Understanding and addressing racism in early years settings

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What is racism?

- Racism is the inequitable distribution of opportunity, benefit or resources across ethnic/racial groups

- Racism occurs through avoidable and unfair actions that : (i) further disadvantage minority ethnic/racial groups; or (ii) further advantage dominant ethnic/racial groups

- Racism is expressed through attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, norms and practices and may be either intentional or unintentional   (Paradies et al. 2009)

Internalised racism	Interpersonal racism	Systemic racism
Acceptance of attitudes, beliefs or ideologies about the inferiority of one's own ethnic/racial group	Interactions between people that maintain and reproduce avoidable and unfair inequalities across ethnic/racial groups	Requirements, conditions, practices, policies or processes that maintain and reproduce avoidable and unfair inequalities across ethnic/racial groups
Believing that Black people are naturally less intelligent than White people	*Being racially abused when walking or driving in the street*	*Young Indigenous Victorians are 2-3 times more likely to be arrested and charged with an offence*

SOAR findings

- A survey of more than 4,500 year 5-9 students in Victoria and New South Wales conducted in 2017

- 31% of students reported racism by other students and 12% reported racism by teachers; 60% of students witnessed other racism by other students and 43% witnessed racism by teachers

- 11% of students said their friends would think badly of them if they ate lunch with a student from a different cultural background (Priest et al. 2019)

Nature of anti-Indigenous racism

- Racism is experienced by indigenous people in employment and education as well as in public places such as transport contexts, shopping centres and on the Internet

- Racism can include teasing, jokes, exclusion or stereotypes as well as physical assault and property damage (Ferdinand, Paradies & Kelaher, 2012)

- Perpetrators can be indigenous or non-indigenous; including colleagues, peers, people in authority such as teachers and public officials (Hansen et al., 2016)

Extent of anti-Indigenous racism

- Representative national surveys indicate that 34% of Indigenous Australians adults reported experiences of racism in the past year in 2015 (ABS 2016)

- Representative national longitudinal data from 2008-13 indicates that 14% of Indigenous Australian children aged 5-10 years have experienced racism (Shepherd et al., 2017)

- A 2012 nationally representative survey found that 23% of Indigenous Australian children (aged 12-13) experienced racism in past 6 months (Priest et al., 2016)

Racial Discrimination in the LSAC 2012 (n = 3,956, aged 12-13)

(Priest et al. 2016)

Shepherd et al. 2017
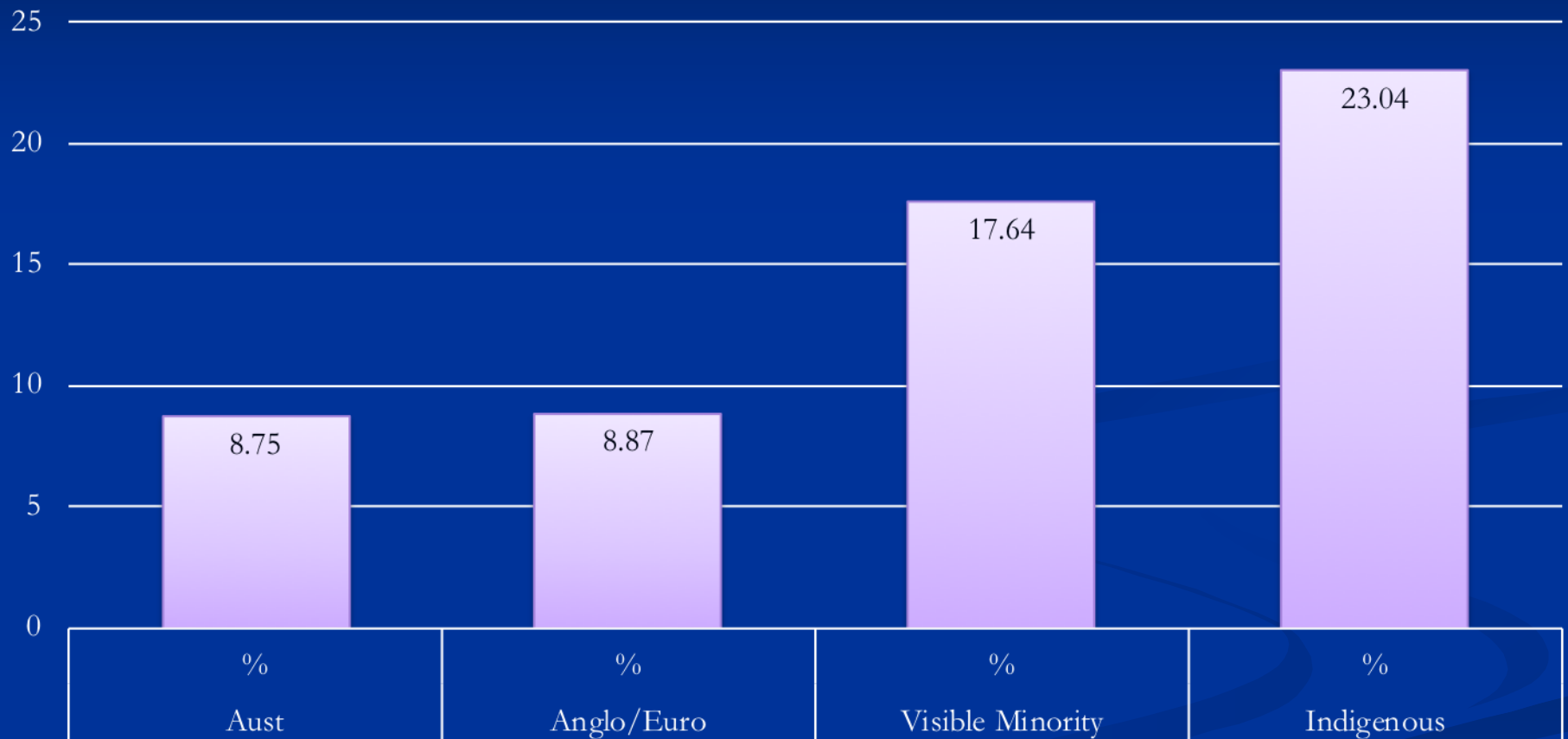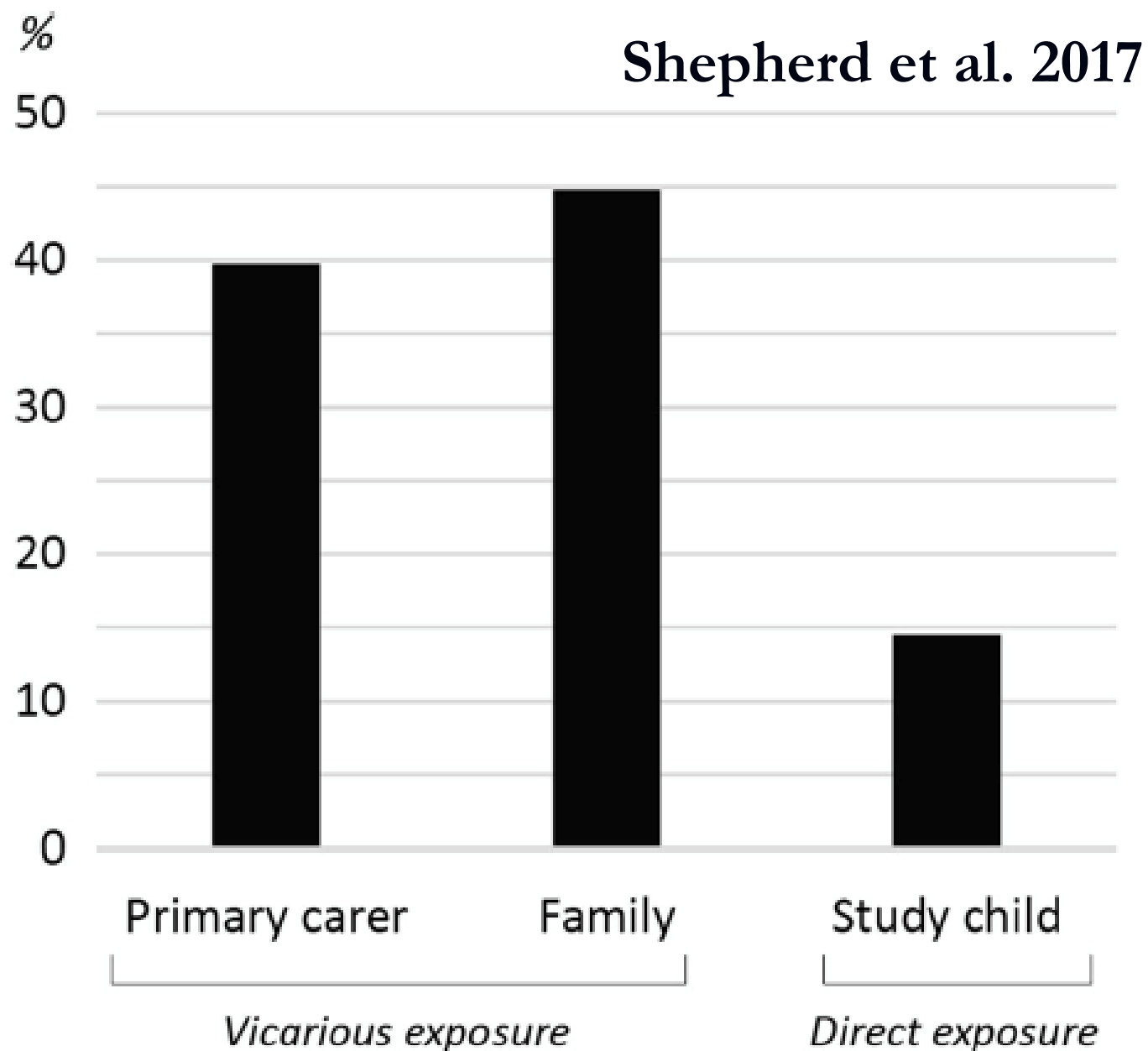
Fig. 1 Proportion of Indigenous children aged 5–10 years that have ever been exposed to racial discrimination

Aboriginal children's experiences of racism

"We went to [a play centre] and then we found this hiding spot and they said "what are yous"? And we said that we're Aboriginals. And they said that all the Aboriginals died because all the white people came."

"Some people call you dog poo, because you look like it but that's a nasty word."

(Priest et al. 2017)

Early development of racism

- Infants as young as 3-months discriminate, and attend preferentially to, own-race faces

- 4-year-olds favour their own racial group and 6-year-olds hold negative attitudes toward other races

- Racist attitudes continue to develop through middle childhood with increasing sophistication, including concealing socially undesirable explicit racism from about age 8 onwards

Broad impacts of racism

- Impaired social inclusion and cohesion

- Lower returns on education investment

- Distrust, disengagement, conflict, violence

- Compromised social and civic participation

- Reduced economic innovation and productivity

Impacts of racism on children

- Children particularly vulnerable to racism's harms
- *Direct* effect
  - anxiety, depression, behaviour problems, suicidality, substance use, immune and inflammatory biomarkers, chronic disease risk factors, telomere length, cellular ageing
- *Indirect/Vicarious* effects
  - pregnancy and birth outcomes, childhood illnesses, mental health, behaviour problems
  - carer and family experiences of racism impact carer mental health, parenting style, ethnic-racial socialisation, access to resources for health

(Priest et al. 2013)

Racism and migrant/refugee youth health

- Among years 11/12 students racism was associated with worse health, with females more likely to have decreased health/wellbeing as a result of racism (Mansouri et al. 2012)

- Among 51 refugee youth (aged 11-19), discrimination still have a significant impact on their subjective wellbeing eight years after arrival (Correa-Velez et al. 2015)

- Among 47 Middle Eastern and Asian children and young people aged 7-15 years experiences of racism were associated with withdrawn social behaviours, greater emotional problems, and indirect aggression (Runions et al. 2011)

Racism and Indigenous youth health

- Alcohol consumption, cigarette and marijuana use as well as emotional/behavioural difficulties and suicidal thoughts in the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (Zubrick et al., 2005)

- Anxiety, depression, suicide risk, mental ill-health and poor oral health in the Aboriginal Birth Cohort study (Jamieson et al., 2011; Priest et al., 2011)

- Poor general/mental health and depression among Indigenous youth in Victoria (Priest et al., 2011)

Racism and Indigenous child health

- Among 759 Aboriginal children in the LSIC, care-giver perceived racism perceived exposure to racism at ages 4-11 was associated with:

- twice the risk of negative mental health (95% CI: 1.3–3.0), sleep difficulties (95% CI: 1.4-3.0), and behaviour issues at school (95% CI: 1.2-2.9)

- 1.7 times obesity risk (95% CI: 1.1-2.5), & nearly 7 times the risk of trying cigarettes (95% CI: 1.1-43.9)

(Cave et al. 2019)

Impacts of racism on teaching

- Racial attitudes are highly predictive of conscious and unconscious behaviours, such as active helping and passive neglecting, word choice, verbal tone, eye contact, degree of interpersonal distance, facial expressions as well as differential treatment and poorer outcomes (e.g. teaching methods, classroom practices, school discipline etc.)

- For example, a U.S. study found that when prompted to expect challenging behaviours, teachers gazed longer at Black children, especially Black boys (Gilliam et al. 2016)

- Such nonverbal bias spreads quickly, with children who witness it applying it to individuals and their broader group (i.e. Black boys) (Skinner et al. 2017 & in press)
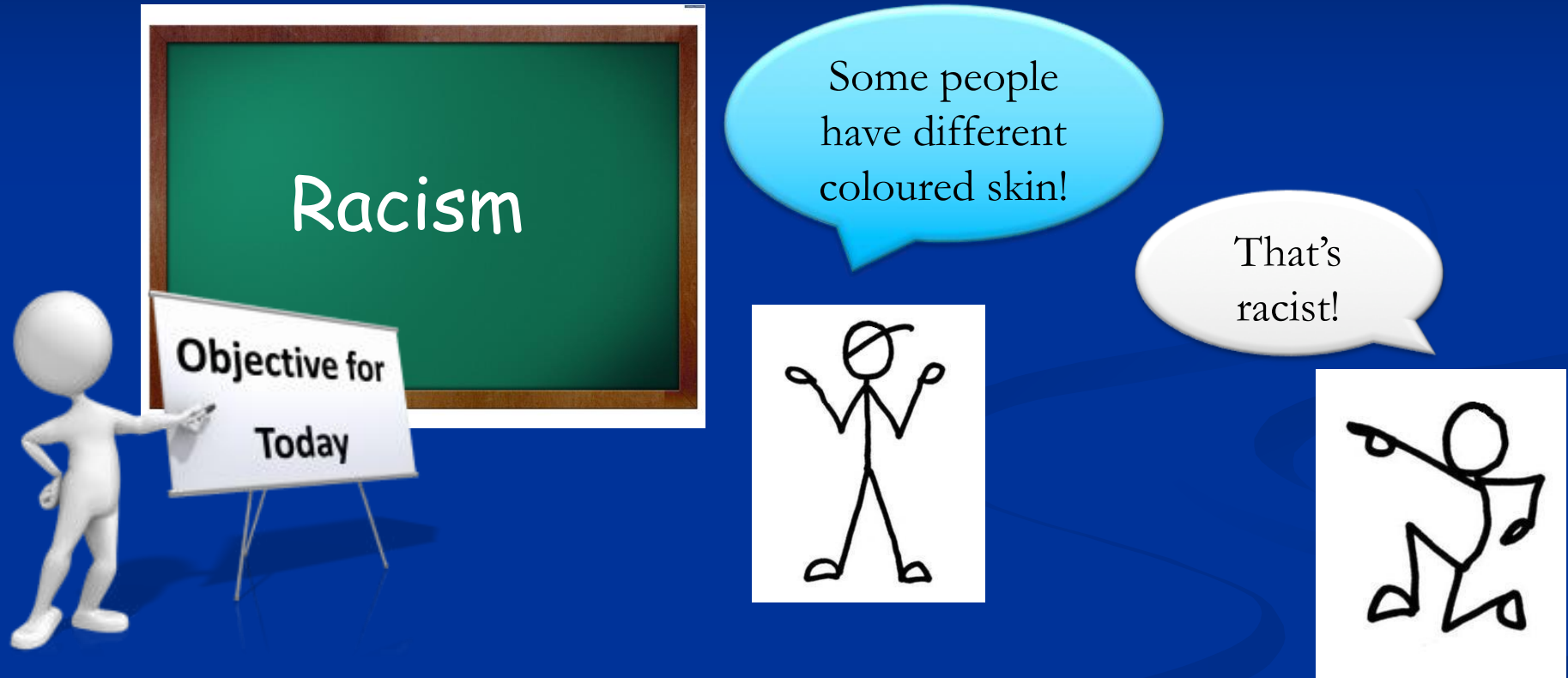
Racism and schooling

- Racism negatively impacts the experiences of Indigenous students from primary school, through high school and to later life, when becoming parents, employees and Elders

- The impacts on students are harmful, wide reaching and life long, and influence academic achievement, attitudes to language, emotional wellbeing, physical health, self-concept, school attendance and post-school pathways, and eventually school choice and engagement if and when those students become parents or care-givers

(Moodie et al. 2019)

Race-related ideologies

- Colour-blindness, either colour-evasion (denial of racial differences by emphasizing sameness) and/or power-evasion (idenial of racism by emphasising equal opportunities) (Neville et al. 2013)

- Assimilationist (conforming to, and adopting, 'mainstream' culture) (Pedersen et al. 2015)

- Multicultural (recognising and valuing difference)

- Polyculturalism focuses on the connections between groups rather than the boundaries between them

The dangers of colour-blindness

Against colour-blindness

- "If people equate seeing or discussing race with racism, then naming even the most obvious racial disparities is understood as racism and people are left without recourse to address racial injustice" (Rossing 2012:50)

When you say you 'don't see race', you're ignoring racism, not helping to solve it
Zach Stafford

Race is such an ingrained social construct that even blind people can 'see' it. To pretend it doesn't exist to you erases the experiences of black people

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/26/do-not-see-race-ignoring-racism-not-helping

Why teach children about racism?

- Young children engage in stereotyping and prejudice

- Avoiding conversations with children about racism does not prevent or reduce it

- Children are often targets of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, including forms of racial bullying

(Bigler & Wright 2014)

Teaching children about racism

- Risks
  - Negative emotional responses
  - Stereotype threat with increased awareness
  - Out-group mistrust and conflict
  - Reinforcing stereotyping and prejudice

- Benefits
  - Detection and rejection of racism
  - Extrinsic explanations for social group differences
  - Protection of self-esteem among minority children

(Bigler & Wright 2014)

Addressing racism – what works?

- Focus on context, and age-related cognitive processing such as perspective-taking, empathy, multiple comparisons, moral reasoning (thinking and feeling about fairness)

- Use dual identity, cooperative learning and bystander action approaches

- Support those who experience racism as well as teaching about how to avoid perpetrating it

(Aboud et al 2012; Beelman and Heinemann 2014)

Addressing racism – what works?

- Structured intergroup contact (e.g., in order to develop diverse friendship groups etc.)

- Explicit education about prejudice (e.g., pro-diversity curriculum)

- Imagined contact with members of other groups (e.g., physical representations, stories, and guided imagination via drawing etc.)

(Skinner & Meltzoff 2019)

Addressing implicit bias

- Activities that allowed 5-year old children (n=95) in China to form positive associations with Black faces lead to reduced anti-Black bias when tested two months later
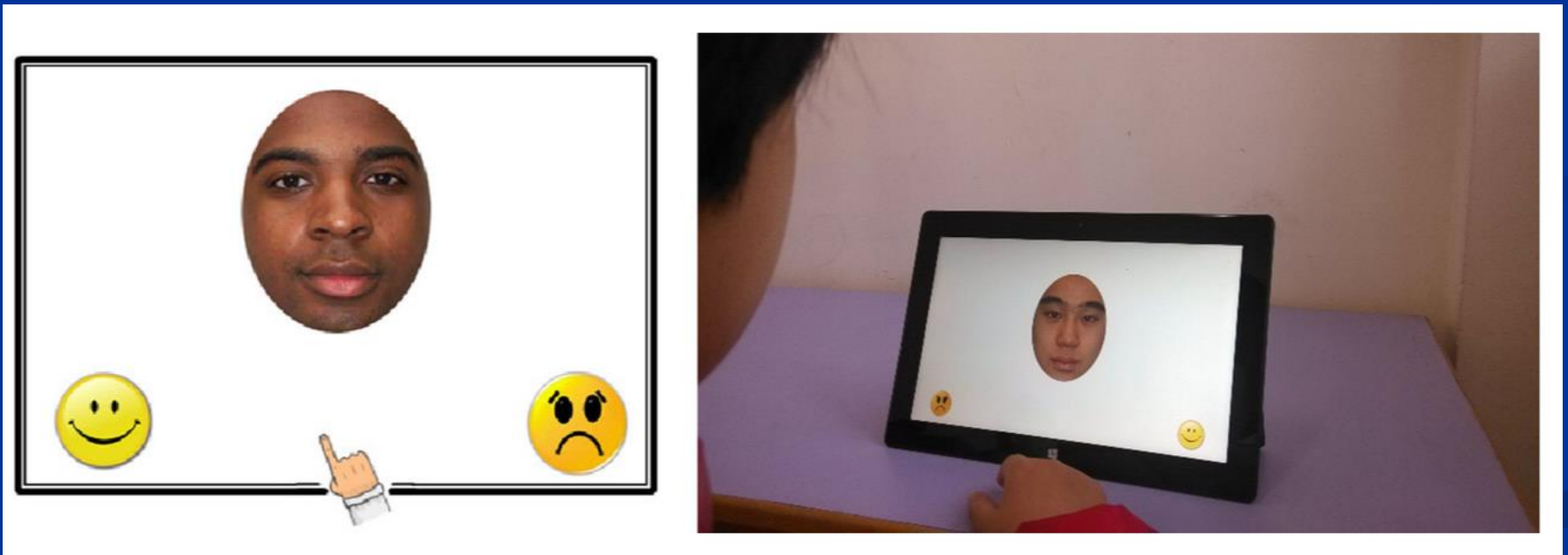
(Qian et al. 2019)

World values survey 2010-14 (n=88,565)

Important child qualities: Tolerance and respect for other people
Percentage of [Mentioned]

Lowest % — Low — Medium — High — Highest %

40   55   70   84   99
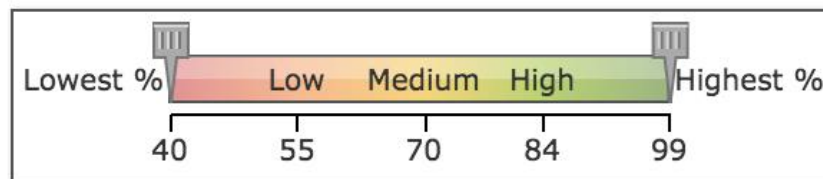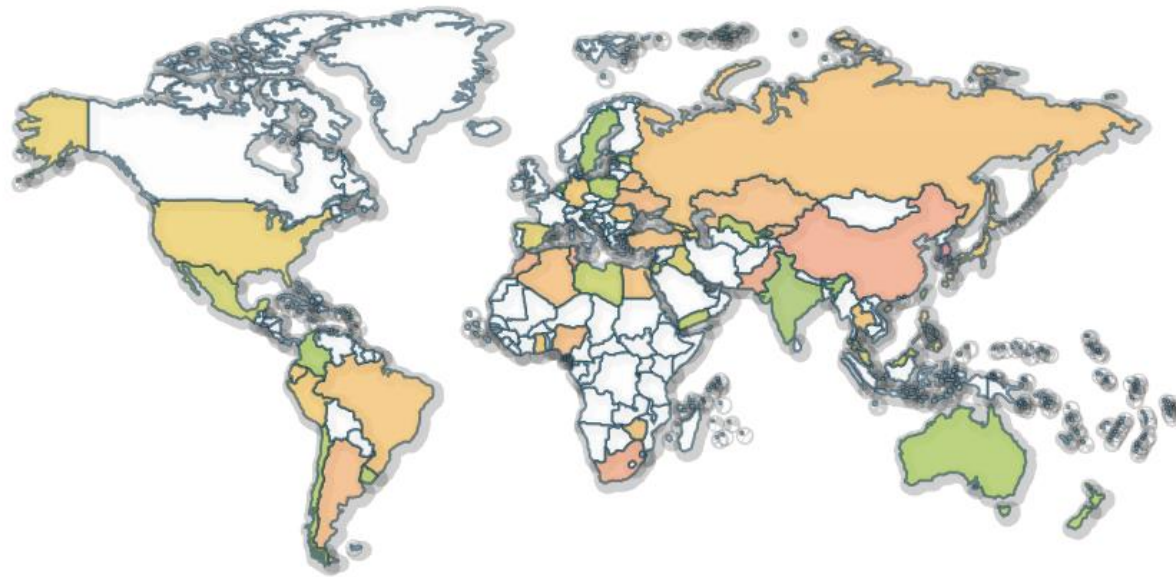
2014 Reconciliation Barometer

83% of the general community believe

it is important to know about the histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and **80%** believe it is important to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

77% of the general community believe

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories should be a compulsory part of the school curriculum.

Only 30% of the general community believe they have a high level of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

71% of the general community and

87% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a unique place as the First Australians.
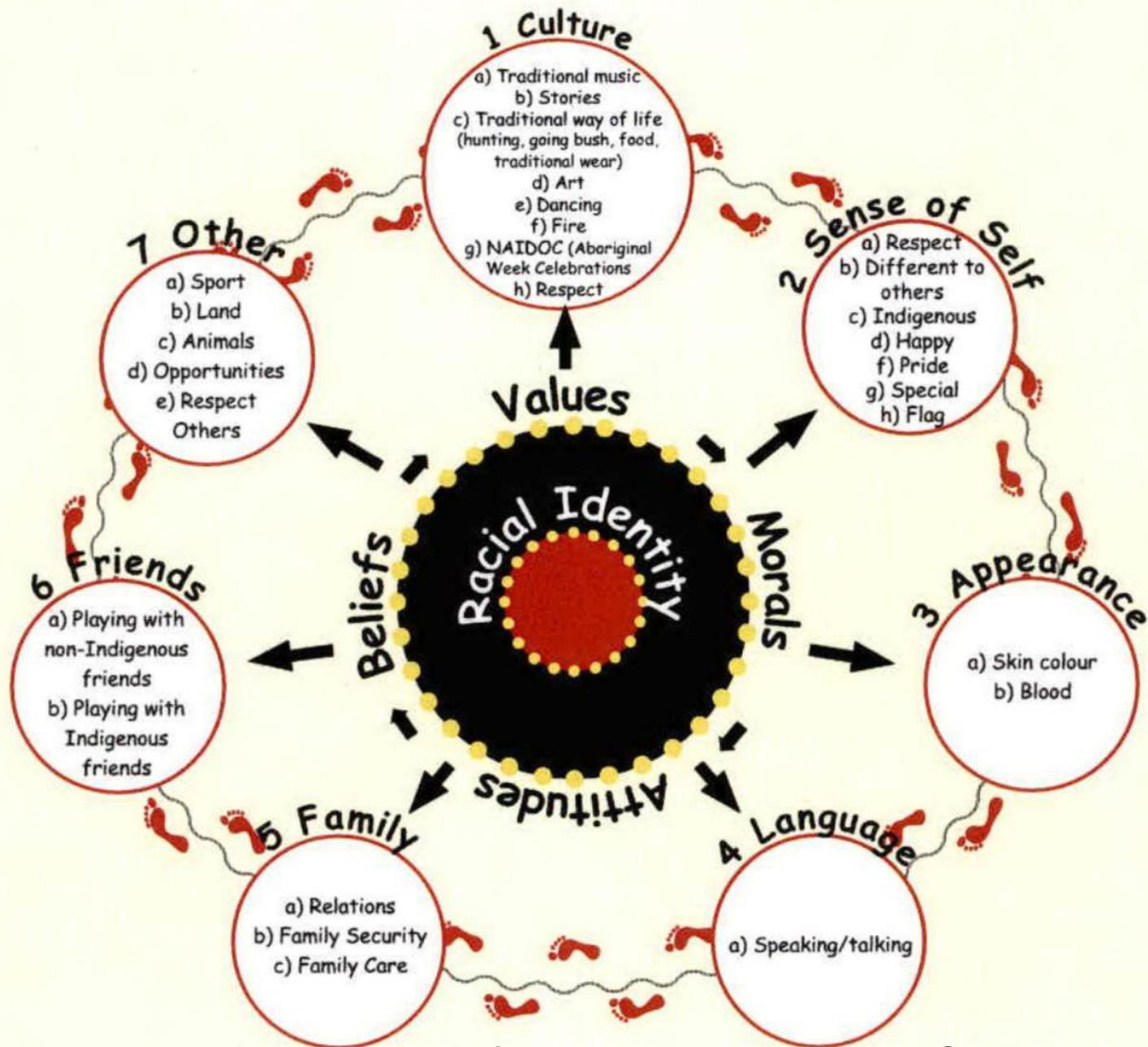
72% of the general community and

87% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia's national identity.

(Kickett-Tucker & Shahid 2019)

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

Questions

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