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**RACIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, ATTITUDES TO
ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG
MINORITY CULTURE AUSTRALIAN ADOLESCENTS**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Psychology
James Cook University

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and as a list of references is given.

.....

ELSA R. GERMAIN

.....

DATE

DEDICATION PAGE

I dedicate this work to,

My father, Dr



Forever my light house and my source of inspiration...

And to,

To my dear daughters



My anchor and coastline...

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my academic supervisor, Dr Jennifer Promnitz for her patience, guidance, support, and constant encouragement.

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Finally, thanks must go to Gavin Charles for helping with the final printing of the work and for making sure that I kept my sanity through it all!

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Elsa R. Germain

.....

Date

ABSTRACT

The present study explored cultural identity in minority culture adolescents living in rural and remote regions of North Queensland Australia. Cultural identity can be defined as a process involving cognitive appraisal which results from self awareness achieved either through the *collective experience* within a membership group or the *individual perception* as we compare ourselves to a reference group. The present study focused particularly on the work by Jean Phinney and her colleagues (Phinney, & Devic-Navarro, 1995) who found that adolescents of minority cultures tend to undergo a process of self-discovery and exploration of their cultural and ethnic roots following self-challenging experiences such as racism. The authors proposed three distinct stages in the process of achieving an ethnic and/or cultural identity: (1) cultural identity is not an issue and therefore is *unexplored*; (2) increasing *awareness* about ethnicity likely to follow experiences of racism; (3) coming to terms with one's cultural identity (*acceptance*). The stage-wise nature of cultural identity construction and achievement was of particular interest in the present study, with a focus on clarifying whether minority culture Australian adolescents undergo a process such as that described by Phinney and her colleagues, when actively searching for and/or achieving cultural identification. It was argued that the experience of cultural identification involves a multifaceted and complex process that may not to be simply the outcome of collective negative experiences such as racism, as suggested by Phinney and her colleagues. Rather, it

is likely to be the result of a range of experiences, -of which racism may be one-, interacting over time (Alipuria, 2002). Another main objective in this study was to examine the predictive value of Berry's (1992) Attitudes to Acculturation Strategies Scale to explain differences if any in perceived Australian (national/civic) identity between Anglo-Australian (AA) and minority culture or culturally and linguistically diverse background (CLDB) Australian adolescents. Convenience samples of junior high school (year 8) and senior high school (year 12) adolescents were drawn from four different high schools located in regional and rural North Queensland, Australia. Approximately 415 students ranging from 12 to 19 years of age were asked to respond to a questionnaire during class time. One hundred and six of the participants were identified as of culturally and linguistically diverse background or CLDB (non-English-speaking migrants and indigenous Australians). The study included intra-group (between CLDB age samples) and inter-group comparisons (between CLDB and Anglo-Australian samples). The study involved a cross-sectional field survey including individual variables such cultural identity search (active exploration of cultural roots), identification with an original culture, incidence of racism, phenotypic characteristics of respondents, attitudes to acculturation, individual and collective self-appraisal, and *group-based* variables including parental variables, and socio-economic and geographical statuses. The present study found that Phinney et al's, (1992) predicted relationship between racism and identity, when mediated by active exploration of one's culture of origin was supported when phenotype was controlled for. A significant relationship

between active exploration of one's cultural origins and identification with that culture was found, but not for experiences of racism and active exploration of one's roots for minority culture adolescents overall. In turn, a relationship was found between racism and identification with an original culture for those CLDB adolescents who reported Caucasian phenotype. Therefore, it was concluded that Phinney's model succeeds in predicting racial identity, but not necessarily cultural identity. There were no differences with respect to the incidence of racism for girls and boys and across the age groups. However, youth who reported Asian and indigenous Australian features (phenotype) experienced racism significantly more than the Caucasian-looking CLDB youth. As expected visible ethnicity was a major factor in shaping cultural identification. Those children who described themselves as "Caucasian-looking" tended to identify themselves as "Australian". However, children who reported phenotypic characteristics as being consistent with those of Asian and Indigenous Australian background tended to report biculturality rather than an "Australian" identity or original culture identification. Racism was not found to be the critical catalyst for cultural exploration as suggested by Marcia, (1980, cited in Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevan, & De Levita, 1994) and Phinney (1991), however, it was when visible ethnicity (phenotype) was controlled for. Interestingly, a large majority of CLDB participants reported experiencing racism, regardless of whether they were visibly ethnic or not. Moreover, those who perceived themselves to be Australian tended to report a lesser incidence of racism. This may indicate that there is pressure to conform to social norms and if youth do

not subscribe to the identity of the majority they may suffer discrimination and prejudice as a consequence. Moreover, while Indigenous Australian youth seem to have translated the term “Australian” to encompass being of Indigenous background also, migrant background children in contrast, appear to have experienced *role incongruence*; that is the overwhelming majority of them reported identifying with being “Australian” but less than half reported identifying with their culture of origin. Results indicated that racism is not necessarily a catalyst for cultural exploration and identification in some minority culture adolescents. Positive, in-group, identity-shaping experiences such as speaking a second language at home and partaking in social and cultural activities appear to be strongly associated with cultural identity achievement. There were no maturation effects for either identity search or cultural identity, with both early and late adolescents reporting similar patterns of responses. This outcome extended to situational identity also, with no age differences being found with respect to original culture identification at home, at school and with peers. Civic or national identity (the meaning of being Australian) yielded no age differences either; however, older adolescents tended to describe being Australian as an asset more so than their younger counterparts. Ego-identity stage at which respondents found themselves made a difference with respect to global self-esteem, with higher self-esteem being reported by those who reported being at the *moratorium* stage (being aware of one or more original cultures but not as yet committing to them). In contrast, those who were at the diffused stage (not yet aware of an identity)

reported lower self-esteem. Thus, for multicultural adolescents, being aware of two or more cultural realities/experiences may be conducive to higher self-esteem, than not being aware of them at all. Ego-identity stage had no effect on other self-appraisal indicators (coping, self-image and optimism for the future). A strong, positive association between individual and collective (in-group) perceptions was found. Attitudes to acculturation were not related to identity search, or cultural identity except for assimilated and integrated attitudes: the lower the search the lower the assimilation attitudes, while the higher the original identification the more integrated the attitudes. In addition, original culture identity was found to be positively linked to collective appraisal (in-group perceptions). With respect to parental variables, English speaking ability and family composition were not associated with identity search or original culture identification. There was no link between settlement time (whether parents were recent arrivals or established migrants) and cultural background of parents and youth's original culture identification. Similarly, neither parental employment status nor occupation appears to be associated with identity search or original culture identification. With respect to national or civic identity, CLDB youth were found to be six times more likely to report being "unsure" of being Australian than AA adolescents, regardless of age and sex. In addition, minority culture youth scored lower on the assimilated and marginalized attitude scales than the Anglo-Australians, as expected, with no differences between the two cultural groups for integrated and separated scores. In addition, younger youth tended to score higher on separated

and marginalized attitudes to acculturation sub-scales, with little difference in scores for integrated and assimilated scores for both age groups. Finally, girls scored significantly higher on integrated scores, but scored lower for assimilated, separated, and marginalized sub-scales. Thus, older youth, regardless of age, and girls overall show a more mature, more tolerant attitude than boys. Older youth and females reported a less positive self-image; however, older youth exhibited higher global self-esteem.

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