aboriginal students to ensure that the majority of players in their teams experienced active participation during games, particularly for intra and inter school sport competitions. In particular, Kellie and Chris instigated and actively sought to share the ball (during team sports) amongst all their team members especially those who wouldn't have had the opportunity to be a part of the game. During inter school competitions, Kellie and Chris played in positions where they had the opportunity to handle the ball or be a part of the play more than their team mates and in doing so, they were in a position to control the play and share the ball. Kellie held a key position of centre for the majority of the inter and intra school netball games. Her position allowed her to control the movement of the ball and thereby the degree of involvement of her team mates. Kellie was also nominated by her fellow peers for captain, giving her responsibility to prepare and organise the sport environment. In Chris's situation, he assumed the centre half back position and his role was to prevent the ball from reaching his opponents' offensive end. In doing so, Chris had to read the movement of the ball from the centre bounce and then instruct his team mates to position themselves in such a way as to prohibit the ball reaching the opponents' goal square (offensive end). Football coach, Mr Davin said the following about Chris:

He can actually get kids to do things more easily than other kids he's sort of like can make a kid play a little better that's not normally that that good or he can get a kid involved that not normally involved (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 201).

Less confident Aboriginal athletes (such as Carl, Sean, Trevor, Wendy and Taylor) also shared with team members, but were not the instigators since most

times they were not in control of the situation on the sport field like Kellie and Chris. There were exceptions however, when Aboriginal students were nominated by their coach as the captain of their respective team and thereby somewhat in control of their team mates. Chris, Carl and Trevor for instance, were nominated as captains (on separate occasions). They played a leadership role which included sharing and cooperating with team mates. In one of the inter school football games, Carl was not selected as the captain, but at the end of the game, he was the only student who encouraged the team together to conduct the end of game cheers and hand shakes (with opponents). Because the nominated captain had not experienced the customary protocol, Carl appropriated the captain's role in order to perform the end of game protocols. The only situation where sharing was not performed was when Heather would not substitute herself from the goal shooting position and share the position with others. These events occurred during intra and inter school netball games and were evident when members of the female netball team had to make substitutions themselves. In physical education sessions however, students were encouraged to share with one another since the sport teacher intervened and controlled the environment.

Common techniques of peer interaction among Aboriginal students

Interactions among Aboriginal students can be described as jovial since Aboriginal students frequently giggled, made jokes and laughed with each other. When Aboriginal peers interacted with other Aboriginal students in sport they did not overtly praise each other's individual performances but rather acknowledged it using tools such as teasing, jokes and laughter. These verbal forms of interaction are the primary social mechanisms used by Aboriginal students to interact with other Aboriginal peers in sport. Furthermore, the social groups formed among Aboriginal students in sport were very insular and restrictive since they mostly interacted among each other. These findings will now be presented in more detail.

Teasing

Teasing was a common interactive tool used to assert one's competence at sport to other Aboriginal students. Teasing referred to verbal attacks which were made in relation to a game or activity outcome. The purpose of teasing was to torment and gain a reaction from peers and frequently consisted of remarks such as "ahah", "you lost", "you're winyarn (meaning weak)", "I'm boss (the leader)", "I'm 'orse (meaning the best)" and "reject" (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 204). If an individual lost a competition, or his/her team experienced a loss, then he or she was teased by opponents. For example,

winners teased those whom they had overcome in competition, and sport competent Aboriginal students (Carl, Chris, Sean, Heather and Kellie) often engaged in teasing episodes during and after sport competitions. These events occurred during physical education and intra school sport sessions and as such teasing was not observed during inter school sport competitions. After conducting interviews it was revealed that teasing did not occur during inter school competitions because students stated all school team members competed and represented the school together and teasing was not appropriate form of interaction. In other words, there was no need to tease each other since all the students were on the same team and together they were all winners or all losers:

Interviewer: Well what's the best thing about playing inter school sport against another school?

Kellie: Because like you don't see that school everyday and they don't torment you and all that.

Interviewer: Mmm.

Kellie: Like when you like like say you lost.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kellie: They they don't tease ya as much as like when you're playing intra school (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, pp. 204-20).

A critical finding is that teasing was restricted to specific individuals and was more common among males. All Aboriginal males in this study teased one another, particularly those who were competent at sport. Interestingly, students who were related to each other (i.e., cousins) were targeted and teased even if the relations were not competent at sport. In comparison, sport competent Aboriginal females only teased their friends but not other Aboriginal females and in this study only Heather and Kellie teased and it was often directed at each other.

Jovial approach

Both Aboriginal males and females interacted with Aboriginal peers in a jovial fashion. This was evident in the methods they utilised to communicate with one another. For instance, Aboriginal students often told jokes, laughed, giggled and made fun of each other. Also, their body language showed that they were comfortable and relaxed when interacting with other Aboriginal students, since they were smiling more often and they presented themselves in a loose fashion rather than a rigid fashion as when interacting

with non-Aboriginal students. A loose fashion can be described as head up, shoulders open, arms swaying and back relaxed. All Aboriginal students participated in some jovial form of interaction, regardless of their level of physical and/or sport competence, or their reserved or shy personality. Female students smiled and giggled, whereas, males performed a physical act such as pushing, wrestling, play fighting and chasing to coincide with the comments they made to each other.

Aboriginal vocabulary utilised

Aboriginal students spoke common Nyoongar (local Aboriginal community) words during their verbal interactions with other Aboriginal students, including themselves (i.e., self talk). During a football activity for instance, Carl did not execute a correct handball to his team mate. Carl immediately said, "coonyie hand ball" (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 206), meaning a silly or clumsy hand ball. Other words often used included winyarn (meaning poor, hopeless or weak), Wadjallah (term used to identify an Anglo-Australian person), mundung (referring to being popular and/or good looking) and nyorn (meaning to feel sorry for another).

Aboriginal-English words were also used during interactions among Aboriginal students and often the word "choo," was used, which is an expression that publicly announces embarrassment or is an attempt to publicly tease another. Other words included "boss", "orse" and "solid" and means that an individual is good at something or is the best and indicates approval by others (Kickett-Tucker, 1999, p. 206).

Physical interactions

Physical contact was often executed in conjunction with verbal communications among Aboriginal students. Some of the common physical forms of interactions performed included wrestling, hair rubbing, play fighting, pushing, and chasing. Other forms that were not as common included hugging, shaking hands, pat on the shoulder and kicking. Physical interactions were common among Aboriginal males and these were not observed nor reported among Aboriginal females. Physical interactions among males for instance, consisted of wrestling, play fighting, kicking, chasing and pushing and were acted out during physical education and intra school sessions. Other forms of physical contact such as shaking hands and a pat on the shoulder however, were considered protocols of good sportsmanship and were performed during inter school sport competitions. The intensity of physical contact among Aboriginal males was similar to the intensity displayed when interacting with non-Aboriginal males.

Social groups

Social groups were formed in sport and the membership was confined to Aboriginal students. Interactions among Aboriginal students occurred both on and off the field. Kellie and Heather for example, played sport together and then after the game they interacted in a social manner by laughing, giggling, teasing, whispering and talking. Carl, Chris, Sean and Trevor interacted with other Aboriginal males both on and off the sport field. They mostly teased, pushed, talked, laughed, joked, chased each other and wrestled. The only difference found was the lack of interaction among less sport competent Aboriginal students Taylor and Wendy. Taylor for instance regularly interacted off the sport field with a non-Aboriginal female named Lena, who was also reported as Taylor's best friend. Wendy did not interact with Kellie nor Heather and she seldom spent time with Taylor. Wendy isolated herself from other Aboriginal students, particularly females, by keeping away from them and not engaging in conversation or other interactions. On two occasions however, Wendy was observed tormenting and teasing Carl after playing sport with him.

When Aboriginal students chose their team mates or partners in sport, they often selected other Aboriginal students. Carl and Chris, for example, were selected as captains for a modified football game which was played during an intra school sport session. The captains selected their own teams and the first four selections consisted of Stuart, Sean, Bob and Trevor. These four selections comprised the total number of Aboriginal students, as there were only six Aboriginal males playing football at that time. In another situation, Year 6 and 7 students selected their own teams to compete in an intra school lunch time basketball competition. The students chose their own team members, captain and team name. There were approximately six teams in the competition and three of them consisted of Aboriginal students. Two of the teams comprised Aboriginal females, while the other team consisted of Aboriginal males. Taylor and Wendy were competitors in team one and Heather and Kellie were members of team two. Sean, Carl, Trevor and Chris comprised team three. In some instances, non-Aboriginal students sought to interact with Aboriginal students prior to, during and after sport participation. Observations revealed that Kye and Netti (non-Aboriginal Year 7 student) were popular and competent at sport and they interacted more with Aboriginal students who were competent at sport also. Non-Aboriginal students who were less competent at sport also actively sought to interact with less competent Aboriginal students. Lena (non-Aboriginal Year 7 student) for instance, interacted with Taylor and Wendy, before, during and after sport participation.

Discussion

This study supports the hypothesis that peer interactions engaged by Aboriginal students in the school sport setting contributed favourably to their sense of self and in particular their Aboriginal (racial) identity and self-esteem. In fact, the findings of this study have shown that both "private" and "public" racial identity of 11-12 year old Aboriginal students were both positively influenced by the social interactions engaged in sport.

Aboriginal students' participation in sport contributed to their "private" racial identity because they wanted to identify as an Aboriginal person when they were interacting with Aboriginal peers and as a consequence they experienced pride. Sport provided the opportunity for Aboriginal students to collectively identify and express themselves positively as a group of Aboriginal people. Former Olympic Australian Aboriginal track athlete Cathy Freeman supports this finding. She observed when Aboriginal children are together as a group, the cohesion from this social group allows them to feel proud, have control and experience confidence and positive influences toward their self-esteem (cited in McGregor, 1998). Tatz (1984, p. 31) provides further support for this conclusion and stated sport is an important factor for a collective identity and that "many nations have underestimated or misunderstood the racial factor in sport, the brotherhood and sisterhood of black identity that crosses national boundaries and ideological systems". It is noted that sport provides the opportunity to bring together Aboriginal families from many communities and districts from all over the state and sometimes interstate (Health Department of Western Australia, 1989). In this tradition, sporting carnivals, particularly basketball and football are important calendar events that not only serve as reunions, but also provide the opportunities for Aboriginal people to express a collective racial identity. Sport brings Aboriginal people together as one and allows them to express their strengths and unity when they are communal. These conclusions are important to the wellbeing of Aboriginal student's sense of self because of the perceived relationship between group racial identity and an individual's self-esteem. The importance of racial identity upon self-esteem and sense of self for young people has been highlighted by Wright (1985) who showed that black American youth who had high self-esteem toward their racial identity, possessed a positive sense of self than youth who had low self-esteem toward their racial identity. It is interesting to note however, that outside of the school sport setting, the situation for Aboriginal people may be the opposite. Ernie Dingo (a former state representative for basketball) made the following observation at an Australian Rules football game in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal players were team members:

It's so funny to go to a football game and watch my brothers get out of their car and the white fellas get out of theirs, and no one says anything to each other until they walk into the same club room, and put the same jumper on. When they're out on the field they pat each other, and back one another up all the time! But as soon as the match is finished, and they've showered and put their civvies back on, they go in two separate directions, whether they win, lose or draw. And that's sad. It's sad that people should have those ideas about life (cited in Coolwell, 1993, p. 86).

Although the results of this study showed that positive social interactions occur between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and that had a positive influence upon Aboriginal identity, it must be stated that the context in which these interactions occur should not be overlooked. Purdie et al. (2000) confirm that the social context as well as the elements within the social setting are integral components that shape Aboriginal children's views of themselves and how they maintain and develop their sense of self. Thus, the school environment must be designed to encourage positive social interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students because these social interactions provide information to Aboriginal students who then use it to determine their sense of self.

Sport provided the platform for Aboriginal students to speak their own language and which contributed to their "private" and "public" racial identity. The language spoken by Aboriginal students consisted of commonly used phrases and words of the Nyoongar language as well as the Aboriginal-English vocabulary. The way in which Aboriginal students communicated with each other provided opportunities to experience positive feelings toward their Aboriginal identity within their own group and thereby contributed to their "private" racial identity. For instance, when groups of Aboriginal students interacted, they felt proud to be Aboriginal and wanted to demonstrate their Aboriginality by talking in 'their own lingo' with fellow Aboriginal students. They made the point that they enjoyed talking their language, because they were aware non-Aboriginal students did not know what they were talking about. This situation was perceived by Aboriginal children to empower them as a group. By speaking in language, Aboriginal students were attempting to publicly demonstrate their Aboriginal identity in front of non-Aboriginal peers and in doing so this act contributed to their "public" racial identity. By using their own language Aboriginal children were empowered and assisted in their confidence to express their Aboriginal identity in the 'public domain' and therefore develop group-pride associated with being an Aboriginal child. Krilanovich (2006, p. 3) agrees and says of minority groups that "language ... links groups and creates a bond". Hence, according to

Harris, Aboriginal students should be encouraged to speak their language since its use "reflects cultural values and [cultural] priorities" (1994, p. 125) and others agree (Krilanovich, 2007; Malcolm, 1998; Malin, 1998; Partington & McCudden, 1992). The importance of language upon Aboriginal sense of self, particularly identity is further supported by Kickett-Tucker and Partington (2000) and Malcolm (1998):

The exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and Aboriginal English ... is a symbolic exclusion of the identity and perceptions of those who speak them. It forces a choice upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, either to suspend or deny their identity, or to accept the status of "outsiders" in the education system (Malcolm, 1998, p. 131).

Feedback was a consistently reported source for Aboriginal self-esteem which consisted of praise and encouragement and was directed at Aboriginal students' individual sport performances. What this means is that non-Aboriginal students acknowledged Aboriginal sport performances in the public domain and in doing so, provided a significant source of information for Aboriginal students to evaluate their self-esteem. This form of feedback was often made in the presence of others (peers and teachers) and thereby informed others in a public domain of Aboriginal students' performances and consequently had a positive impact on their "public" racial identity.

The feedback Aboriginal students received from other Aboriginal peers however were different to that received from non-Aboriginal children because they were purposeful in challenging the Aboriginal social order within the school setting, but this was dependent on Aboriginal students' level of sport competence. Social order is defined as a structure of relationships between individuals who have set roles, obligations or purposes. Feedback therefore, was mostly received from Aboriginal students' relatives or friends and given to sport competent Aboriginal students. This form of feedback was directed at a sport outcome (win or loss) demonstrated by sport competent Aboriginal students and consisted mostly of teasing and mocking. It seemed this form of feedback was used as a tool to challenge Aboriginal students' social status and this only occurred among highly sport competent Aboriginal students. Brown and Bigler (2005) and Johnson (2001) make the point that children need to understand their social group because this knowledge will assist them in understanding experiences of discrimination, prejudice and racism. Teasing and mocking however, were also a means of feedback for less sport competent Aboriginal students but it was not used to challenge the Aboriginal social order at school. Teasing and mocking were performed in a jovial and humorous way such that giggling, laughing and telling

jokes were the communication tools commonly used among Aboriginal students in the school sport setting, regardless of the level of sport competence. Teasing and mocking is a preferred and accepted style of communication among all Aboriginal students. Malin (1989) also found teasing (both physical and verbal) to be a characteristic of the interactions among urban Aboriginal children. She reported that Aboriginal children mostly engaged in verbal teasing episodes for fun, since it was most common during their daily social interactions. Teasing was also used to remind other Aboriginal children to "not take themselves too seriously" (Malin, 1989, p. 495) and was purposeful in controlling others (usually younger children) in times of safety (refer to Malin, 1989) for further information about the role of teasing upon the safety of young children). Teasing therefore, should be acknowledged as a communication protocol commonly used by Aboriginal children and has a specific objective that is important to the socialisation amongst Aboriginal children. However, there seems to be a "fine point" where teasing may be detrimental to children's wellbeing and this needs to be explored further in future research.

Irrespective of skill level Aboriginal students valued their self-perceptions in the school sport context and behaved in ways to affirm their self-perceptions by helping others, making new friends and breaking down negative Aboriginal stereotypes. For instance, they often possessed the confidence to assist others in sport or held positions of authority for instance, Aboriginal students often provided verbal instructions to non-Aboriginal peers and in most cases, Aboriginal students physically positioned or located a non-Aboriginal peer (during a game) if the verbal instructions were difficult to follow. Regardless of skill level, all Aboriginal students assisted (by physical or verbal means) non-Aboriginal peers in school sport. Aboriginal students who possessed average to above average skill levels however, assisted others more often than those students who had average to below average skills. Students who possessed an average level of sport competence were often selected for leadership roles such as captain or leader. Aboriginal students were nominated and selected for these roles by their peers and sport captains were known for their skill, popularity and demonstrated leadership qualities. Their leadership strategies encouraged maximum participation of all students and these included strategies such as sharing the ball, encouraging all peers to actively participate in the game or activity, assisting and motivating peers to perform and always displayed sportsmanship at all times (both on and off the sports field). By selecting the appropriate peer for such a role meant that sport was more enjoyable because everyone had an opportunity to be part of the game play and thereby positive social interactions were experienced and more friendships were developed. The literature

shows support for the findings of this study such that mere participation in sport provided the opportunities to make friends (Australian Sports Commission, 1991; HRSCATSIA, 1992; Malaxos & Wedgwood, 1997; McGregor, 1998) and have fun (Roberts & Rijavec, 1988). More specifically, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (HRSCATSIA, 1992) report increased opportunities for social interaction in physical activities encouraged children to make friends and breaking down Aboriginal stereotypes. The report made the claim that "the most positive interactions between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community are often seen to take place through sport" (HRSCATSIA, 1992, p. 175). It is vital to the development of a healthy Aboriginal sense of self that sport is organised to encourage positive social interactions with non-Aboriginal children. Regular positive social interactions will result if the sports context is constructed that will ensure Aboriginal children have more opportunities to experience fun and develop friendships. Consequently, a positive experience in sport with non-Aboriginal students can help break down Aboriginal stereotypes and encourage Aboriginal student to gain acceptance and equality for their Aboriginal identity. A positive sport experience can provide positive experiences for Aboriginal children to behave in ways that affirm positive self-perceptions of their Aboriginal identity.

Sport has a larger role in the development of Aboriginal children's sense of self than first thought since it is important to children's positive expression of their identity both for their own racial group and for the wider society. Sport was also a context which afforded opportunities for Aboriginal students engage an Aboriginal language with other Aboriginal peers and thereby contributing to a positive racial identity. Sport at school also provided a platform for positive social interactions, feedback and appraisals that Aboriginal students used toward their racial identity. The importance of having positive esteem of Aboriginal identity at school is supported by others and has been linked to the academic outcomes of Aboriginal children and youth (Pedersen & Walker, 2000; Purdie et al., 2000). It is vital therefore, that Aboriginal children have positive self-esteem toward their Aboriginal identity because it affects how they feel about their sense of self which then influences their academic outcomes. This is very important for the education of Aboriginal school children because success rates for completing primary and secondary school are worrying (MCEETYA, 2006). Mainstream schools are "public" achievement domains and it has been shown Aboriginal children do not feel as though they can express their Aboriginal identity in a safe and secure environment. Pedersen and Walker (2000) for instance, found that Aboriginal students reported lower scores on their racial identity in the class room when compared to non-Aboriginal students. In Australian schools, it is extremely

important that the social context is a culturally safe and secure place where Aboriginal children can express their identity, feel accepted and gain equality of their Aboriginal identity. Acceptance and equality helps Aboriginal children feel good about themselves and which can then have a positive influence on their academic attendance and retention.

Mainstream schools should develop learning environments that encourage Aboriginal children to express their racial identity in positive ways because of the subsequent impact upon Aboriginal students' self-esteem and sense of self. It is important therefore, that mainstream schools understand the critical role a positive Aboriginal identity upon sense of self and the potential impact upon academic outcomes, attendance, retention, social interactions and behaviours in the school environment.

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