

THE DREAMS OF MOBILE YOUNG ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in mobility patterns and quantification, little is known about the lived experiences of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. Mobility research to date has focused primarily on remote to remote movements. Supported by a Co-operative Research Centre — Remote Economic Participation Honours Scholarship, this study feeds into the 'Pathways to Employment' research project and develops new knowledge for understanding and enabling education and employment pathways which have relevance to young Aboriginal people from remote Australia. It explores understandings of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people aged between 13 and 25 years, who move in, out and through remote, regional and urban locations. Considering dreams and aspirations in the context of cultural difference is the central focus.

Current Australian government policy directions aim to reduce Aboriginal Australian disadvantage by focusing on young people. Dominant notions of aspiration are founded in neoliberal ideology, which privileges linear, future focused education and employment pathways. Failure to consider dreams and aspirations in the context of cultural difference and diversity has meant the voice of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people is often absent from the policy process. By speaking with participants in Adelaide, Port Augusta and Alice Springs, this research study improves understandings of what mobile young Aboriginal Australian people dream for. It opens spaces for diverse and alternate meanings of dreams, aspirations and the future to be explored through acknowledging pre-existing assumptions and challenges conventions about what young people's dreams and aspirations *should* include.

The research follows a qualitative design informed by Indigenous research methodologies. It has also been guided by a phenomenological approach and draws from critical race and whiteness theory, participatory research approaches, postcolonial theory and decolonising methodologies. In the three sites — Adelaide, Alice Springs and Port Augusta — agencies, organisations and community leaders involved in the delivery of services to young Aboriginal people were approached to facilitate the recruitment of participants. Twenty-four young participants engaged in semi-structured interviews. Fourteen agency participants were also interviewed to collect a broader background perspective on mobility in the lives of young Aboriginal Australian people. Gathering data from multiple sources increases the reliability of the research through triangulation.

The dreams of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people are driven by one critical ingredient — family. Dreams and aspirations are primarily influenced by the maintenance of relationships closest to them. Young participants in this study endure complex lives with experiences of grief and loss having an impact on young people's dreams. Many young participants struggle against the values of the neoliberal system and the values associated with their own cultural and social positioning. Marginalisation and disadvantage also have an impact on dreams and aspiration as young people are occupied with meeting basic needs. Young people interviewed dream of knowing about and accessing better support and show great resilience.

Young participants want to contribute positively to society but their priorities are not valued in society. The neoliberal system and its focus on individualisation builds on existing wealth and privilege and as such, compounds marginalisation. By not reflecting the 'ideal individual' mobile young Aboriginal Australians dreams and aspirations go unacknowledged and become invisible. This research concludes that alternate policies that include the dreams and aspirations of Aboriginal Australian young people will result in improved outcomes in education and employment participation. By supporting Aboriginal Australian young people in ways they value, a space will be given to exist and dream where the different demands of family and the market can be safely acknowledged and positivity negotiated. Pressure to conform currently imposes sacrifice on young participants where they are forced to relinquish connectedness.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Thesis Title: The Dreams of Mobile Young Aboriginal Australian People

Candidate's name: Amy Parkes

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief I declare that this thesis is the result of my own research, that it does not incorporate without acknowledgement any materials previously published, written or produced by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed: _____

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INTRODUCTION

The colonisation of Australia with its inseparable Eurocentric ideology has resulted in a multitude of historical policy reactions which have constrained and controlled the mobility of Aboriginal Australian people (Battiste 2000; Prout 2009a, p. 197). Prout's (2009a) significant study looking at Aboriginal spatial mobilities, suggests contemporary societal and economic arrangements typically characterised by fixed spatial ordering continue to compound the marginalisation of mobile Aboriginal Australian people. Government policies aim to curtail Aboriginal Australian disadvantage amid growing interest in mobility patterns, yet little is known about the lived experiences of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. The nature of mobility is both diverse and socio-cultural in nature and its exploration will support better informed responses to the marginalisation of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. Mobility research to date has primarily focused on remote to remote movements (Memmott, Long & Thomson 2006; Musharbash 2008; Prout & Yap 2010; Robinson et al. 2012). To contribute to and expand existing knowledge, this study explores young Aboriginal Australians' mobility in, out and through remote, regional and urban locations in the geographical regions of Adelaide, Port Augusta and Alice Springs.

This research seeks to give primacy to mobile young Aboriginal Australian voices by acknowledging power and questioning dominant social and cultural assumptions about mobility, dreams and aspirations. Considering dreams and aspirations in the context of cultural difference and not assuming its equal relevance in the lives and futures of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people will be the key contribution of this study; which aims to openly explore the possibility of alternate meanings of dreams, aspiration and the future, without imposition.

The term Aboriginal Australian has been used throughout this thesis as a more distinct way of describing the research population. Torres Strait Islander people were not involved in this research project. The terms Indigenous or Indigenous Australian were used when citing the work or direct quotations of others and in an international context. An initial attempt was made to define participants by cultural group but this was not proceeded with as it was found to cause discomfort for some young participants.

Throughout this study, the research population, historical context and ideas of racism and marginalisation are conceptualised using perspectives drawn from postcolonial theory (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007). Understanding invasion and colonisation in relation to Aboriginal Australian culture and society helps explain some of the changes and variations in

Aboriginal Australian people's patterns of mobility (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007, pp. 168–172). Critical race theory is also used in the development of a critical understanding of the impact of processes of colonisation on young people's future imaginings about education and employment. Critical race theory is also a tool for understanding Australian society as structured around dominant white societal, cultural and economic ideologies (Delgado & Stefancic 2012; Essed & Goldberg 2002). Furthermore, the construct of whiteness will be used as a means to help explain the persistent and insidious oppression of Aboriginal Australian people (Hollinsworth 2006).

Chapter One: The Literature review comprises two parts. The first section will consider mobility in both pre- and post-invasion contexts, including a discussion of colonial impacts, historical and contemporary policy reactions and future research directions. The second section will look at deconstructing contemporary discourse around dreams, aspiration and future focused thinking by discussing the privileging and assumption of future focused discourses. Dominant Western and neoliberal ideology will be analysed and contrasted with alternate cultural constructions and understandings.

Chapter Two: The methodology will include a reflexive account as well as outline the research paradigms and theoretical bases from which the research draws. Research aims, an explanation of the sample, recruitment, data collection and analysis are included. Indigenous research ethics will also be discussed.

Chapter Three: The findings chapter comprises two parts. The first section covers findings from Young Participants. This section talks about family as central to young people's dreams and aspiration. Grief and loss are recognised among a number of complex factors in the lives of young people. From here the support needs of young participants are also considered. Perceptions of education and employment are discussed, as is the relevance and meaning of these terms in the lives of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. Meeting basic needs and the types of jobs young people discussed are issues also included in a discussion about education and employment. This second section includes Agency Participant findings. The agency section explores education and employment pathways as a major theme in discourse. The idea of a synthetic culture emerged from interviews and is also discussed as a form of disconnection between young people and their identity and culture. Family and 'trouble' are explored as reasons that drive mobility away from community, as well as the impacts of perpetual policy changes.

Chapter Four: The chapter will touch on the key findings of the research, providing conclusions. The importance of family, grief and loss, basic needs, support networks and

education and employment are concluded in this final discussion which suggests areas for service and policy improvements and future research focus.

Chapter 1:

LITERATURE REVIEW — DECONSTRUCTING CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE

1.1 Mobility

A review of the literature about Aboriginal Australian mobility broadly indicates that while there is a growing interest and discussion about mobility patterns and their quantification, very little is known about the socio-cultural story and lived experiences of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people or their dreams. Building on the work of Young and Doohan (1989), Taylor and Bell (2004) and Prout (2009a), this study focuses on furthering knowledge about the dreams of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. This literature review provides a background on Aboriginal Australian mobility and how mobility has been affected by colonisation. Political impositions and assumptions upon Aboriginal Australian mobility will be explored to illustrate how conflicting values between the colonised and coloniser generate tensions. Notions of dreams and aspiration are examined to highlight the influence of structural forces. In the context of cultural difference, it is argued that dreams and aspirations of education and employment should not be assumed to have equal relevance in the lives and (what are) imagined futures of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. This section closes by summarising needed research in the area of Aboriginal Australian mobility and providing a justification for this present study.

1.1.1 Mobility: Pre-Invasion

Prior to British invasion, traditional Aboriginal Australian society did not have fixed central government and formal political structures that reflect those in the Western world (Fryer-Smith 2002). Traditional socio-economic lifestyles are described instead as broadly semi-nomadic and revolving around dynamics such as territorial knowledge, flora, fauna and seasonal cycles (Fryer-Smith 2002). Nomadic life is depicted by Cowlshaw (1999) as spontaneous and operating alongside a belief and trust that the environment will supply the goods to meet all needs. This dependence on a 'subsistence economy' is a familiar characterisation of hunter gatherer civilisations, which operate to supply what is needed for consumption without aiming to accumulate wealth. While this account is limited in that it does not provide explicit detail of the great complexity of social and political organisation and variability that existed among the hundreds of Aboriginal language groups, it does

communicate the significance of movement to harmonise with and subsist from the environment, as central aspects of Aboriginal Australian societies before invasion.

1.1.2 Mobility: Colonial Impacts

Both Prout (2009a) and Taylor and Bell (2004) illuminate the powerful impact of colonisation on mobility. The invasive dispersal and spatial rearrangement of Indigenous people is acknowledged as a universal characteristic of colonisation. In Australia, the impact of the inauguration of protectionist policies since 1869 was profound, with legislation designed to directly oppress and control Aboriginal Australian spatiality (Museum of Australian Democracy 2013). While Taylor and Bell's (2004) writings have an international interest, Prout's (2009a) study explores Aboriginal Australian spatial mobility more specifically in Yamatji Country. Prout (2009a, p. 197) supports the idea that characteristic nomadic lifestyles pre-invasion have been constrained by British invasion and settlement, suggesting that contemporary, societal and economic arrangements representative of fixed spatial ordering, compound the marginalisation of mobile Aboriginal Australian people. In Cowlishaw's (1999, p. 39) extensive analysis of colonial domination, nomadic or mobile lifestyles are described as being out of balance with 'whitefellas' ways. Historically, Aboriginal Australian employees have struggled to apply for leave from work to attend ceremonies or participate in the maintenance of social relations, as such practices were not acknowledged by 'whitefellas'. Peterson (2004, p. 223) discusses how Aboriginal Australian behaviour around movement was often viewed by 'whitefellas' as a biological urge to go "walkabout", changing location without reason or notice. This racist labelling of mobility as meaningless and aimless, earned this traditional custom negative connotations, thus categorising mobile Aboriginal Australian people as unreliable (Peterson 2004; Prout 2008b). From this understanding, the notion of Aboriginal Australian movement as problematic or a dilemma became reinforced.

The intensification of urbanisation and remote relocation of Aboriginal Australian populations is something Prout (2009a) suggests as a persistent focus; whereby the transformation of spatiality to align with dominant philosophy around economic participation has both fuelled and compounded marginalisation across economic and social domains. For Aboriginal Australian people who continue to engage with a 'subsistence economy' in contemporary Australian society, nomadic traditions allow them to place less significance on the value of accruing goods in spite of the assimilation attempts of the coloniser. This presents a conundrum however, as political values that prize the capitalist economic notions of material goods and wealth compete with the values of many Aboriginal Australian people. Elucidating

this clash of ideology is useful, as it helps to understand both the colonised and coloniser's competing social contexts and perspectives (Cowlshaw 1999).

In 2006, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research released a discussion paper titled '*Population and Diversity: Policy Implications of Emerging Indigenous Demographic Trends*' (Taylor 2006). While Taylor's writings are more quantitative than qualitative, they contain important and current information regarding various forms of Aboriginal Australian mobility and policy related influences. Taylor (2006, p. 3) argues that one of the key contemporary policy questions relates to the unclear relationship that exists between mobility and marginalisation. He suggests that naming the cause of one over the other is to attribute a cause and effect in ways that as yet, have not been properly substantiated and are still undetermined.

1.1.3 Mobility: Problem or Opportunity

The impact of temporary mobility on the effective delivery of services such as education, training, employment, health and housing is widely discussed in government rhetoric, often in quite definitive ways. Policy assumptions relating to mobility in the sphere of family or health for example often identify mobility as a problem to be overcome and as a situation that is the cause of significant 'cultural barriers'. *South Australia's Homeless Strategy 2009-2013* is one example, where mobility is addressed within the Safe Tracks Strategic Framework (Department for Families and Communities 2011). From this approach, policy specifically couples mobility with homelessness and as something to be addressed and reduced (Beck & Shard 2010). This political perception is underpinned by Target 6.6 of the South Australian Strategic Plan which aims to halve the number of rough sleepers and concentrates on safety and health (SA Strategic Plan 2013). In contrast, mobility or temporary movements involved in people's pursuit of employment and education align better with dominant political persuasions and are therefore commented on more favourably. An example of this is support for the views of Aboriginal Australian leader Noel Pearson who discusses mobility in relation to the 'mainstream' economy (Pearson 2003). This view of mobility encourages movement away from home towards economic opportunity with the maintenance of culture, family and place occurring when a person 'orbits' home (Pearson 2003). Prout (2008a; 2009a, p. 178) reaffirms political tensions explaining how policy and service delivery conserve a 'spatial order that privileges sedentarism' which results in infrequent and challenging mainstream interactions for mobile Aboriginal Australian people. Prout (2009a) highlights how by viewing Aboriginal Australian spatiality as unmanageable, a negative discourse is cultivated. She then illustrates how this discourse is reproduced through the repetition of mainstream services that have foregone the principle of seeking to know and

engagement with the varied situations that mould contemporary Aboriginal Australian mobility (Prout 2009a; 2009b).

1.1.4 Mobility: Post-Invasion

Contemporary Aboriginal Australian mobility occurs for many reasons. Familial and kinship obligations, ceremonial customs and seasonal and cultural events are just a few of a number of possible drivers (Taylor & Bell 2004; Biddle & Prout 2009, p. 307). However, since colonisation, new reasons for mobility such as service access for health, employment and education have been introduced (Biddle & Prout 2009, p. 307).

Young and Doohan's (1989, p. 92) analysis of movement in Central Australia explains ceremonial activity as predominantly tied to relationships to land and relatives. Ceremonial mobility for reasons including initiation and funerals, which are sometimes referred to as 'sorry business', is deemed so important that many Aboriginal Australians are prepared to endure significant hardships to partake in these relationship maintenance activities. Visiting family and friends is another key aspect of Aboriginal Australian mobility and something Young and Doohan (1989, p. 108) explain as purposeful, selective and always responsive to clearly defined social networks. Circular movement as a kind of mobility is often exercised as a means of social network preservation and is recognised as an enduring feature of Aboriginal Australian mobility patterns (Taylor & Bell 2004, p. 14). The significance of maintaining social, cultural and family ties is well documented in the pioneering work of Young and Doohan (1989, p. 20), Altman (1987) and Brehndt and Brehndt (1992). The driver of relationship building, maintenance and preservation for mobility is a theme which continues to resonate in the more recent publications of Taylor and Bell (2004), Peterson (2004, p. 234); and Memmott and Moran (2001). While processes of globalisation, including access to health and changing demands relating to employment, education and training are thought to have spurred new patterns of circular mobility, Aboriginal Australian people have shown a persistent determination to return to the land where they are culturally connected despite added structural pressures (Taylor & Bell 2004, p. 17).

The promotion and enforcement of dominant cultural systems and protocols is seen across a number of key life areas including how people 'should' be housed, what structure families 'should' take, the 'right' institutional structure and 'correct' meanings to attach to education, employment, health and law. The capacity for individuals to align with dominant societal norms has great influence over how people are valued in society. For marginalised groups who may not comfortably conform to dominant cultural expectations and values, this presents further exclusion. For example, Cowlshaw (1999) demonstrates how mainstream

Australian social structures and a political economy are built on fixed concepts about mainstream work, settled lifestyles and 'stable' housing: therefore, those who function in more mobile cultures are susceptible to further marginalisation.

1.1.5 Dreams, Aspirations and the Future

Much research to date has looked at mobility as a factor in employment (Doyle & Prout 2012; Prout & Hill 2012; Taylor 2012), yet enquiries engaging directly with the views and voices of young Aboriginal Australian people themselves are noticeably missing. Aboriginal Australian children and young people are the central feature of current government approaches, with access and achievement in education and employment viewed as ensuring smooth transitions to adulthood (Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2013). The Australian Government's National Indigenous Reform Agreement outlines COAG's commitment to 'Closing the Gap' in relation to Aboriginal Australian disadvantage across a number of indicators; these include:

- ensuring all Indigenous four-year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;
- halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade;
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 equivalent attainment by 2020;
- halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (COAG 2013).

The significance of political strategies that focus on employment, opportunity and the future are further demonstrated by Taylor's (2003) demographic findings that indicate future exponential growth of Aboriginal Australian working populations in desert regions. In light of the predicted social and economic urgency for appropriate policy responses, occupational opportunity, skill development and education pathways are in sharp focus. In the text *Coercive Reconciliation* Altman and Hinkson (2007) discuss the view put forward by Coombs and Stanner in 1979, which strongly supports an alternate Aboriginal Australian employment policy. In their text, Altman and Hinkson also affirm their vision for policy that genuinely considers the aspirations of Aboriginal Australians, stating:

In the case of Aboriginal Australians, the past adds up to a complex conjunction of trauma and ingenuity; distress and the will to survive; cultural continuities cut across by many transformations. Looking at the actions people have taken in the face of profound social upheaval might provide clues to the kind of social force that could be mobilised in the present in support of a future shaped by Indigenous aspirations.

Whatever the future brings, it must entail a range of choices that Aboriginal people can themselves own, including the choice to continue to pursue a culturally different way of life and different set of values to those of the market (Altman & Hinkson 2007, p. 11).

Aspiration also has strong links to the employment and educational sociological literature, where aspiration is regarded as a solid forecaster of one's potential for educational and occupational attainment and success (Andres, Anisef, Krahn, Looker & Thiessen 1999). What becomes fascinating is the degree to which our individual dreams become tailored by the structural forces around us. Considering dreams and aspirations in the context of cultural difference and structural forces is the focus of this study. Exploring the possibility for diverse and alternate meanings of dreams, aspirations and the future and questioning existing assumptions on what dreams and aspirations *should* include will enable the voices of marginalised mobile young Aboriginal Australian people to be more clearly heard.

Morphy (2010) highlights how current tensions between mainstream policy impositions and Aboriginal Australian culture have engendered reactions whereby the 'aspirations' of Aboriginal Australians have been missed. Insufficient attention to the lived experience of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people means little is understood about how young people exist, or make meaning for themselves. Research undertaken by Young and Guenther (2008) suggests that some Aboriginal Australian people hope for employment developed around their abilities and strengths and for opportunities that enable (not curtail) the exercise of cultural obligations. An appreciation of cultural and traditional interests of young Aboriginal Australian people's vision for the future is noticeably absent in the research literature. Instead, there is a prevalence of normative edicts about what aspiration is or should be, based on dominant cultural assumptions.

Purcell (2011) considers discourses of aspiration in the context of educational reform policies aimed at disadvantaged groups, raising critical observations that have tended to elude discussions to date. Both Purcell (2011) and Morphy (2010) suggest the importance of considering the influence of structural forces on dreams and future aspirations and highlight the common underestimation of the significance of culture in studies of mobility. This raises the question of how the notion of dreams, aspiration and the future are perceived by mobile young Aboriginal Australian people, and illustrates the importance of being a reflexive researcher, questioning dominant constructs of aspiration and illuminating rarely considered assumptions.

1.1.6 Mobility: Research Directions

This study focuses on the lived experience of mobile Aboriginal Australian populations, as recommended by Young and Doohan (1989), Taylor and Bell (2004), Wilson and Peters (2005) and Prout (2009a). Mobile Aboriginal Australian people are likely to be challenged by policies that support social structures which focus only on the dominant culture's preferred political economy (Cowlshaw 1999). This research seeks to give primacy to Aboriginal Australian voices by acknowledging power and questioning dominant social and cultural assumptions about mobility, dreams and aspirations. Considering dreams and aspirations in the context of cultural difference and not assuming their equal relevance in the lives and futures of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people will be the key contribution of this study; which aims to openly explore the possibility of alternate meanings of dreams, aspiration and the future, without imposition.

1.2 The Development of Time and Progress

Time is widely assumed to be linear and forward flowing. This study explores contemporary discourse relating to the future focused aspirations of young people and discusses the link with Western (European) notions of time and progress. The choice to aspire in a certain future orientated way is discussed as limited or privileged depending on availability and access to a wide range of resources. This opens space for discussion about the limitations or privileges of social class that influence an individual's capacity to aspire (Brannen & Nilsen 2002; Nilan, Julian & Germov 2007). From here, the universalisation of Western (European) notions of time and progress is explored, alongside alternate cultural constructions.

Universal Western assumptions about time suggest it is a progressing phenomenon, something linear which constantly flows and passes us by, yet this understanding of time as a linear movement forward is culturally constructed (Hayden 1987, p. 1282). This linear future orientated notion of time is a powerful construction. It regulates government and organisations and is firmly focused on political and economic objectives. Time is based on notions of purpose, dedication, progression, achievement, individualism, work ethic and ultimately 'success'. These ideals continue to invigorate the Western obsession with development, shaping many of the assumptions and actions of a majority of individuals 'successfully' operating in this cultural space.

1.2.1 Contemporary Discourse of Aspiration

Today, 'aspiration' from a dominant western cultural position is regarded as a critical part of a successful and achieving mind. There is much talk about aspiration in education and employment related policy documents with terms such as 'future', 'pathways' and 'trajectory' being commonplace. In the *National Strategy for Young Australians Executive Summary*,

priorities are outlined as aiming to see young people “succeed and build their own future” (Australian Government 2010a, p. 1). The policy direction throughout the strategy explicitly and clearly couples the idea of “healthy, happy and resilient” young people with the “opportunities and skills they need to learn, work, engage” (Australian Government 2010b, p. 5). The depiction of linear future orientated progress assumes this prescribed way is the panacea for a successful and ‘happy’ life. In 2001, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (2002) began focusing on disadvantaged young people in the declaration *Stepping Forward — Improving Pathways for all Young People*. Again, this policy direction emphasises forward leading pathways. For young people, successful dreams and hopes are constructed as dependent on their ability to engage with a future focused discourse of aspiration. The concept of aspiration is currently used in a closed or prescribed way, typifying a person’s life course as successful only when developed in a particular way. Aspiration is a future orientated pathway through formal educational accomplishment followed by participation in employment and it is this aspiration that is supported as the successful way of being or becoming (Worth 2009, p. 1050). Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000, p. 7) highlight the related link between work and identity, explaining how those who do not work become recognised as a ‘non-person’.

This specific pathway reflects neoliberal individualism. Neoliberal theory is an evolution of capitalism and considers that free and deregulated markets promise individual liberties (Harvey 2007, p. 64). The position of the individual is outlined well by Harvey (2007, pp. 65–66), revealing how neoliberal ideology has induced the normalisation of aspiration:

While personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being. This principle extends into the realms of welfare, education, health care and even pensions...Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings (such as not investing significantly enough in one’s own human capital through education) rather than being attributed to any systemic property (such as the class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism).

The widespread acceptance of individualised thought has forged the trademark for what equals a successful adult (Gordon et al. 2005). Those who aspire receive the promise of individual fulfilment and affirmation of a rightful place as a contributing member of society. From this perspective, aspiration is a code for conform, as it programs us to follow dominant ways to receive acceptance and inclusion. Aspiration bestows certain privileges and acceptance in society, while for those who do not conform in this way, the opposite can be expected. Not having ‘aspiration’ is regarded as out of the ordinary, lazy and detached.

While most research assumes the future orientation of linear pathways, there is a small body of research highlighting the cultural assumptions that sit behind this way of viewing education and employment (McRae-Williams 2011; Lea, Thompson, McRae-Williams & Wegner 2011; Lea, Wegner et al. 2011; McRae-Williams & Gerritsen 2010). In the paper 'Pathways: Following the Highway, Taking the Scenic Route or Journeying Through the Dreaming', McRae-Williams and Guenther (2012) question the assumption of pathways and acknowledge the possibility and need to consider different ways of knowing, being and valuing. In response, the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP) has sought to widen systemic understandings of education and employment pathways relevant to Aboriginal Australian people in remote areas.

1.2.2 The Future of Aspiration

The future focused discursive construction of young peoples' dreams and hopes is predicated on universalising what are particularly Western (European) notions of time and progress. While this is how young people are constructed in policy, Sanders and Munford (2008) explain that for young people, the reality is that their understanding of the future is not necessarily insightful. Instead, they may be expressing perceptions of the present with a consideration of possibilities.

Young people's absence of future thinking and factors such as resource access impact the way young people aspire. Brannen and Nilsen (2002) explain how choice is limited or privileged through the ability of individuals to gain access to available capital. They suggest that the cultural/social construct of individualisation creates an environment that builds on existing wealth and reproduces entrenched socio-political patterns of disadvantage. Social positioning and access to resources and opportunity have great influence on the way young people imagine the future and affects the way it actually unfurls (Brannen & Nilsen 2002; Nilan, Julian & Germov 2007). Appadurai suggests how aspirations develop from broad socially produced cultural norms. For marginalised groups, the complex interaction with dominant cultural regimes further influences the ability to aspire (Appadurai 2004, p. 67). When thinking about possible futures, the difference between the 'real futures' aspiration will lead to and the 'imagined futures' that young people more typically perceive is raised. In the context of transitions for young people, the latter 'imagined future' holds more validity (McDonald et al. 2011). These authors looked at young people's awareness of their own individual position and their understanding of how options become available to them through aspirations and future orientations. From this examination, a tension was noted between what young people expect to be able to aspire towards and the real likelihood of such opportunity being available. This highlights that for marginalised groups who have different capacities to make choices than what is assumed by dominant discourses, the possibility of

disappointment and further exclusion when trying to 'make it' in a one-sided system is increased (McDonald et al. 2011). As Brennan and Nilsen (2002) suggest, recognition of structure as well as agency are critical considerations for young people thinking about a realistic future.

Despite acknowledgement in the literature, the development of a holistic social system to address diverse alternatives of becoming and future imagining is something that has not been of much interest to governments. Grosz (1999; 2005) has made significant contributions about time and futurity that discuss the processes of youth transition and future aspiration as 'becoming'. Worth discusses Grosz's account which describes transitions as "open, multiple and in flux— offering a way of thinking that goes beyond the chronological" (Worth 2009, p. 1050). Hayden also suggests that change can be supported if we regain control of time through acknowledging the cultural assumptions that construct it, improve our analysis of it and create alternate institutions that permit new directions (Hayden 1987, pp. 1306–1307).

Guenther and Osborne (in press) have recently considered aspiration and success in remote Indigenous Australian contexts, noting significant cultural differences. Given the previously discussed origins of progressive discourses, it is unsurprising to discover that equivalent terms for aspiration and success are not found in local Indigenous Australian languages. For many Aboriginal Australian people living in this context, Guenther and Osborne suggest that aspiring towards Western constructions of success necessitates the added acquisition of bilingual and bicultural skills. Aspiration is also explained by Guenther and Osborne to be conceptually different as they highlight how perceptions of the future are often localised and focus on country and family instead of the dominant aspiration in mainstream society of education, career and work. Western society privileges notions of aspiration that are associated with education and employment following from the development of very specific and particular neoliberal constructions of time and progress. Neoliberalism is not about reflexivity, it does not enquire about personal feelings. The development of a deeper knowledge about the validity and operation of aspiration and progress through the perspective of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people is lacking. As a minority group, mobile Aboriginal Australian people are likely to be one of the most harshly impacted by this modern regime, yet their position and voice have rarely been heard.

Contemporary spatiality has evolved in ways which promote fixed, as opposed to mobile lifestyles. This dominant lifestyle value enforces certain kinds of engagement with economic participation and compounds the marginalisation of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. Building, maintaining and preserving relationships for Aboriginal Australian people is

widely acknowledged as a key driver for mobility. With linear, future orientated notions of time dominant in Western understandings of dreams and aspiration, an understanding of the cultural interests of young Aboriginal Australian people's vision for the future is absent. Normative edicts about aspiration are constructed around dominant cultural assumptions. Taking this literature into account, this research explores understandings of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people considering dreams and aspirations in the context of cultural difference and diversity. The following chapter will explain the methods and methodological approaches that were taken to realise this objective.

Chapter 2:

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter will provide a reflexive account of the research as well as describe the research paradigms and theoretical bases from which the research will draw as part of an Indigenous research methodology. An outline of the aims of the research and the questions it sets out to explore will be followed by an explanation of the sample, data collection and analysis processes. The worldview I hold, my personal reality, culture and the way I have come to understand truth are nuanced throughout the research. Finlay talks about how reflexivity in qualitative research can promote reliability, stating that reflexivity helps:

...make explicit how intersubjective elements impact on data collection and analysis in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency and accountability (Finlay 2002, p. 211)

With Aboriginal Australian people as the focus of enquiry, the significance of self-reflexivity is emphasised, as it “unmasks complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing” (Richardson 1994, p. 523).

Research Design

The qualitative research design of this project is informed by Indigenous research methodologies which address the disparity between the political and the person (Smith 2005; Chilisa 2012).

Indigenous researchers such as Smith (2005) assert that Indigenous research is about changing and improving conditions. They are driven by a purposeful dream and not a prescription. Their subjects are not merely objects to be studied objectively (allegedly); rather, the desired outcome is that which challenges the worldview of Indigenous people based on a Eurocentric perspective (Dunbar 2008, p. 92)

When researching with Aboriginal Australian people, as a member of the dominant race I am interested in questioning Western research logics and frameworks. In doing so, I am able to explore central or dominant cultural systems and values as opposed to questioning the ways of the dominated minority. Using multiple methods, I will draw from phenomenology, critical

race theory and participatory research approaches, postcolonial theory, decolonising methods and critical whiteness studies.

Phenomenology will guide the discussion as a phenomenological study seeks to find out more about the nature and meaning of things such as concepts, events and experiences and is therefore a useful guide for exploring lived experiences of young people and their ideas about dreams (Saldana 2011, p. 7). Critical race theory will be employed to elucidate the continued resistance and effects of racism with which Aboriginal Australian people are faced. Understanding Australian society as structured around dominant white societal, cultural and economic ideologies can be explained through critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic 2012; Essed & Goldberg 2002). Drawing from participatory research approaches, the idea of working together with participants is particularly relevant (Stringer 2007). While this study does not involve collaboration with participants to the point that they are co-researchers in the development of questions and analysis for the research, the study does implement a number of participatory methods described by Chilisa in *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (2012, pp. 228–233):

- Reflexively critique the self to ensure inclusion of local knowledge
- Identify and invite community members to participate in the research
- Identify collaborators who can make decisions and move the project forward
- Involve the community with communicating research to young people
- Give young people control over where and how interviews are conducted
- Conduct semi-structured interviews that are flexible and give young people the power to talk about things of importance to them outside the research aims

Aboriginal Australian people, the historical context of colonisation, racism and marginalisation are conceptualised in this study by drawing from postcolonial theory (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007). Understanding invasion and colonisation in relation to the impact this has had on Aboriginal Australian culture and society helps to understand changes and variations in Aboriginal Australian people's patterns of mobility (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007, pp. 168–172). A decolonising research methodology is adopted to highlight the significance of a culturally relevant framework as it supports researcher awareness of the cultural interface between the coloniser and the colonised. To carry out this methodology, I have been mindful of my own colonial positioning as a non-Indigenous researcher and have sought to be aware of the subjectivity of this positioning. One of the key reasons I am interested in engaging in decolonisation is that “decolonizing research is performative — it is enmeshed in activism” (Swadener & Mutua 2008, p. 33).

This study also engages with critical whiteness studies. Being aware of issues surrounding white privilege can facilitate a sensitive research process which respects the power differentials inherent in the researcher–participant relationship (Prior 2007). Key whiteness theorists suggest “whiteness is itself the human universal that no (other) race realizes” (Montag 1997, p. 292). From this understanding, any race that falls outside the dominant white race is regarded as subhuman, recognised as the ‘other’ race that falls short of white perfection (Montag 1997). The dominant white race is the norm, the measuring stick, the status quo. Whiteness is very much invisible as it is seldom recognised by people of white skin colour. Instead of talking about white privilege as the automatically bestowed unearned benefit that it is, white people are more comfortable with engaging with this advantage in terms of the disadvantage of ‘others’ (Montag 1997; McIntosh 2010). In McIntosh’s renowned discussion about white privilege, she talks about “unpacking the invisible knapsack” stating:

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day (McIntosh 2010, p.100)

Aim

The research aim is to explore the understandings of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people aged between 13 and 25 years who move in, out and through remote, regional and urban locations. Speaking with young people in the geographical locations of Adelaide, Port Augusta and Alice Springs will improve understandings of what mobile young Aboriginal Australian people dream for. The study also seeks to ascertain young participants’ perception of enablers and/or barriers to their dream realisation. Increasing awareness in this underresearched area, this project contributes to the extension of current understandings that will assist with the development of new knowledge regarding education and employment pathways. The research seeks to contribute to the development of new policy directions relevant to young people from remote Australia.

Primary Research Question:

What are the dreams of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people?

Secondary Research Questions:

What are some of the barriers perceived by young people to realising these dreams?
What are some of the enablers perceived by young people to realising these dreams?
How does education and employment feature in young people’s future imagining?

Sample Definitions

The sample population consists of the two separate participant groups. The primary participant group is Young Participants and the secondary is Agency Participants, to be interviewed in the geographical locations of Adelaide, Port Augusta and Alice Springs.

Young Participants:

This primary participant group is defined as mobile young Aboriginal Australian people aged between 13 and 25 years who experience mobility in, out or through urban, regional or remote locations.

Agency Participants:

The participant group 'agency' is defined as agencies, organisations or community leaders involved in the delivery of services to young Aboriginal people and their families.

Sample Size

The total sample size is 38, comprising 24 Young Participants and 14 Agency Participants. Gathering data from multiple sources such as young people, agency and community leaders increases the reliability of the research. This method of triangulation is supported by Saldana who states:

Multiple data-gathering methods (and sources) enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of a study through what is known as *triangulation* — generally, the use of at least three different viewpoints (Saldana 2011, p. 76)

The Young Participant sample size is strong as interviews occurred across mixed demographics for each location, covering female and male gender and across the age spectrum of 13 to 25 years for each location. The sample size allowed for interviews to take place with young people from diverse backgrounds and varied current circumstances. While every effort was made to include the voices of young people who were not associated with mainstream systems, agency affiliation was always a facilitating factor. The limitation of this is that young people not accessing support, education or employment, with no links in any way are potentially under-represented in this research. In saying that, due to data being gathered from young people with a range of backgrounds, it is believed the conclusions drawn from this sample will be robust and meaningful. Diversity in age, gender, disadvantage and mobility patterns is represented across all locations, allowing for the identification of key trends to inform future research directions for this population group.

Table 2.1 Young Participant Sample Breakdown

	Adelaide	Port Augusta	Alice Springs	Total
Female	5	4	6	15
Male	2	4	3	9
Region Total	7	8	9	24

Table 2.2 Agency Participant Sample Breakdown

	Adelaide	Port Augusta	Alice Springs	Total
Region Total	4	6	4	14

Research Ethics

This project has received approval from the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee Application ID: 0000031282 (AIATSIS 2011). Following an ethical approach to Indigenous research as a non-Indigenous person I accessed cultural advice from Cultural Advisors for this project.

Recruitment

Using a snowballing approach, agency and community leader relationships were built and helped to facilitate the recruitment of young people. This technique was adopted due to the difficulty of contacting the Young Participant population group. Some factors influencing the accessibility of young participants are the increased temporary mobility patterns of young Aboriginal Australian people (Prout 2008b; Biddle & Prout 2009) coupled with short visits to regional research settings. The agencies and leaders advised on the best approach to facilitate contact with young people. Secondary to the recruitment role, agencies or community leaders engaged in the research as an 'agency' participant for the purpose of collecting broad perspectives and background data on mobility. Such specific discussion helped to gain perspectives on the operationalisation of mobility and the lives of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. Helping with recruitment was not dependent on an agency's participation in data collection.

The Role of a Cultural Advisor and Relationship Building

Due to the significance of building strong and trusting relationships as a critical feature of effective research with Aboriginal Australian populations, there are

considerations that exist around the conflict between long-term relationship building and project time constraints. These potential limitations are recognised and addressed through dynamic networking with community leaders, local agencies and building on referrals from the project Cultural Advisor, Syd Sparrow. It is through this valuable relationship and critical collaboration with Syd that an understanding of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and protocols is further developed and relationships with agencies and key community people identified and appropriately initiated.

Face-to-Face Contact

The resounding recommendation I received upon consultation with Aboriginal community leaders is to show myself in the flesh as a 'real' person. One of the community leaders who kindly taught me explained:

It's community engagement, you've got to be grassroots, what we did today, you walk in, knock on a door, "Hello... how you going?" That's engagement, you did that this morning, and we can send an electronic email, to me that's just cyber communication, people don't get to see the real Amy and shake her hand and say, "This is a kind hearted person here that I can trust, talk to this person then". They can't read that in an email.

Limitations

Creating opportunity to engage with young people, developing rapport and establishing trust in a short timeframe are all potential limitations that are minimised through the recruitment process. A longer recruitment time of approximately eight weeks occurred in Adelaide. However, in Port Augusta and Alice Springs, face-to-face recruitment occurred within a time limited window of between five and six days, giving added significance to this approach. Agency and community leaders acted as an initial channel for relaying research purposes and where possible, I took part in preliminary activities and outings with young participants to build relationships. Through this process I was able to take cooking classes with a group of young female Aboriginal Australian people and to participate in a program organised by Zonta, where we collectively mended blankets for women accessing domestic violence crisis services. Young people interested in finding out more about the research stayed for a focus group or one-on-one session for further explanations about the research. If young people contacted by agencies and community leaders by phone showed interest, they were offered a house visit.

Young Participant Data Collection

Data collected from young participants focus on perspectives of dreams and hopes. In order to respond most appropriately and to be receptive to the comfort of each person in each space, my approach is passive and flexible, without imposition. Knaack (1984, p. 111) emphasises that by incorporating multiple methods, it ensures as a researcher that you are taking steps to connect with participants in a way that they can control, as opposed to practising research that encourages people to succumb to the style of research that I as the researcher preconceive as 'best' (Knaack 1984, p. 111). Following referral and relationship building, I explain the benefits participants will offer me as the researcher and explore the reciprocal relationship where the researcher learns from participant knowledge. Time is then provided to think over involvement, supporting an informed decision. English language understanding and developmental factors are assessed in consent processes. I explain my role as a mandatory reporter, as a student researcher in South Australia, explaining that in accordance with the *Children's Protection Act 1993 (SA)*, I am not able to keep confidential information where I suspect risk or harm to physical and psychological wellbeing. Processes relating to the recording and storing of data, identifiable information and anonymity are explained to participants. Clarifying understandings is a continuous process. Relationship building exercises prior to interviews are also conducted where time permits, by visits to informally 'hang out' with participants. The option for recorded or non-recorded interviews is offered to make young people feel safe.

Primarily through recorded, flexible, semi-structured interviews, the perspective of young people is sought in a respectful conversation that allows participant control. Yarning is a term used by some Aboriginal people to describe conversations and is recognised in the literature as a social and research topic (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Fredericks et al. 2011). Prior to the interview I engage in a 'social yarn' with participants, described as a:

Conversation that takes place before the research or topic yarn is informal and often unstructured, follows a meandering course that is guided by the topic that both people choose to introduce into the discussion...It is usually during the social yarn that trust is developed and the relationship is built (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 38)

Where possible, appreciative approaches to inquiry are adopted to avoid deficit based questions. As advised by Chilisa, I consciously move away from deficit towards affirmative enquiries that buck the frequent problematisation of Aboriginal Australian people (2012, pp. 243–245). It is important to explore and discover understandings and to be careful not to assume the answer into my question. Some examples of the kinds of questions I might ask people are:

- What is important to you at the moment?
- What do you dream of?
- If you could imagine any future for yourself...What would it does it look like?
Where would you be? Who would you be with?

Agency Participant Data Collection

Agencies consenting to involvement as participants for data collection engage in a semi-structured interview for the purpose of collecting broad perspectives and background data on young people and mobility. Interviews with service providers and community leaders pursue more specific knowledge and opinion based questions. Audio recording of all interviews is discussed with participants as optional. A diary of observations accompanies agency visits and acts as a record of personal insights and discernment of events and experiences. The data collected for this research group will be used as supplementary contextual background to the primary data received from young people.

Data Analysis

Following the transcription of recorded interviews and collation of this with manually recorded data, textual analyses of the perspectives of Young Participants and Agency Participants are conducted separately. All data are subjected to conceptual analysis whereby data are combed over and examined. Key words and particular quotes which stand out as significant or have particular relevance to the research question/s are initially highlighted. Categories are then developed and key themes summarised. Conceptual analysis is recognised as ethical and particularly suitable due to its unobtrusive capacity with regard to identifying themes and patterns (Walter 2010). The tendency for me to highlight the themes that resonate with me the most, to tell the stories of the people with whom I personally bonded is something that I assume will happen as part of human nature. Through reflexivity, I question my assumptions, critically analysing both the data and myself. Reflecting on bias such as the tendency for me subconsciously give a voice to the participant who I thought really needed my 'help' is something I aware of. My white middle class status inclines me to certain presuppositions. The engrained white view that Aboriginal Australian people have problems that white people need to help them to fix is something on which I continually reflect. Smith describes the 'Indigenous problem' as a persistent idea, explaining that:

...it operates within the wider discourse of racism, sexism and other forms of positioning the Other. Its neatness and simplicity gives the term its power and durability. Framing 'the ... problem', mapping it, describing it in all its different manifestations, trying to get rid of it, laying blame for it, talking about it...teaching about it, *researching* it, over and over (Smith 1999, pp. 90–91).

Problematizing Indigenous is a Western obsession. The discourse has shifted away from cultural deficit views to cultural diversity views. Even within these views the Indigenous can be perceived as a problem because many are considered 'inauthentic' and too ungrateful. The belief in the 'Indigenous problem' is still present in the Western psyche (Smith 1999, pp. 91–92).

I will allow the data to tell me the story as I validate theme selection from its frequency within the data. The anonymity of the data at the analysis stage and the supervision that I receive to question and support my reasoning for theme selection adds rigour to this process. When I interpret the data, it will be impossible to remove my subjectivity; however, I will continually question my thinking, beliefs and assumptions to invest in the integrity of my results.

Chapter 3:

FINDINGS

3.1 YOUNG PARTICIPANTS

3.1.1 Family

The leading theme throughout all discussions with young participants is the significant value of family in their lives and the belief in togetherness. Every young person involved in this study highlighted the significance of family, with the centrality of family holding consistently for participants irrespective of gender. Concern for family is often expressed in relation to the way the young people interviewed dream and prioritise their wants. Family being happy and well takes precedence over all other things in life, with factors relating to grief and loss weighing heavily on the minds of young participants. Young people interviewed express the wish that they had more support through tough times. Reflecting on their own past experience and the present situation of their communities, the young participants express an urge to give back to community and a humanitarian underpinning to the way they see themselves living in the future. Dreams about education and employment attainment are secondary to family and are predominantly seen as a way of enabling access to the basics for themselves and family.

3.1.1.1 The Importance of Family

The importance of family was expressed in many ways, but it was always expressed. For some, the importance of family was expressed through feelings of love and happiness and for others there was a longing to be with family and look after family. One young male participant told me that Mimili in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of South Australia was his 'home'¹. At the time we met, he was staying with an organisation in Adelaide to access education and employment. He explained to me the importance of his family, saying:

“My family keep me happy, pretty much the basic stuff. The basic stuff is the big stuff”

¹“Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) is incorporated by the 1981 Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act whereby the SA Parliament gave Aboriginal people title to more than 103,000 square kilometres of arid land in the far northwest of South Australia” (Anangu 2013).

From this participant's perspective, the dream for happiness is something that comes from being with family. A female young participant in Adelaide expressed warmth as she explained the caring nature of her family:

"They're like everything, like they're there and everything and — I don't know — they're your family, really important...They're caring and stuff and they just want like what's best for you"

In Alice Springs, a young mother tells of how she values her family by explaining:

"My family and my daughter, that's all — like 100%"

Words describing family as being '100%' and 'everything' capture the essence of the way young people involved in this study express the importance of family to them. This is the one consistent aspect in the lives of young people involved in this study that they are confident about. Many of the young people interviewed appeared the most self-assured when they spoke about family. The family system is spoken of as something they are familiar with, know well and therefore describe prioritising around. The young people involved in this study hold family close, a message which came through constantly in the interviews — resonating with the voices of many. It is from this centralised positioning of family that the dreams and futures of young participants are conceived and conceptualised.

Paradoxically, some young people in the study also see family as the only thing that could stop them from realising their dreams. One young person interviewed in Port Augusta explains to me some of the expectations that family have around always being together saying:

"Yeah and like, because family always wants me to be around them. So I'll just miss out on a bunch of education and knowledge about it. So then I'll miss out on some of that"

When this idea was explored further with the young person, possible obligations, social reasons for needing to stay home surface as the young person elaborates:

"I just stay with my family because it's upset, I suppose"

With young people in this study highlighting the importance of family and the need to be together — whether to feel happy or through trouble — it is interesting to note how this then relates to the way the young people interviewed proceed to dream and prioritise wants. The dream for family to be happy and well takes precedence over other matters. Preserving family ties links back to early findings of Young and Doohan (1989, p. 20), Altman (1987) and Brehndt and Brehndt (1992). The significance of maintaining family networks reinforces the importance of relationships in ways which are distinct from the individualisation prioritised within neoliberal systems. Maintaining relationships is recognised as a driver for mobility in the prominent work of Taylor and Bell (2004), Peterson (2004, p. 234) and Memmott and Moran (2001). Similar to this study's findings, Guenther and Osborne (in press) noticed the central focus of family in some Aboriginal Australian people's perception of the future, noting that family took precedence over mainstream ideas of education and employment. For some young participants in this study who place such importance on family, there is a subsequent concern for the vulnerability of their loved ones.

3.1.1.2 Grief and Loss

Discussions of family and friends are intertwined with stories of loss. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011), death is experienced by Indigenous Australians at a much greater rate across all age groups and all of the major causes of death when compared to non-Indigenous Australians. Experiences of losing family or friends due to suicide, old age or poor health have a noticeable effect on the young people interviewed. Many young people are directly affected by the experience or anticipation of death. As I spoke with young people in this study, I became aware of feelings of grief and loss and noticed sadness in many of the young people as they told of losing friends and family. As a researcher I felt particularly moved by the young people's willingness to share these private stories with me. Reflecting on my own privilege around health, I realise that from my social position, fearing death for its foreignness is more likely.

For some young people interviewed, it is the thought of how they will cope when death inevitably happens, as many have particularly strong connections with grandparents and the elderly. One young male in Port Augusta tells me of his depth of feeling:

“Just making sure everyone's okay, just because I like to know that my friends are okay, because I did have a friend kill himself...at the age of 12 because he

wasn't okay, he didn't get any help...so I just want to know that everything's going to be okay and everything in their lives"

Many of the young people in this study reveal being very close to grandparents, living with grandparents and some also being carers for grandparents. The wellbeing of grandparents, family and friends worries these young people and is something they perceive as the one thing that might destabilise them and stop them from realising their dreams and hopes. Young people interviewed told of their worry about how they would cope if they experience the death of someone close, as they feel that this could have detrimental effects on how they would manage to stay 'afloat'. Another young participant shares a similar concern, again in Port Augusta, stating:

"The only thing that could probably hold me back is maybe certain family members...like passing...someone that I'm close to, like my grandfather, my grandmother and I probably feel like I don't want to do anything anymore"

A young mother I spoke with who was staying in Alice Springs shared her grief and the difficulty in life after losing her child. She said:

"Because we lost our little girl and that's why everything is just moving slowly...Yeah, we only have one little boy to look forward to now"

What resonates from young participants' stories is the fundamental understanding of self as part of a family. The purpose and meaning of self is so intrinsically tied in with family that there becomes a combined lens for viewing the world. The young mother interviewed goes on to talk about how she hopes for the chance to talk to other women about her grief and loss, to share stories and feelings to try and ease emotional pain.

"I want to be in the women's group, the woman's that, who been their loss you know, they lost their loved ones, I want to sit down and try to hear their story, yeah can share my story with them to make me bit, little bit alright...yeah 'cos it's been taking a while for me to go through everything. Yeah and I have to raise my son, yeah doing everything I can"

Through this interview the woman talks extensively about her difficulties in dealing with the grief from the loss of her son. Despite her ongoing struggle to manage, the feelings of grief and loss remain and affect her ability to think or move towards her

dreams. For the young participants I interviewed who told stories of losing a family member, losing a friend or the impending death of someone close, the effect of these experiences and feelings of grief and loss affected their capacity to dream and think about the future.

A young man in the study was visiting Adelaide from a remote Aboriginal community and reflected on the family at times of grief and loss, explaining:

“I don’t know, I think there’s like an aura that you have with your family, that can’t be cut, you know you can’t break that chain, sort of thing. But you lose a family member, but you still have that chain there. That’s what I love about it. Because you could lose someone, but still all be there for one another”.

What this participant so clearly articulates is the interconnectedness and oneness of his identity with the identity of others. He does not consider himself primarily as an individual but rather as a unified part of others, who are also interdependently connected with him.

Each young individual in this study has a very unique story to tell of how they responded to the ever present grief and loss in their lives. The particular kinds of loss experienced can be heightened from location to location depending on external factors. For example, death by suicide was most discussed in Port Augusta, whereas loss relating to family and grandparents was a theme recurring throughout all regions. Family is the overwhelming issue of significance raised by all of the young people in this study. It was referred to as the primary bond in each young participant’s lives regardless of whether the relationship represented a source of adversity or of comfort and pleasure. The intergenerational experience of nurturing and caring for one another in relation to grief and loss is one of the lasting effects of colonialism. For the young people in this study, trying to survive against conflicting social and economic systems is a daily struggle which causes immense strain and on many occasions premature death. This invokes Prout’s (2009a) idea that colonisation has impacted mobile populations in a way that they are forced to live in systems which preference fixed lifestyles and that compound existing marginalisation. The importance of family and the effects of grief and loss also influence some young people’s opinions relating to support networks.

3.1.1.3 Support Networks

When given the opportunity to talk about anything on their minds, anything at all, the overwhelming response of the young people in this study was that they would like the people who ‘make decisions’ to know that young Aboriginal Australian people need to be better informed about the support available to them. One of the young male participants in Adelaide had been through some tough times with drugs, alcohol and the law. In his interview he describes how “it ended pretty bad”, but that with some solid support he was able to come to Adelaide to try to get an education and some work. He explains that his brother was “pretty homeless” at the time and so “it was a good move for us both”. Thinking about some of the struggles of his community, he explains:

“...support networks for people that have been through what I’ve been through you know a lot of young fellas get left behind because there’s not enough workers going to their houses and making sure they’re going to school and stuff like that. It can be pretty annoying though, like I used to have workers rock up to my house and I’d be hiding and stuff and wouldn’t answer the door...but you know I would just get in there and get them up and ‘What are you doing?’ you know like just — I don’t know some of the government you know organisations you know they don’t put in the hard yards maybe; it’s probably not their job too, but like yeah some maybe don’t care but yeah I don’t know that’s just one thing”

This young participant highlights the complexity of community struggles and government intervention. While he talks about the idea of more workers being needed, he also recognises not accepting help as a child. A key point this young man makes is that it is not so much about a need for more services, but for the kinds of services that will be accepted by young people.

On one occasion in Port Augusta I was confronted by the strong opinion of a mainstream service provider who appeared to be experiencing work-related burnout. The worker told me that if Aboriginal young people want help, they can come and ask for it. While this may be viewed as racist, it also reveals a perspective that young people need to help themselves. This view resembles that of Noel Pearson (2000) around ‘passive welfare’, suggesting that handing out assistance to Aboriginal Australian people has eroded the capacity for people to be responsible for themselves. Making critical generalisations about minority racial groups is something that can also be seen as undermining the capacity for positive change, with one of

the standout features of effective relationships between young participants and agencies recognised as an optimistic, proactive approach. Essentially, there is an argument that young Aboriginal Australian people need to get up and help themselves: however, the young people in this study reveal that a part of the daily struggle for them is not having the information about support available to know where to start.

One young woman in this study, who was staying in Adelaide but calls Port Augusta home, is passionate about becoming a lawyer. She describes how witnessing domestic violence and large numbers of children coming in and out of her family home in her childhood has made her hold strong opinions about the right to feel safe. This young female participant explains that people need to know that harming other people is against the law, emphasising the right to feel safe:

“I’d like to just to — like, if somebody does something wrong, like against the law or like hurt somebody, I’d like them to like know the punishments and like I want people to know that they’re safe like, feel safe”

From this young person’s perspective, the complexity of life for young people is also shown. Again, this young woman described feeling traumatised as she worried for the safety of her mother and family. Many of the experiences and lives of young people I spoke with were complicated with stressors in life. Young people talked about having to sort things out, finish business, take care of things and tidy things up before they can move. The ability to look forwards and dream in life is therefore impacted by young participants not feeling safe and stable.

Young people in this study also see boredom and a lack of facilities as causing problems for young people like themselves. They suggest that lack of access to facilities stops them staying on the right track. Being kept busy in a positive way is something the young participants in this study suggest would be beneficial. One of the young people in Port Augusta stated:

“I would like to later on, help out in — try and get more facilities, for younger people in this town. Because there’s not really that much they can do here. And I’d really like something to happen about it. Because a lot of young kids are getting into crime and that. It’s not really helping them getting anywhere in life. If they’re being occupied in a good way, they can probably be somewhere in life”

Young people interviewed indicated the benefits they believed would come from more facilities, improved services and having a better knowledge and awareness of what is available. In Port Augusta and Alice Springs, the critical 24-hour services that ran for young people in each location have been in recent times shut down. Both of these services were cited by participants in this study as having been important to the wellbeing of young people. There is strong recurrent opinion in the communities that the closure of pivotal services has been a great loss. Increasing the number of services already available is not needed, but availability of certain kinds of services with the capacity to accept and adapt to complexity in the lives of young people is crucial. This ties in closely with the views of Brannen and Nilsen (2002) and Nilan, Julian and Germov (2007) who highlighted the effects of social class on young people's capacity to aspire, based on the limiting or privileging effects of resource access. Facilities, services and practices that can acknowledge and work within spaces of intensity require localised and flexible approaches. In this way, when young people experience complexity in life as expressed through the interviews of this study, they can be supported and nurtured systemically in ways that are accepting of socio-cultural wellbeing as a priority.

3.1.2 Education and Employment

Dreams about education and job attainment are secondary to family for the young people involved in this study and are often seen as a way of enabling access to the basics for both themselves and their families. Feelings or expressions of a desire to succeed, achieve and aspire, beyond the desire of connecting and/or engaging with family and the aspiration for family happiness and achieving positive togetherness, were seldom mentioned. An understanding of the purpose of education was at times lacking, with the young participants knowing that they had to just 'try and get it done'. While education was broadly recognised as leading to a particular job or the possibility of money, the actual process of how this might occur and what that job might entail, what it might involve, what it might feel like was at times non-existent. McDonald et al. (2011) highlighted that sometimes what young people imagined for the future was not necessarily within reach and as noted by Brannen and Nilsen (2002), critical considerations around the reality of agency and structural limitations are often missing from our understandings/constructions of aspiration. At times, incomprehensible structural complexities prevent young people from realising their dream in the way they might have thought.

Sometimes the young people involved in this study had just simply heard about something and so they were going to go with that choice. In Adelaide one young person describes

feeling uncertain but predicts that over time, the accrual of certificates will possibly lead to work:

“So I could take eventually, I don’t know, maybe a year or two but I think once I get a couple of me certificates and stuff I could nearly get a job somewhere”

Although the concept of employment was at times only vaguely understood with some young participants not sure of what specific or different kinds of work entailed, what was explicit for young people was that education and employment were pathways to provide for family and helping community. The young people in this study often dream that the world would be more compassionate and services more caring. Young people in the study feel that if they are able to experience this gentleness and care through difficult times that they will be more likely to realise their dreams. In Port Augusta one young participant talks about giving back to community:

“Well I’ve been through my own problems and that and I’m actually like got myself better and that and then seeing the youth and that going through — I think going through what I went through and that — I just want to help them and let them know that there are people out there who are there for them and that”

In Adelaide a female participant dreams of working and returning to work in Hermannsburg², the community where she was born:

“Teaching...yeah back at my remote community where I was born”

3.1.2.1 Meeting Needs: Basic Access

Employment featured over education, with work discussed primarily as a link to money. When asked about what having money might mean in the lives of young participants, it became clear that many dreamed of being able to meet basic needs. In Alice Springs a participant tells me about what they dream of:

“A little bit of money too. Food, clothes”

Earning income is seen as a way to provide for the basics things young people talked about such as: food, knives and forks, clothes, housing and shelter, a licence, access to transport or a car. As has been discussed, the importance of mobility to

² Located 124 km south-west of Alice Springs, Hermannsburg/Ntaria is situated in one of the most picturesque areas of Central Australia (MacDonnell Shire 2013)

maintaining relationships was evidenced in the value many young people in this study placed on having a car. Dreaming or aspiring to have a car was associated with moving about and connecting with family and friends.

“And a car — like that’s what I really, really want. Get to places and take you where you want to be”

A licence was an immense challenge for the young mothers in this study, especially for the single mothers who dreamed of being able to take their kids to school. Being able to get essential, everyday items from the shop or being able to reach a chemist for sick family was also something young people suggested a car would enable them to do, particularly for those outside urban locations. For young people in this study who are not having basic needs met in life, it becomes almost natural to them for these things to become the ‘dream’.

Needs are prioritised as is indicated in Maslow’s hierarchy, with physiological needs being placed before the need to ‘succeed’. This suggests that if some of the young people in this study were not living in poverty and instead had basic needs met, perhaps they might start to imagine life evolving in new ways. One young mother I interviewed was a carer for an incontinent elderly relative and had endured several weeks on end without running water. When the water was eventually returned, it was only cold water. While hot water had finally been provided at the time we met, it is easy to start to see given this situation how a person might feel happiness to be having access to water. Another hope this young participant had was that the fence surrounding her property taken down for road works be replaced. This young woman feels safe with her fence as it stops ‘drinkers from coming in at night’. As she continues to wait patiently, she dreams about having the fence fixed so she can care for her family and feel safe — any ‘other’ person’s basic human rights. The young mother is noticeably graceful and thankful for her home, she tells me:

“I’m happy like the things that I am doing now. Yeah I’m happy by like doing things for my Aunty and I’m good at doing that for her. Yeah and I’m happy that way and plus when I’m getting my little one to school and that”

This experience has caused me to think reflexively as I recognise that the worldview of this young mother is significantly different from the view I hold. Following Indigenous research methods becomes critical in thinking through young participant data as my personal frame of reference and cultural difference make it difficult for me

to immediately understand this way of being. I want to explore this young woman's experience as viewed by her and for that reason need to take the time to think through how my own lens is affecting my interpretations. My understanding of the world is so different historically, socially and culturally, it is seemingly impossible for me to attempt to interpret her understanding as I am doing so from a position of not knowing or alternate knowing. I am intelligent in the interpretation of my own circumstances, but I feel that for me to think I can grasp this way of living wholly would be, — I believe — completely ignorant. It takes a while for me to process my visit as it becomes clear that for this young person, the sense of pride that she draws from the ability to care for her Aunty and try and get her child to school is what brings her fulfilment in life. In her world, she is happy. What is notable is that for some young people interviewed being a full time carer is their daily work. The responsibilities carried out for family and community are in fact more exhausting than any full time taxable job, with no start or finish time. Some young people interviewed are not recognised as engaging in work, yet they are occupied full time with caring for others.

As Gordon et al. (2005) indicated, neoliberal ways of thinking have created dominant ideas about pathways that lead to success. A pathway of caring for others, an aspiration of caring for others is not acknowledged as this kind of dream and does not conform to the normalised aspirations of education and employment. Dreaming and aspiring to fulfil the role of caring for family is not accepted or included in the neoliberal agenda, whereas more profitable pathways are commended. Young people in this study have talked about the importance of maintaining and respecting family/relationships and the drive to meet the basic needs that are not available due to poverty. The dream for these young participants is to be part of family while also meeting these basic needs. Whether education and employment support this dream seems to be ambiguous for young people. Perhaps if education and employment were inclusive of an aspiration to be with and support others, then as young people strive to preserve and maintain family wellbeing and connection they will begin to feel recognised for their contribution instead of being further marginalised.

Again, this interpretation requires reflection as in my world, following education and employment pathways so that I can provide for my family and have a home is a well-established assumption. There is a visible link for me between undertaking higher levels of study and employment outcomes and I have a clear picture about the kind of life I want to live. I think predominantly in the future and struggle to stay in the present because my basic needs are met. Maintaining relationships is important to

me but does not consume my time and energy. This assessment of my own life is important as it helps me to ask questions about the circumstances of the young people in the study. For example, if people were not struggling to meet basic needs, would maintaining relationships to facilitate access to resources be as essential? The big questions here and the challenges for young people are around whether engaging in education and employment is a positive or negative idea; especially as young participants consider the impact of decisions on the one thing of most importance — family.

3.1.2.2 Types of Job

While for many of the young people in this study the dream and hope of being happy with family and meeting more basic needs takes precedence over education and employment aspirations, some young people were able to identify specific types of job and career streams. Some participants did not perceive any obstacles in the future and were highly determined. Young people talked about the benefits of having mentors, supportive family and teachers encouraging them:

“I just try and stay motivated and just think of the end result and what I’m going to get out of it, when I do it. And begin at school and having mentors and being... and having family that push me and motivate me to do stuff. That’s just helped me a lot, because otherwise probably feel all lazy and want to give up and stuff. Yep and teachers as well because they push me. They tell me how well I’m going and that just makes me want to do more, encouraging me”

For another young person in this study, aside from family, getting an education and employment were her next priorities. In Port Augusta, a young female outlines her specific plan:

“Well I want to finish school first, hopefully get my SACE certificate. I’m on track for that anyway, because all my teachers tell me, that I’m doing well for that. I only want to do nursing as my career, or something in the health area because I feel strongly about helping out my community and Aboriginal people and keeping their health good. And yeah, I really want to do nursing, hopefully do nursing cadetship, after I’ve finished school and if I feel confident, I want to do nursing. I will go to uni to study, go to be a registered nurse”

Playing sports such as football and basketball professionally, becoming a hairdresser, joining the air force, the army, social and youth work, teaching, photography, counselling, criminal law, mining, electricians, horticulture, welders and accountants are some examples of the range of jobs that young people talked about. Often, but not exclusively, the hope to have a specific occupation is found in dreams of young people who are in some way connected with mainstream agencies. Young participants I interviewed in mainstream settings were frequently taken through education and employment development processes as a way of meeting associated program and policy aims. Programs are geared primarily towards young people achieving education and employment pathways. As a result, the neoliberal discourse of future focused linear aspiration is at times articulated incredibly clearly by the young people in this study and can be linked to this particular stimulus. In Alice Springs, a young male participant states very clearly:

“I want to try and join the army when I finish school as my career. I want to be a mechanic”

For some young people in this study, even with guidance they still seemingly are quite unaware of what this job actually means, how to make it happen is vague, as is an understanding of what that might actually entail. One young person, when asked about where he had heard of a particular job type explained he did not know, he had just heard of it somewhere and did not know much about it. What was clear was that the job was something available, not as a thought out choice but as a systemic obligation. Some of the most disadvantaged young people in this study lived in constant fear of losing the welfare benefits they needed to survive. Young people interviewed described situations that can be understood as being coerced to assimilate and conform to dominant norms and values due to this need for survival. The focus of young people to conform to participate in education and training removed the need to think of these in terms of personal dreams and hopes. With possibilities presented as obligations, individual autonomy and drive become uncalled for and eliminate the space for individual dreams. What was interesting was how many of the young people jumped at the chance to be given information about courses and career information relevant to their area of interest and seemed really appreciative of this gesture to help and take an interest in them. Some young people expressed a lack of awareness about the options available to them and how to manage the education system. In Port Augusta, a young person spoke of the things that might stop them from reaching their dream:

“Not knowing how to do it, like the educational side of it, the knowledge of doing it”

For others ‘making it’ is sometimes seen as just getting a job as opposed to an attachment to what that experience might be like. In Adelaide, one young person asserts:

“Well I don’t know what I would like be doing, but I would like to see myself, at least having a job”

In Alice Springs a young mother spoke about her hope to one day in the future to start work but this is prioritised against family responsibility and her role as a mother:

“I think if ... move on with my kids, see the future and become a good mum for them, and I want my kids to get well educated and keep going to school, probably when they get more older... and I want to start working”

Young participants who were most able to clearly articulate the types of jobs and careers that they would like to have in the future were most often also those linked with the mainstream services which seek to educate young people about these processes. For those participants with lower levels of access to services, more basic needs were at the forefront of their minds. Young people in this study are often constrained economically and at times influenced by certain social and cultural priorities in ways that can limit the scope of thinking to that of immediate needs and survival based thinking. In situations where young participants are busy dealing with basic needs and meeting family commitments there is not much time or space to think about service access. With young people interviewed primarily thinking and dreaming in relation to caring for and being with family, the organisation of life manifests in this family centred way. In this way, the ability of a person to express future thinking in regard to employment and education pathways will be at times dependent on the current community and family circumstances and influences that they are managing.

The mobility of young people was in evidence in the interviews across key areas of family, housing, employment and education. Many of the young people in this study were accessing education and saw this as something which would enable them to reach a level and type of education unavailable to them in regional and remote areas. Sacrificing family for education was a decision many young participants had to make

and had been encouraged by family to carry through. Young people interviewed talk about the difficulty in their lives, having to manage being away from family.

“sometimes when I’m not around, they bond more, my family and I’m just kind of out of the picture”

In these situations young people interviewed are often making choices that are not easy, the decisions to take up education and employment away from home and family are decisions that can affect identity and belonging. Mobility away from home to access education meant homesickness and emotional hardship for young people in this study. Despite this, many chose to move, as this was something that their family wanted. With family as the central aspect of young participants’ lives, a feeling of loss of connection to ‘home’ and ‘family’ existed but this is not a question of whether moving for education and employment is right or wrong. What this highlights is the importance of service awareness, of the great family sacrifices some young people make. The complexity of circumstances evidences the challenging space that young people in this study occupy.

3.2 AGENCY PARTICIPANTS

3.2.1 Education and Employment Pathways

Education and employment feature as the primary theme in the discourse of mainstream agencies in this study. For some agencies, criteria exist for young Aboriginal people who want to sign up. The two key aspects here are that a young person has an aspiration in mind or desire to succeed, at the least some indication of a desire to study. The second common criterion is that young people need to have family support to participate and to consent to participation. In some cases, the application process is quite rigorous including the submission of expressions of interest by family and subsequent review by education teams who are responsible for approving applicants. As discussed by Brannen and Nilsen (2002), choice to participate can be limited or privileged through resource access. The individualised environment builds on existing wealth, reproducing disadvantage. For young people who do not have some form of capital, their disadvantage is therefore compounded or becomes more entrenched. For one program in Port Augusta, picking those students from the school who have the most potential, those who already have a dream or aspiration is fundamental to admission; this approach is seen as critical to the success of the young person and the program. When talking with someone from this agency, I asked about what that might mean for young people who do not have support at home, who have been left behind in class and are unable to obtain the average grade of ‘C’ that was required for entry. The agency

response revealed that this program did not cater for this kind of student; it had been tried in the past and it simply had not worked. An agency participant in Adelaide explains:

“Now one of the most important criteria for kids to be in this program is that they the student has actively chosen to be here. You know the Stolen Generations we are not — and we go to the nth degree to ensure that that’s the case. The second criteria of equal importance is that the family are supportive of the child being here and will support them whilst they are here. If you don’t have those two things in place it’s not going to work. Of course it’s going to lead to great unhappiness...Now they might not know exactly what they want to do now, but they sure as hell know they want to do something”

Attaining the ‘basics’ described in interviews with young people — looking after family, having access to essentials, knowing how to get support if and when it is needed and general wellbeing are all precursors to education and employment. The system is continually advocating that young people should aspire towards education and employment, yet without basics needs being met, young people are simply surviving and often are unable to think about the future in this way. Young people in this study have emphasised a desire for connectedness and relatedness with family. Without this family identity, education and employment can be impacted. For young participants there can be little time to think of the future when trying very hard to meet their basic needs. Young people interviewed can also struggle to think about the future, as there are difficulties associated with the complex negotiation required to navigate around different expectations such as family, community, education and employment systems and self. Those who do aspire and do get support from services appear better able to imagine a future because they see less tension in life. In some instances, young people say that they rarely think much about the future at all. A participant from an agency in Alice Springs explains to me:

“so we try and create a safe place where they can make mistakes and not get heckled or laughed at, or picked on... try and create those environments at school, so eventually they don’t have to think about anything else, except themselves and what’s good for them instead of having to be constantly on alert in terms of, you know, got to be surviving every day — that kind of stuff. So we just want to create an environment where they can think about other stuff instead of finding a place where they need to sleep, having to find somewhere to go and eat and all that kind of stuff, just to be kids and our kids, they live an adult life, so we try and make it so they can just be kids, really.”

In Port Augusta, a very influential person in the distribution of high profile scholarships for Aboriginal Australian young people explained to me that he was not a racist. Using the common marker “I have Aboriginal friends but...”, he went on to tell me how “all most of them want is a handout”. This person now makes it his ‘policy’ that if Aboriginal people want something “they can come and ask for it”.

In places with increased Aboriginal populations such as Port Augusta and Alice Springs, racial division is more apparent than I have experienced before and this brings me to Chilisa’s point regarding the significance of self-reflexivity to reflect local contexts (2012, pp. 228–233). In Port Augusta and Alice Springs racism emerges in a different way to that in Adelaide and may be considered to increase the difficulty level of accessing employment and education on a racial basis. In regional and remote areas, racism seems to work on a subtle level. For example, in order to access mainstream services you are considered for inclusion when you behave in certain ways and are able to show that you value certain things. Essentially, young people who are able to become normalised in some ways will receive advantages. For young people in this study not accessing mainstream services, the thought or process of becoming more normalised is a direct challenge to their identity. This is a challenge not only to individual identity but a challenge on the basis of connections to others. Aboriginal run agencies have a stronger focus on healing the wellbeing of young people through identity first, while education is of primary importance in mainstream contexts. The recognition in most services interviewed is that education is the last hope for Aboriginal Australian young people and community. This is a huge responsibility that young participants carry and is evidenced through the strong humanitarian perspectives of young people. Mobility for education is seen from some mainstream perspectives as a necessary evil, a sacrifice that needs to be made as it is the last resort. The dominant emphasis of education over identity in mainstream services suggests the benefit of a political–cultural shift that more solidly recognises these elements as equally significant and co-dependent.

Through my engagement with community it was noticeable that young people whose family are challenged with getting young people to school, the capacity for these parents to negotiate a rigorous application process is likely to also be diminished. As role models for young people, it is natural that adults who experience systems as difficult and inaccessible would be deterred and that this is then modelled to the child. According to an agency participant, young people who experience life in this way are typically thinking and making decisions like an adult from a very early age. As one agency participant describes, for a young person in Alice Springs, getting up in the morning can mean a number of things:

“a lot of our young kids from an early age have the ability to make their own decisions. What I mean by that is, when I was growing up, my parents made the decisions for me, stuff like, you need to go to bed early because you’ve got school in the morning and you’re going to school. Our kids don’t do that, so when they get up in the morning, walking out the door can mean a hundred different things. So, it can be a decision to just stay around the home. It could be a decision to go and hang out in town. Going into town can mean ten different things; walking past a car that’s open and there’s a wallet in there – suddenly change the direction of what they’re doing. Then they could be running away from security or the police. So, throughout that whole day they’re making all these decisions by themselves, there’s no one there guiding them”

Alice Springs offers examples of programs that operate as alternate educational options that respect unique circumstances and support learning on this basis. Mparntwe Clontarf Academy operates from Centralian Middle School and supports positive development, access to basics and school attendance as it builds leadership, wellbeing and self-esteem (Clontarf Foundation 2013). The unique attribute of the Mparntwe Clontarf Academy model is its prioritisation of factors that sit outside typical education system provisions. By emphasising basic needs, family and strengthening self the program allows young people the space they need to manage the breadth of needs. The Clontarf Academy addresses low attendance through engagement with recreation and in this process gives the students a special place where they know they will get a meal, get a break if they need it and the chance to be around people who are able to role model and support them. Alice Outcomes is another service proud of “achieving excellent outcomes for the young people in the program both in terms of social and educational development” (Alice Outcomes 2013). It is this balance of social and educational elements which supports its success and the service is proud of strong relationships and trust it has built with young people. At Alice Outcomes, the approach is to adapt to the complex daily lives of young people:

“Kids walk in late — we go welcome — we don’t say where have you been? If we get ten minutes’ work today that’s enough. We let kids relax if they need to — if they come to school and they are not in the mood for work, we will let them hang out as long as they are not too painful. So we’re a lot more forgiving I think. We have food here obviously so if you come hungry you can eat. We know kids very, very well so they feel very secure I think in our company. The staff here has been very stable for a long time and so our reputation is known. Kids know who is going to be here when they get here and they know the structure... I think that continuity of staff helps a lot too”

In this program young people have to be under the age of 15 years to enter but are allowed to self-pace their learning. So if a young person's adolescent pathway is non-linear, this is acceptable. In a mainstream institution this would likely mean 'failing' a year or dropping out. To be able to commence when ready and experience the flexibility to cope with competing areas of life, builds resilience in young people, increases self-esteem and removes labels of 'failure' that some young people experience. The naughty child, the dysfunctional young person, instead becomes the one who just took a different way of 'getting there'. Wanting and encouraging young people to succeed necessitates systems and staff that are open to allowing success to occur in diverse ways. This relates to Prout's (2009) earlier point about the cultivation of a negative discourse that situates young people as unmanageable. As recommended by Prout (2009), the services discussed above have sought to engage with varied situations and responded with flexibility.

3.2.2 Synthetic Culture

Some young people in this study talked about travelling to big cities and of a love for America — and these desires were often coupled with expressions about the dream of having an elite sports career. A concern about this kind of ambition could be expressed as the worry that this also can bring feelings of shame for those young people who do not 'make it'. Mobility towards cities was discussed in this study regarding the trend for populations from regional and remote areas to orientate towards urban locations to access education and employment. Aaron Stuart, an Arabunna man from Port Augusta and co-Chair of the Aboriginal Community Engagement Group (ACEG) describes the exposure of those young people moving to the city and living away from their home areas to what he coins a 'synthetic culture'. Aaron has undertaken pivotal work in Port Augusta on suicide prevention and describes his concerns about the impact of synthetic environments on young Aboriginal people's identity and wellbeing. When young people accept and adapt to the synthetic culture, which is all around them by way of environment, technology and the modern way of the world, Aaron sees young people disconnecting from culture and identity. Part of the youth suicide prevention program is to take young people on camps out bush so they can rebuild connections with land, place and culture. This helps to repair the damage that young people can suffer as a result of getting caught up in the synthetic culture. Aaron indicated that he has noticed that in the end, young people will be forced to return and come back home to rediscover their roots and identity, finding their culture again. Taylor and Bell (2004) also noted that despite frequent mobility away from home for education and employment, mobile populations persistently returned to land and 'home'. Aaron sees a lot of young Aboriginal people, particularly in the city, who live with feelings of anger. Young people find it difficult to see acceptance and acknowledgement of the past as a way of defending their own survival.

The idea that progress and technology bring new challenges to Aboriginal people is echoed by many Aboriginal community leaders and Aboriginal agency workers throughout Adelaide, Port Augusta and Alice Springs. An elder from the APY Lands who had worked extensively with young people shared similar concerns to Aaron regarding television and technology, explaining how for young Aboriginal people taking on this new culture means they become disconnected from land. This elder suggests that you can talk to young people “outside on the land where they will ‘open up’”. Young Aboriginal people, this elder suggests, are able to engage with culture in open spaces. He says it is becoming a real challenge, as when young people are fixated on technology and television they spend time indoors and this makes connecting difficult.

3.2.3 Family/Trouble as Reason for Moving Away

Some agency participants in this study shared the view that young people will choose to move away from community due to trouble or from circumstances that have become unliveable. In Alice Springs, one agency participant suggests:

“Kids move away because they know they are getting into strife. Kids don’t want to be involved, so they go and move with family members. They try and get into boarding school — they move interstate or just intrastate”

For young people in this study, the significance of family and prioritisation of family needs regardless of circumstances remain at the forefront of their minds. This is echoed through the words of an Aboriginal community leader in Port Augusta who states:

“The wellbeing of young people is not individualised — it’s not just about you — there is a bigger picture”

Young people in this study who moved to get an education or employment rarely acknowledged or perceived that they were moving due to trouble and instead, associated the purpose of the move with seeking education and employment or to visit family. An agency in Adelaide emphasises how movements based on family issues can be facilitated by agencies:

“So in a sense it’s not about people actively choosing to leave community for — to pursue their own ambitions in life unfortunately when it does happen it is often about people who are really being forced because circumstances don’t permit them to remain. Now sometimes that’s at the behest of an agency. I was chatting with somebody this morning – sadly those departures are often motivated by the wrong reasons. I mean I can also think of positive examples...but it is still far outnumbered

by departures as a consequence of unwillingness to continue on in what is not a very viable situation...I would suspect the great majority of them — by far the great majority of them would be movements based on issues related to family”

From an agency perspective, young people who chose to move from the APY Lands to Adelaide do so in the hope they will find something better:

“There’s been a trend over the last probably 10 years here in Adelaide where significant numbers of Anangu from the APY Lands and western communities are coming to live in Adelaide. In general terms, talking with people about why they do that is because they believe that life in Adelaide will be better, quieter, more tranquil, less fights and generally speaking the great majority of those people are coming down here to avoid situations in the community that they don’t like. However what’s happened is a lot of those issues have followed along and you’ve now got those same issues coming here”

What is interesting from these perspectives is the notion that people are moving away in search of something, often that something different they are searching for is not there; it is not as they imagined and in the process additional problems are collected and a disconnection from family occurs which can include a sense of loss of identity. In Port Augusta one community leader expresses his concern about young people moving away from family for education:

“Although they say the emphasis on education down there, but they’re moving them away. And so they move them away from parents and that, well who’s going to look after them?”

3.2.4 Perpetual Policy Change

The resounding theme from those agencies interviewed was a need for young people to feel safe and stable within the dominant mainstream system. Program mobility is seen as perpetuating disadvantage: one agency participant in Alice Springs describes it in this way:

“They think they are on a path and then someone comes and says — no you’ve got to go this way now”

Another agency participant in Alice Springs describes the impact of changing cycles on the ability of young people to feel safe. Feeling unsure of what to expect makes it difficult, with constant change destabilising young people and leading to problems with attendance:

“Difficulties are that education is all over the place — just kids in general — families move from community to community. Education is all over the place. They don’t feel safe and secure; they feel like they don’t know what is going to happen in that school so they don’t want to go to that school so it makes it very difficult. Even beyond education, a different manager will go out to a community and have a plan and every other plan is forgotten and this new manager who doesn’t know the community has got a plan and that’s – it’s terribly undermining”

One community leader in Port Augusta suggests that he tries to help young people find their inner self and soul, as this has often been crushed by the inability to keep up with the alien system and its perpetual change. He says:

“we make them feel that if their education ain’t scratch up to the European standard or the Australian standard, we say...Hey it’s alright, our process is not to learn that way. Our process we did this in the old days, by story, song, dance, art and culture. And that, we survived four climate changes with that, we lived, we adapted. We were scientists within our own right”

In Adelaide, the concern about changing political cycles is discussed again with the emphasis on the need for a generational view to be taken. Short-term cycles that relate to political cycles are seen at conflict with Aboriginal wellbeing and the Aboriginal way and lead to the suggestion of bipartisanship.

“We take a generational view here and often say to people if you don’t have a generational view don’t bother because you will slit your throat in the first three weeks because you will want out. So if you want a Christmas card – if you want 20 Christmas cards after being here for 3 weeks from the kids forget it. And it’s the same with any number of wonderful programs that have been conceptualised; they need to operate over the generations. That’s the only way you are going to get any traction...and sadly yeah they operate in political cycles...and I understand that – that’s the reality of the world – blah, blah, blah – but when it comes to issues such as this then there needs to be bipartisanship and support. This is one area where politics should not be played — it’s just not appropriate.”

Other concerns exist relating to the way that these policy cycles have generated what some respondents termed the ‘Aboriginal Industry’. The idea that young people are undergoing an extensive amount of training and accruing certificates was another common theme raised by

agencies. Some respondents describe how young people are compelled to complete training so that they do not lose money. This relates to what young people in the study also expressed about completing certificates, they saw it is a way of getting some kind of job with no awareness of what the job means, what it may lead to. Young people describe finding themselves taking training courses over and over again and without seeing the prospects or getting a job, they lose motivation and drive.

It is the strong view of Aboriginal community people interviewed in this study that training centres are training people but not delivering positive outcomes to the people. In the meantime, respondents suggest: training agencies benefit from huge payouts from government for each person they sign off as completing training or getting a job and this has encouraged a lot of corruption. Agency respondents suggest that some workers in these areas have been known to take advantage of young people for profit. The irony here is that young people in regional areas in particular were noted as always doing more training — yet always being underskilled. One agency participant explains it to me, only partially in jest:

“they train for a year to learn how to reverse a bobcat”

In this way, many of the young Aboriginal people in this study explain “the system is designed to keep us down”. The call for young people to be connected with real jobs that have meaning for them and at the very least the offer of a real job was seen as critical and something that has created delusions for young people who are giving up and not for a lack of trying.

Chapter 4:

CONCLUSION

The findings in this research reflect the stories of young participants who are strong, intelligent and caring people, desperately longing for a good future for their families. The young people in this study are all dealing with difficult, complex and demanding circumstances. Popular stereotypes commonly depict young Aboriginal Australian people as lazy, disinterested, delinquent and detached. These perceptions are challenged by the findings of this research, in which all of the young participants express the dream of wanting to contribute positively to society.

The key finding of this research is the significance of family in the lives of young participants. A uniform commentary from all participants was the centrality, significance and positioning of family. The importance of family is expressed in many ways but is always expressed through feelings of love, happiness, a desire to be together and care for one another. This connection with family takes precedence over all other things. Family, togetherness and the caring for others brings happiness and a sense of connection for those interviewed. When with family, young participants feel a sense of belonging, identity, confidence and esteem in who they are. This finding about the importance of family has also been identified in other research. Previous studies by Brehndt and Brehndt (1992), Taylor and Bell (2004) and Peterson (2004) have also identified family as important, relationships as central and as a driver of mobility. This study extends this knowledge, furthering our understanding of the profound importance of family as it specifically relates to mobile young Aboriginal Australian people. It gives further meaning to the importance of family in young people's lives and explores how the primacy of family underpins the way young participants dream and think about the present and the future. Dreams are prioritised around family — the need to both be with and care for family.

The dream for family to be happy and well is of most importance to those in this study. Young participants continually talked about grief and loss associated with losing a friend or family member. The anticipation of losing a loved one had a significant impact on the way young people thought about the future. While it is well acknowledged in the literature that Aboriginal Australian people experience increased morbidity and mortality than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, there is another side to this (Australian Institute of Health and

Welfare 2011). The reality of the compounding effects of experiences of sickness and death and the associated grief and loss that this foreshadows is rarely highlighted. The grief noted in this study shows that young participants' lives and dreams are profoundly affected by experience of loss or the fear and/or anticipation of further grief. Young people live with continual worry about the likelihood of losing someone and enduring grief, they wonder how they will manage to cope and continue to dream. This is a significant finding of this research and needs to be considered in policies and programs aimed at supporting mobile people.

Structural constraints on young participants' dreams became evident through their stories. For young people who experience such socioeconomic disadvantage, daily life necessitates that all energy is channelled into survival and meeting basic needs. Surviving in this way was viewed as hard work and occupied all of young people's time. Young people interviewed showed extraordinary resilience and talked about the dream of having basic needs met. Purcell (2011) and Morphy (2010) have emphasised the need to consider the impact of structural forces on dreams and aspiration. These structural constraints are well summarised by Jensen (2005, p. 25):

Yes, we should all dream big and pursue our dreams and not let anything stop us. But we all are the product both of what we will ourselves to be and what the society in which we live encourages and allows us to be. We should struggle against the constraints that people and institutions sometimes put on us, but those constraints are real, they are often racialized, and they have real effects on people.

The structural constraints which impose on the lives of Aboriginal Australian people have been documented. This study expands on this reality and shows that if young participants were more able to meet basic needs they would have a greater opportunity to dream beyond daily survival.

Reflecting on the past, many young participants discussed the wish that they had been more aware of the services available and better informed of the support that was there for them when they needed it. Improved services as opposed to more services are suggested and the young people in this study expressed the need for particular kinds of services that would be accepted by young people. While the view that young Aboriginal Australian people need to help themselves is acknowledged, the experiences of the young participants in this study reveal a different struggle. One of the key challenges for young participants in this research is not knowing where to go for support, or where to start. Young people talked about a lack of awareness of the kinds of support available to them.

Another key finding of this study is in relation to education and employment. Young people dreamed about education and employment, but they did so in a unique way. Education and employment were secondary to family in the lives of young people. The key driver and rationale for education and employment was the ability to be able to care for themselves, family and community by meeting basic needs. Caring for, being with and connection with family were all seen as a motivation for aspiring towards education and employment. A critical finding of this study concerns the difference between the way agencies and participants perceived future priorities. Agencies prioritised education/employment needs and young people prioritised family. Young people in this study dreamed for more caring and supportive services and thought that more compassion during difficult times would make realising their dreams more likely. It was not that they did not value education and employment pathways, but that aspiring towards education and employment was motivated by the dream of being with family and caring for others.

Some young people in the study expressed a desire for the big city and its 'synthetic' experience. Most participants, however, expressed the desire to engage in education and employment close to family and community. Some participants expressed the challenges to identity and wellbeing that were a consequence of moving away.

Given the stories of mobile young participants, programs aimed at supporting this population must take into consideration the central place of family to their lives. The diversity of experiences and aspirations represented in this study, suggests that support could be better offered if individual situations were considered and individual education and employment pathways facilitated. Some young people in this study acknowledged that moving away from family for education and employment opportunities was a good idea. Most also identified employment as a way of meeting basic needs. Yet the paradox of taking up such education and employment opportunities to support dreams of caring for and being with family, necessitates having to spend a period of time away from family through adolescent and young adult years. This is a tension experienced by many young participants in this study.

Policies which aim to improve young Aboriginal Australians' education and employment participation have inadequately considered the impact of unique socio-cultural characteristics. Linear, future focused pathways that privilege education and employment within current policy constructs failed to adequately accommodate the dreams and aspirations associated with family that are evident in the stories of participants of this study.

In order for the system to allow for inclusive access to education and employment opportunity, best practice models that are recognised as effective are those that

accommodate diverse dreams and can respond to complex circumstances. Such programs are important for urban, regional and remote young people. Best practice models discussed in this thesis offer flexibility and alternate education and employment pathways that support the distinctiveness of individuals.

Young people who are struggling to meet basic needs are often ostracised and labelled as unreliable or delinquent. This continues despite the finding that young people have a strong desire to support family and community and positively contribute to society. Because young participants did not conform to, or reflect dominant notions of what it is to be 'aspirational', it can be wrongly assumed that they are non-compliant or non-valuable persons to society. For the system to engage, retain and build the skills of young Aboriginal Australian people through education and employment, what is needed is respecting the significance of family relationships, for example, by catering for physical proximity to home and family and supporting people's dreams of happy and functional families.

With policy makers operating in an 'information vacuum' (Taylor 2006, p. 23) exploring the lived experiences of mobile populations is important to responsive service delivery and policy formulation. The findings of this research study lend support to the idea of alternate policies for Aboriginal Australian people as envisioned by Altman and Hinkson (2007), including more comprehensive consideration of the aspirations of Aboriginal Australians so that values that do not principally reflect neoliberal and market priorities are permitted space. All young participants in this study dream and aspire. They do so in particularly caring and considerate ways, whilst dealing with complex social and emotional pressures.

Young people in this study are just as aspirational as anybody else but are born to lives with challenges that occupy their time in ways that impact on their capacity to think 'forwards'. Further research is needed into the ways in which education and employment opportunity are geared towards Aboriginal Australians who already have the most resources. Further service developments are required so that young people who do not access mainstream services, who are struggling to meet basic needs are better supported, or at least have a better awareness of what is available. An investigation of ways in which mainstream education can be integrated with alternate education practices to better support family connectedness is also recommended. Many young participants were mothers struggling to meet basic needs. Further research into experiences of support and access to support for this group of young women is also a recommendation of this research.

Despite the complex lives and struggle of many young participants in this study, experiences of marginalisation, disadvantage and racism are endured with an inspiring resilience. With

many participants dreaming and aspiring through the drive to maintain the relationships closest to them, it is with great hope and optimism that we can start to imagine a future where the pressure to conform does not impose any sacrifice of connectedness.

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