

**For the Love of Their Children:
A Narrative Study of the Experiences of Central
Australian Aboriginal Fathers**

Submitted by
Clive George Rosewarne

Bachelor of Arts, 1983 Monash University
Graduate Diploma Education, 1995 La Trobe University

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Allied Health, Human Services, and Sport

La Trobe University

Victoria, Australia

September 2024

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Figures List.....	viii
Table List	x
Abstract	xi
Statement of Authorship	xii
Acknowledgements	xiii
Abbreviations	xvi
Glossary of Terms	xvii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Research Aims and Questions	3
1.2 Research Methodology.....	5
1.3 My Position	6
1.4 The evolution of the research project.....	7
1.5 Terminology	8
1.6 Delimitation or boundaries of the study.....	9
1.7 Limitations of the Study	9
1.8 Outline of thesis	10
1.9 Conclusion.....	12
Chapter 2. Context.....	13
2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 My Background	14
2.3 Study setting	18
2.3.1 A town like Mparntwe – The ‘Land is really part of us’ and an ‘erasure’ narrative.....	18
2.3.1.1 Indigenist narrative	18

2.3.1.2 Erasure narrative.....	25
2.3.2 A town like Alice – Attempted exclusion, re-inscription and narratives collide.....	27
2.3.2.1 Re-inscription.....	29
2.3.2.2 Collapse of the liberal consensus	31
2.3.2.3 Alice Springs today—narratives collide.....	37
2.3.3 Colonial impacts for Aboriginal males in the pre-Intervention era	46
2.3.4 Negativity in contemporary policy debates and Aboriginal males	48
2.4 Summary	50
Chapter 3. Worldviews, Anarchist social theory and sociology	52
3.1 Introduction	52
3.2 Research worldview	53
3.2.1 Axiology	53
3.2.2 Anarchist Axiology	54
3.2.3 Ontology/epistemology	56
3.2.4 Indigenist Ontology and epistemology.....	57
3.2.5 Object orientated ontology: an ontology of relationships	59
3.2.6 Anarchist ontologies and epistemologies	61
3.3 Contribution towards an Anarchist Sociological Imagination	64
3.3.1 Anarchism in the ‘post’-age as critical theory.....	65
3.3.2 Power Theory.....	68
3.3.3 Post-structuralist Power Theory.....	69
3.3.4 Anarchist Power Theory.....	72
3.3.5 Feminist Power Theories	75
3.3.6 Anarch@Indigenist Power Theories	76
3.3.7 Resistance or ‘Power to’ and ‘Becoming’	79
3.4 Summary	84

Chapter 4. Discourse Methodology and Methods	86
4.1 Introduction	86
4.2 Methodology.....	86
4.3 An Anarchist Methodology	87
4.3.1 Anarchist Discourse Analysis	89
4.3.2 The Problem of Representation	91
4.3.3 Labelling, Patronising and Focalising Representation	92
4.3.4 Anarchist ecological model of Representation	95
4.3.5 Positionality and subjectivity in research	98
4.3.6 Validity	103
4.4 Methods.....	104
4.4.1 Aboriginal Male Reference Group (AMRG).....	105
4.4.2 Ethics	106
4.4.3 Ethics in practice: people know each other in a closely bound community	108
4.4.4 Participant selection criteria.....	109
4.4.5 Participant recruitment and sample size	110
4.4.6 Interviews	114
4.4.7 Observations	115
4.5 Summary	116
Chapter 5. Aboriginal Fatherhood Discourse Genealogy	118
5.1 Introduction	118
5.2 Gender and fatherhood in central Australian Aboriginal cultures: creation and reinforcement.....	119
5.3 Settler based masculine and fatherhood discourses and subjectivities	124
5.3.1. Genealogies of masculinity discourses.....	124
5.3.2 Discursive practices of gendered fatherhood.....	134

5.3.2.1 Provider Discourse	136
5.3.2.2 Discourses of Care.....	137
5.3.2.3 Care as ethics.....	139
5.3.2.4 Carer role models	144
5.3.2.5 Discourses of Absence.....	144
5.3.3 Fathers' Emotional Wellbeing	147
5.4 Genealogies of Aboriginal male and fatherhood discourses	151
5.4.1 Aboriginal males: Settler deficit discourses of the savage	151
5.4.2 Contemporary negative discourse, 'the violence of Aboriginal men'	154
5.4.2.1 Violence	155
5.4.3 The Northern Territory Emergency Response (the Intervention)	158
5.4.4 The Leak cartoon and responses	162
5.5 Contemporary Aboriginal fathers' voices	166
5.5.1 Dissonance and recovery	167
5.5.2 Contemporary Aboriginal fathers' views on fatherhood.....	170
5.5.2.1 Fathers' Roles.....	172
5.5.2.2 Absence and parenting role models.....	173
5.5.2.3 Emotional Wellbeing.....	173
5.6 Summary	175
Chapter 6. Aboriginal fathers' interviews: Fatherhood discourse analysis	178
6.1 Introduction	178
6.2 Being Fathers, Enacting Fatherhood and dominant fathering discourses	181
6.2.1 The provider/protector, involved father roles	182
6.2.2 Discourses of care: emotional support and teaching values	185
6.2.3 Generative fathering—teaching Aboriginal culture.....	186
6.2.4 Generative fathering: Education	189

6.2.4.1 Fathers' involvement with their children's academic participation when they are at home	189
6.2.4.2 Support in the home.....	190
6.2.4.3 Motivation: Education a way to 'get ahead in life'	191
6.2.4.4 Control and practical help	199
6.2.4.5 Fathers' direct engagement with schools.....	201
6.2.4.6 How direct engagement was enacted.....	201
6.2.4.5 What helped with engagement?	203
6.2.4.6 School, as space and structure, issues that affected fathers' engagement	205
6.2.4.7 What issues constituted barriers to further engagement if desired....	206
6.2.4.8 Creating invisibility	207
6.2.4.9 Gender as a determinant of engagement.....	209
6.2.4.10 Engagement attempts.....	212
6.3 Role models for fathers	214
6.4 Summary of findings.....	221
Chapter 7. Aboriginal fathers' interviews: Emotions and wellbeing	224
7.1 Introduction	224
7.2 Sense of self: Fathers' views on what children bring to their lives	225
7.3 Stress related to Fatherhood roles	231
7.3.1 Carer Stress.....	231
7.3.1.1 Emotions, conflict and values teaching	231
7.3.1.2 Difficulties in instituting lifestyle changes	235
7.3.2 Provider stress.....	239
7.3.3. Protector stress	243
7.3.4 Protector stress: Aboriginal fathers and the Intervention(ists)	243
7.3.5 Protector stress: Extended family as stress factor.....	246

7.3.6 Generative Care: School has emotional impacts	251
7.3.6.1 Positives	251
7.3.6.2 Negatives.....	253
7.4 Self perceptions of fathering	258
7.5 How fathers deal with emotional issues in the family and where fathers seek emotional support and parenting support.....	259
7.6 Summary of findings.....	267
Chapter 8. Discussion and Conclusion	269
8.1 Introduction	269
8.2 Discussion.....	270
8.2.1 Being real: children make fathers real.....	270
8.2.2 Being real: enacting ideals of fatherhood	271
8.2.3 Just a normal bloke: trying to be real	272
8.2.4 Coercive discourses	273
8.2.5 Dissonance	275
8.2.6 Feeling alone	277
8.2.7 Care of self—or power to	278
8.2.8 Lines of flight.....	279
8.3 Reflection on methodology	280
8.4 Conclusion.....	284
Appendix A. Ethics Approvals.....	288
Appendix B. Aboriginal Indigenous Education Workers in this study	290
Appendix C. Copyright Permissions	292
References	293

Figures List

Figure 1	2
Mparntwe/Alice Springs Location.....	2
Figure 2.1	16
Images of the Industrial West of Melbourne: Newport Power Station and Petro- Chemical Refinery Nth Altona	16
Figure 2.2	17
Early Anarchist Literary Encounters	17
Figure 2.3	19
Section of ‘Spencer and Gillen Outline Map of the Central Area of Australia 1899/1968’ showing concentration of ‘dreaming’ stories around Mparntwe.	19
Figure 2.4	21
Key Elements of Warlpiri Culture.....	21
Figure 2.5	22
Forever Arising From and With Country.....	22
Figure 2.6	23
Extract Alice Springs Native Determination: Land Responsibility.....	23
Figure 2.7	30
White Gate Town Camp	30
Figure 2.8	31
Town Camp House.	31
Figure 2.9	34
Controversy Arose Regarding the Lateline Reporting	34
Figure 2.10	36
Intervention Signs Placed at the Entrance to Aboriginal Communities	36
Figure 2.11	38

Kumunjayi Ryder Memorial & St Phillips College.....	38
Figure 2.12	39
Contiguous Primary School Boundaries 2019-2023	39
Figure 2.13	41
Graffiti Near Pre-school.....	41
Figure 2.14	42
Colonial Present.....	42
Figure 2.15	49
Bill Leak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day Cartoon	49
Figure 2.16	49
Joe Bayliss #Indigenous Dads.	49
Figure 4.1	96
A problematic closed representational cycle.....	96
Figure 5.1	162
Bill Leak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day Cartoon	162
Figure 5.2	162
Bill Leak Cartoons Depicting Aboriginal Male Violence	162

Table List

Table 2.1	40
Socio-educational Characteristics of 3 Adjacent Zoned Alice Springs Primary Schools (PS)	40
Table 2.2	45
Absolute Ranking of Social and Economic Disadvantage – Indigenous regions ...	45
Table 2.3	46
Educational Differentials: Alice Springs Aboriginal Population by Gender	46
Table 4.1	111
Father Status of enrolled Aboriginal identified children February 2013	111
Table 4.2	113
Recruitment outcomes and number of contact events.	113
Table 5.1	165
Number of serious offences being served by Aboriginal males.....	165

Abstract

Aboriginal males who are fathers or fulfilling fathering roles of school-aged children do so in a volatile political and social policy environment. The Australian Commonwealth Government policy intervention, the Northern Territory Emergency Response (2007), racially vilified Aboriginal males as ‘poor fathers’ implicating them, as a group, as perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse. Informed by an anarchist sociological analysis, this thesis explores the degree to which a group of Aboriginal fathers in central Australia have freedom to realise their fathering ideals. The research was undertaken by a non-Aboriginal father with close ties to the community. The discourses fathers drew upon to enact fatherhood, as described in interviews, are identified. Fathers identified strongly with provider/protector and involved fatherhood discourses. They provided many forms of generative care, including developing ethical values and emotional stability, teaching Aboriginal culture for strong identity and supporting schooling to secure their children a positive future. This care came with tensions, disappointments, and stress associated with fractured family relationships, the need to deal with negative discourses embedded in social relations, and conflicts between fulfilling a provider role and having time to spend with their children and their schooling. Fathers described being emotionally isolated. The research shows that the individuality of social relationships prevalent in modern society—emphasising the individual over the group, the personal over the communal—can be emotionally detrimental for these socially marginalised and racially stigmatised men. The thesis describes notable resilience in fathers who deal with stress, contradictory internalised discourses, and social negativity when pursuing their singular experience of fulfilling their fatherhood goals. Complexity and personal struggles are recognised, countering dominant reductionist negative tropes of Aboriginal fatherhood. It is evident from their narratives that these fathers are loving and supportive parents who are affirmed by their children’s reciprocated love.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Clive George Rosewarne 13th September 2024

Acknowledgements

I would like to commence by acknowledging the fathers who volunteered to share their fatherhood stories. I recognise that it took courage and trust to share the personal details of their lives with me. To honour that trust has been a primary motivation to bring the study to this point. To bring their stories and the study findings to a wider audience will be the next step—to create useful community knowledge.

I would like to express my gratitude to two men who have ‘held’ me during this lengthy process. Without their support, despite my determination to honour the fathers in the project, I have no doubt I would not have finished. I give my deep thanks to Ken Lechleitner; I thank you for being a willing sounding board, cultural interpreter, and friend. I thank you for those massive arms that held me and picked me up and put me back on my feet when I really needed that support and care. I express my gratitude to Rev Dr Brian McCoy SJ. for being willing to take on supervision of this project—when you thought it was only going to take the ‘normal’ time for a PhD. Your own calling then demanded your attention. I am very grateful that you had the time and capacity to come back in these final years, where you provided sound, calming, and encouraging counsel. Your knowledge of Aboriginal men’s journeys was invaluable to this project.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to my family who have been incredibly tolerant of my research/study. Firstly, to my partner Christine for her forbearance, given this study took far longer than was expected. Thank-you for the many conversations during the various iterations of the study. Thank-you for giving me immeasurable emotional support through the thick and the thin. Thank-you for financially supporting me for a significant period of the study. In addition, for financing many of the project costs, that otherwise were not covered from research support as I was a remote based student. To my children, Alex and Joe, I give my appreciation of your love and support, and for the happiness that you bring to my life. Without this emotional experience, I would not have been able to envisage the importance of asking my fundamental research question(s). I should also give a call-out to Kirah and Woody for their companionship on this journey.

I would like to thank my other supervisors; firstly, to Prof Annette Street for taking on this project as the primary supervisor, and Dr Mary Whiteside for agreeing to be a co-supervisor. Your encouragement and involvement in the early development of the study was always valuable and appreciated. Unfortunately, neither was able to be involved for the duration of the project, Prof Street for personal health reasons and Dr Whiteside's position at the University ended. So therefore, I am very grateful to Prof Margarita Frederico for taking up the role of primary supervisor after Prof Street's retirement, having previously chaired the Progress Committee, and for the last 4 years being the only supervisory panel member. I thank-you for dealing with my changes of direction during the research and I would imagine an anarchist theoretical/methodological study of Aboriginal fathers was not what you were expecting to be supervising. I have valued your comments on the draft chapters and guidance to getting me to finish. I have especially appreciated your support for me to take extended periods of leave from study to deal with depression.

Research is always built upon the work of others, as my extensive reference list attests, therefore, I would like to give thanks to the many people who have provided support and encouragement and have listened and talked over the project with me. While I take full responsibility for what I wrote, I recognise that these dialogues have enriched my thinking. In particular I would like to thank (in no particular order), John Liddle, David Blu, Brayden Williams, Ricky Mentha, Craig San Roque, Paul Ah Chee and Alex Brown.

I acknowledge this work was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship, which covered the University fee for the course. In addition, I recognise the La Trobe University School of Allied Health Higher Degree by Research Grant for funding the transcription of the interviews and my conference registration at the 2013 National Men's Health Conference.

I would also like to thank Christine Ponter (librarian-Alice Springs Hospital Library) and the La Trobe University Library and IT staff for their support during this study. I also acknowledge Digital & Audio Transcription Services (DAATS) for their work in

transcribing the majority of the interviews. I am also indebted to Brian, Christine, and Margarita for their thorough proofing of the final drafts of the thesis.

Finally, I'd like to thank the many musicians and composers who have provided the soundtrack to this study over many hours whilst at the computer, from *Animal Collective* to *Tchaikovsky*, from *Rage Against the Machine* to *Gweno*, and *Mariza*, I could not have done it without you. While a thesis is not a literary work—so I am told, many literary authors capture the issue of representation I have dealt with in writing this thesis. I will finish my acknowledgements with two quotes that have helped me over the journey with the aporia of representation.

Each of us is several, is many, is a profusion of selves. So that the self who disdains his surroundings is not the same as the self who suffers or takes joy in them. In the vast colony of our being there are many species of people who think and feel in different ways.

Fernando Pessoa (2003) *The Book of Disquiet*.

The most disheartening tendency common amongst readers is to tear out one sentence from a work, as a criterion of the writer's ideas or personality.

Emma Goldman (1917/1969) *Anarchism and other essays*.

Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation
AIEW	Aboriginal & Islander Education Worker
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMRG	Aboriginal Male Reference Group
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
ARO	Aboriginal Resource Officer
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AWD	All Wheel Drive
CAHREC	Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee
CDP	Community Development Program
CLO	Cultural Liaison Officer
CLP	Country Liberal Party
Congress	Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
CSMM	Critical Studies of Men and Masculinity
FV	Family Violence
GRIFIA	Gender-Related Index For Indigenous Australians
GRT	Gender Relations Theory
ISA	Inclusion Support Assistant
ITAS	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
MC	Mounted Constables
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
PM	Prime Minister
PS	Primary School
Qld	Queensland
RSI	Repetitive Strain Injury
SA	South Australia
SEWB	Social and Emotional Wellbeing
USA	United States of America
WA	Western Australia
WWII	World War Two

Glossary of Terms

Aboriginal Male/Men: the terms ‘man’ or ‘men’ are reserved for those Aboriginal males who have been initiated through traditional law or ceremony. The term ‘male’ would correctly be used to describe a non-initiated adult and ‘boy’ would usually be used to refer to young males who have not been initiated.

Aboriginal people: is the preferred collective term used by the majority of Aboriginal people in the central Australian region. Indigenous and First Nations are seen as being terms external to local collective naming experiences, being too broad in scope or pertaining to overseas naming conventions.

central Australia: Geographic description of a broad region in the centre of the continent that includes all of the Northern Territory (NT) south of Elliott, parts of neighbouring Western Australia (WA) and Queensland (Qld) that border the NT in this region; as well as the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY), area in the north-west of South Australia (SA).

Cultural business: The cultural world of central Australian Aboriginal peoples remains highly gendered. There are specific times and spaces where males and females will temporarily separate to attend to their responsibilities for particular cultural practices. Cultural business can be used to describe all aspects of separate gendered ceremonial and cultural law activities.

Discourse: the ways in which socially constructed daily beliefs (as truths) are reproduced to create or reinforce discursive practices. Discourse includes ways of representing people, ideas, knowledges, constructions of reality and subjectivities.

Discursive practices: include text, social and embodied practices and knowledge formations. They are both constitutive and subjectifying.

Fathers: Males who undertake fathering roles with children. In this study, this term includes biological fathers and stepfathers, as well as other males fulfilling the main fathering roles, which may include uncles and grandparents, as well as a person’s father’s brothers.

Family Violence: The preferred term to describe the broad range of situations whereby family members experience violence both within and beyond their immediate domestic situation, it includes wider family members as well as intimate partner violence.

Intervention: Shorthand for the Northern Territory Emergency Response. This was an Australian Commonwealth Government policy response to broadly reported allegations of child sexual abuse in remote NT Aboriginal communities.

Post – structuralism: a body of theory associated with the French intellectual movement that developed post Paris May 1968, which broke with structuralist social theory, emphasizing relationships and interaction rather than structure as sources and processes of power.

Post Anarchism: The reimagining of anarchism through a post-structuralist lens.

Prefiguration: The means used in pursuing an end must be congruent with what you are aiming to achieve. Those actions prefigure (or model) the desired outcome.

Town Camps: Aboriginal living areas, held by incorporated Housing Associations under a perpetual lease, either a *Special Purpose Lease* or a *Crown Lease*. They have long histories as places where Aboriginal people have lived for generations around Alice Springs.

Wellbeing: In this thesis, I have used this term in a more narrow and precise sense than what is usually referred to as Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) in Aboriginal/Australian Indigenous contexts. Rather, I have characterised emotional responses to issues in the fathers' lives, even though many of these issues are encompassed in the SEWB definition. I felt that my focus on a sociological analysis precluded making conclusions within the professional SEWB framework.

Worldview: How we conceptualise the world in both its physical and metaphysical sense, interpretation of meanings, sense making and re-inscription of our personal understandings back into that interpretation. The term can be used to capture the philosophical and moral dimensions of axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodologies where these create or shape meaning.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Aboriginal fathers and other males fulfilling fathering roles in Alice Springs, Northern Territory (NT), Australia, do so within a continually changing and sometimes volatile political and social policy climate.

The Australian Commonwealth Government, Northern Territory Emergency Response ("*Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act*," 2007),¹ often referred to as the 'Intervention', is seen by critics to have had many negative impacts upon Aboriginal males' emotional wellbeing, not just in the Northern Territory but elsewhere in Australia (A. Brown & Brown, 2007; Nelson, Baarda, & Martin, 2012; Sunrise Male Health Summit, 2009).

Every Aboriginal man is now tainted with a brush, they have emasculated us, they have said we are all woman bashers, we are all alcoholics, we are all child abusers. (Forrester in "Aboriginals threaten to ban tourists from Uluru," 2008)

This statement by a male central Australian Aboriginal community leader, pinpoints the hurt and anger felt by many Aboriginal males about the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). It highlighted a perceived attack upon their own Aboriginal male identity, feeling 'emasculated', along with the perception they were child abusers and women bashers.

This research is focused on a group of Aboriginal males in Mparntwe/Alice Springs² (Figure 1) and seeks to understand how they experience being fathers in an often negatively framed and judgemental social context. I explore the extent to which they were free to create their fatherhood subjectivities. I identify a variety of discourses this group of fathers drew upon when describing and framing their fathering

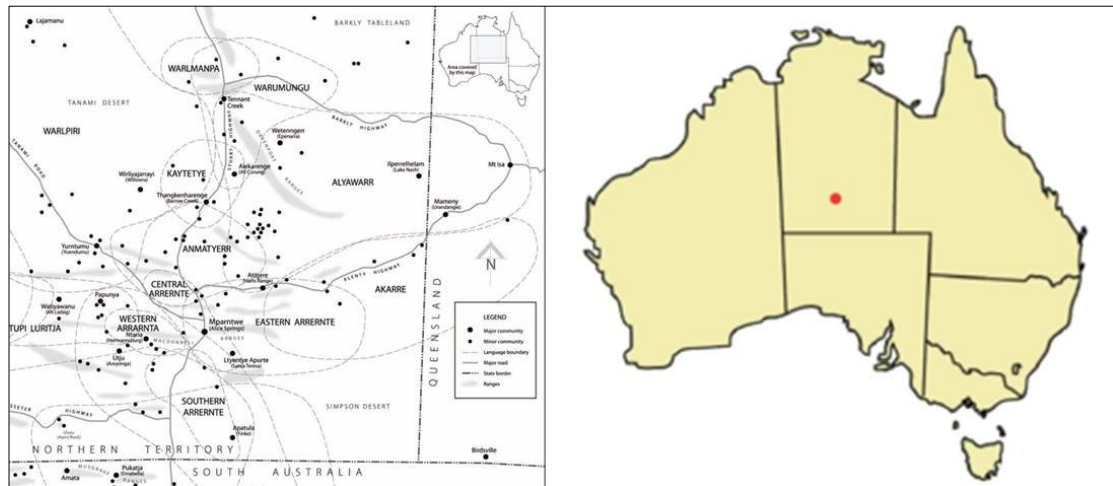
¹ This was a Commonwealth Government policy response to broadly reported allegations of child sexual abuse in remote NT Aboriginal communities. The political and social context and impacts are detailed in later chapters.

² Mparntwe, is the Arrernte name for the area upon which Alice Springs has developed. In this thesis, I use Mparntwe when I am particularly evoking this cultural connection. Otherwise, I use Alice Springs as a recognised place name and because that was how the fathers in their interviews refer to the town.

experiences and ideals. I discuss the emotional impacts that being fathers have for this group of males and the wellbeing issues they raised.

Figure 1

Mparntwe/Alice Springs Location



Note. Left- Mparntwe located in the Aboriginal language grouping context & Right- Red dot, locating, Alice Springs in the centre of the continent.

Sources. Left, Thornley in (Walsh, Dobson, & Douglas, 2013), Right, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alice_Springs_Locator.png

Negative attitudes towards Aboriginal males have been ingrained in settler narratives since the advent of colonisation. Such attitudes were amplified in the politicised climate that existed after shocking child sexual abuse allegations were aired by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2006), then during the subsequent Board of Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, and when the policy intervention through the NTER designed to protect Aboriginal children from child sexual abuse was enacted. A year later a key finding of the Aboriginal Male Health Summit 2008 held near Alice Springs found that, “The almost ‘witch-hunt’ of Aboriginal males and the demonising of our males by the mainstream media and politicians both State and Federal, caused much angst not only at the Summit, but at all community levels as well” (Aboriginal Male Health Summit, 2008, p. 26).

This ‘witch hunt’ occurred despite the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* “*Little Children Are Sacred*” report cautioning that, “at times, Aboriginal men have been targeted as if they were the only perpetrators of child sexual abuse in communities. This is inaccurate and has resulted in unfair shaming, and consequent further

disempowerment, of Aboriginal men as a whole” (Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, 2007, p. 57).

There are few published detailed or researched accounts of how Aboriginal males frame their roles as fathers, particularly in the central Australian setting. Research completed by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress identified how Aboriginal males viewed their families and their sense of responsibility towards their families, as motivating factors in their desire to manage their lifestyles, and to have, or to work towards, better states of health (Rosewarne, Wilson, & Liddle, 2017). Aboriginal males consulted during that study and in the development of this research identified current Commonwealth and Northern Territory Aboriginal Affairs policies as having major impacts upon Aboriginal families, particularly Aboriginal males, by creating considerable upheaval in their lives and their local communities (Aboriginal Male Health Summit, 2008).

1.1 Research Aims and Questions

The primary aim of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of how Aboriginal males enact fatherhood.

To address this concern, I have focused on the following key questions:

- How do the Aboriginal fathers participating in this research represent themselves in relationship to constitutive fatherhood discourses?
- What conflicts are present in their subjective representations?
- How do these Aboriginal fathers choose to represent their social relationships in the context of their fatherhood practices?
- To what extent are these fathers free to develop and practise their own version(s) of fatherhood?
- Are there ways in which the fathers sought to escape coercive discursive practices present in their representations?

Underlying these questions, and discussed separately, are the wellbeing implications of these personal and social interactions.

An important element of this project is to hear Aboriginal males' stories, rather than have their story shaped by media perceptions of Aboriginal males: especially the negative, deficit, dehumanised view of sexual assault perpetrators, drunks, the 'frightening others'. In this regard, this study can be of significance for the empowerment and utility of the local Aboriginal community in telling their story to wider audiences.

The aim of the research was to explore the manner in which Aboriginal males experience fatherhood of school-aged children and how this affects their emotional wellbeing. I felt this required more than description—even 'thick description' and interpretation of social structures (Geertz, 1973). Nor did I want this to be an intellectual mining project, seeking 'data' from 'others' supplying the chain of imperial/colonial productions of knowledge (Connell et al., 1999). Instead, I sought to undertake a cultural critique of forms of domination and the experiences of Aboriginal fathers in negotiating these forms of domination. I have attempted this by analysing how fathers create representations of themselves as fathers. I explored their views of fatherhood, parenting associated with schooling and emotional support, and whether these representations challenge, conform with, liberate or create new representations of what it is to be an Aboriginal father in this setting.

This critical cultural analysis, whilst centring Aboriginal males as the source of information, places the gaze on the social situation they negotiate. It goes beyond being descriptive of their ascribed roles and responsibilities in order to highlight those factors impacting upon their 'choices' in being fathers and how these factors relate to their ability to enjoy or create their own freedom in being fathers.

I framed the research approach from an anarchist philosophical view of power and discourse (Heroux, 2010). Implicit in this approach are questions of freedom (Alfred, 2005; Jun, 2012, 2018), subjectivity and the power of discourses to shape subjectivities and how individuals help reproduce those discourses (Antliff, 2011; Ferguson, 2011; Jeppesen, 2019). Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I seek 'lines of flight' from these 'territorializing' discourses.

1.2 Research Methodology

A secondary aim of the research is to explore how anarchist principles could be applied in the research space both as an analytic sociological method and as a research practice.

The analysis utilises an anarchist post-structural theoretical lens, whilst also drawing upon the valuable perspectives found in allied theories of feminism (Lazar, 2018), Indigenous standpoint theory (Coulthard, 2010), and anti-colonial theory (A. G. Lewis, 2012; Ramnath, 2011).

The issue of representation is recognised as a fundamental issue for social sciences (Cohn, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Heroux, 2010). It is particularly important in this context, where Aboriginal males have historically been negatively represented. I struggled extensively with how I, a non-Aboriginal person could make claims to represent those fathers who participated in the study and keep their narratives intact, rather than presenting a research analysis fragmenting their stories. I have applied a post-anarchist narrative analysis, focusing upon the discourses that were present in the fathers' narratives. I have endeavoured, through this process, to keep as much of their self-representation in the forefront and not to distort, or risk, truncating their stories. This approach recognises the differences and the heterogeneous nature of the experiences of this group of fathers and the likelihood of unstable or shifting self-representation as they negotiate how to make meaning during their discussions of fatherhood. It recognises that double readings of statements are a valid analytic tool (Cohn, 2006).

I sought to follow the anarchist principle of prefiguration, whereby the means and ends of the process are congruent (Shantz & Williams, 2013). I embedded these anarchist ethical principles into the research process. My use of this approach aimed to decentre the process (and ownership) of knowledge, to make these findings of value to the fathers' community and to support Aboriginal fathers dealing with multiple forms of domination, social relationship creation and representation building.

Another important principle guiding my approach to this research was that the research be community-based. My personal view of community-based research is that there must be, at a minimum, strong community control or involvement in the design, implementation, and outcomes of the research. The issue being researched must be of interest to the local community and capable of meeting the requirements of academic research. Where the project is not initiated from the community the project needs to be agreed to by the community as being a valid issue to research. In the case of this project, it came about in part, through discussions arising from a previous Aboriginal community-controlled research project.³ I included community input into the design of the project through the active engagement of the Aboriginal Male Reference Group (AMRG). They had input to the design elements; and have been active throughout the project; particularly in discussing ideas and assessing findings of the project.

The title of the thesis, “*For the love of their children*”, arose when analysing the fathers’ stories. It became evident to me the fathers were motivated to undertake the various activities they did as fathers because they loved their children. At the same time, when they discussed the emotional nature of being fathers, the love they received from their children and positive emotional impact it had on them was constitutive of being fathers. ‘For the love of their children’ therefore invites a double reading (Cohn, 2006) of the meaning of love in the fathers’ narratives in this thesis: the doing for and the receiving of love is co-constitutive of being a father.

1.3 My Position

I recognise that my interest in this project was initially grounded in a number of my own experiences: as a father of school-aged children, through my work with central Australian Aboriginal people (particularly with males) and the underlying philosophical and political values that have guided my life and involvement in various social change campaigns aimed at addressing social inequalities.

³ In part, the genesis of this study came about during the research project ‘*Ingkintja, The Congress male health program*’, during discussion with Aboriginal managers and staff at the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO), the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Rosewarne et al., 2017).

This ‘grounding’ helped shape the particular research methodologies I have chosen and how my own experiences have come to bear upon the theoretical lens through which I approach the analysis of the experiences of the other people presented in this study. A more detailed discussion of my positionality and role as the researcher occurs later in the thesis.

1.4 The evolution of the research project

This project has had multiple iterations, primarily due to the challenges I encountered with finding an appropriate methodology and method to address representation. I struggled with how to ethically and honourably represent ‘others’; this has at times plagued me, and almost led to me giving up. However, particularly with the encouragement of the AMRG (and others), and recognising that I did need to ‘honour’ those fathers who had shared their stories, I kept reshaping how I was analysing their narratives (Crotty, 1998). Originally I had planned this research as a case study of Aboriginal fathers bounded within the confines of one school using a thematic analysis (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). However, I found this approach too restrictive, because these fathers’ lives were hard to ‘bind’ into a case. Early use of NVivo distorted this process even more, creating disassociated text. The case study approach was a familiar one (Creswell, 2013), but, for all that, I found it was not addressing another part of my desire to do doctoral research—to expand my thinking. I had previously worked with a community health service where the research paradigm was the social determinants of health. I found this too limited in its understanding of power (Navarro, 2009) and was not satisfied with a structuralist analysis as being capable of letting voices be heard in the findings. I consider this approach stifled voices into pre-set planned power structures as the determinants of people’s actions. I was also initially attracted to the egalitarian promise of critical ethnography (Kincheloe, 2001) but found that the practice of the research was not ethnographical in the way de(pre)scribed. In addition, I did not find Marxist approaches, dominant in this field to be appropriate. These various structuralist approaches to explain action and belief were too rigid and left people as relatively inactive objects upon which external forces determined behaviours. I initially wrote a full analysis chapter and literature review based upon these (since) discarded principles. I then returned to consider fundamental worldviews and methodological approaches. Then, at the risk of going down too many intellectual rabbit holes, I explored contemporary anarchist

philosophical thought and methodologies, and sought out anarchist research methods. I have then reanalysed all my material, interviews, readings, and theories. I believe this work has most definitely met my late career desire of undertaking a doctorate as a thought-expanding process. I also firmly believe that this approach ‘honours’ the fathers’ stories more ethically and usefully than the discarded approaches. I have shared the findings and discussion with the AMRG and they have commented very favourably on this approach to representing their community’s experiences.

1.5 Terminology

Cognisant that totalising terms are problematic, I follow Beasley (2012), in utilising gendered terms as “gender categories as sites of analysis” (p. 759) while remaining open to the contestability and fluidity in using such terms. In this study, the gender term of father was used throughout with the Aboriginal males who were involved.

I use the term Aboriginal ‘male’ rather than Aboriginal ‘man’ or ‘men’. In central Australia, the words ‘man’ or ‘men’ indicate a male or group of males who have entered into men’s cultural business. During this time, they are led by other more senior men through their ceremonial law and thereafter have specific cultural obligations and responsibilities within their community and with other men. This cultural business is an ongoing process throughout their lives. The term cultural or law business often refers to a specific time of year or period when men will withdraw from the community to participate in ceremonial activity. This is a spiritually profound process and is closed to the uninitiated. This undertaking is not discussed in this study. To avoid miscommunicating someone’s cultural status, the term male is preferred within the community to describe any or all males. Notwithstanding this need for distinction, Aboriginal males will often use the term men when describing themselves generally. Where this occurs in the narratives, it has been retained. Where I describe non-Aboriginal males, or when the noun is being used in broadly generic style, I use men or man as appropriate.

Except where a person’s specific language affiliation is known, I use the term ‘Aboriginal’ rather than ‘Indigenous’ to describe people from the region. Whilst not an ideal term, masking more than it describes and essentially using an adjective as the subject, this is the preferred collective term used by the majority of Aboriginal people

I have worked with in this region. Where aggregated data describes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people this is stated. I use the term non-Aboriginal or settler to describe people, institutions and cultural practices and beliefs that are not identified as being Aboriginal, unless these can be more clearly identified as coming from a particular culture, country, or region, such as French, France or European. Some implications of these terms for how people are viewed and categorised are discussed in later chapters.

The term father is used in general descriptions as meaning males who undertake fathering roles with children; in the literature, this usually includes biological fathers and stepfathers. When describing Aboriginal fathers in central Australia, I include both these descriptions as well as other males fulfilling the main fathering roles, which may include uncles and grandparents, as well as one's father's brothers.

1.6 Delimitation or boundaries of the study

This study has some limitations being based in central Australia with Aboriginal males resident in this region. Aboriginal worldviews, as presented in the chapters on Worldview, Anarchist social theory and sociology (Chapter 3) and Aboriginal Fatherhood Discourse Genealogy (Chapter 5), provide a framework for Aboriginal male identity. However, details of these Aboriginal male practices are not discussed. How Aboriginal males experience the cultural practices of men's business is not a matter explored in this study, except where the participants themselves reflected upon it. This essential element of being an Aboriginal man in this context is not explored.

This study provides Aboriginal males with a platform to voice how they experience fatherhood. It does not provide a voice for the fathers' partners or for their children. Therefore, their statements are not validated or externally reviewed by the people in the relationships they reflect upon. Nor does it provide a forum for schools or teachers to state their reflections upon their dealing with these fathers.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that I am not an Aboriginal person, nor do I speak any Aboriginal language.

My understanding of the participants' lived experience is that of an outsider. I have attempted to address this limitation through the research design, having an AMRG of local senior Aboriginal men and community leaders with whom to discuss and guide me in the research in an iterative research approach. The role of this group is discussed later in the thesis. In this way I aimed to ensure as well as I could that those interpretations I placed upon the words of the participants were checked against Aboriginal specific lived experiences of this community. This is discussed further in the Discourse Methodology and Methods (Chapter 4).

Only fathers with children in school and who felt empowered to volunteer to be interviewed were part of the study. Fathers of children who do not attend school were not part of this study, so their experiences of fatherhood including consideration of why fathers did not send children to school cannot be included. Nor can the views or experiences of those fathers with children in school who chose not to be interviewed.

The views expressed are those of the fathers at the time of their interview(s). They do not form a longitudinal data set. Any change in attitudes cannot be explored, except where fathers retrospectively reflected upon their experiences.

This study focuses on the emotional wellbeing of the participants, as they define and identify this through their experience. It is not a physical health study. There is increasing evidence that emotional health influences pathways to physical health. This may become an area for further study.

1.8 Outline of thesis

The theoretical underpinning of my post-anarchist approach to representation has necessitated a variation in approach to how this thesis has been structured in its chapter nomenclature, including a reordering of certain conventions of traditional chapter placement.

In Chapter 2, I outline my personal history and experiences. This is an appropriate cultural way of introducing oneself in Aboriginal communities in central Australia, and in Aboriginal communities elsewhere in the country (Sarra, 2011). In addition, it makes transparent how my experience shaped the choice of research methodology. In

this chapter, I also discuss the social, cultural, and political setting and the policy environment in which the study is located. My aim for these contextual presentations is to clarify how my experiences and my understanding of social and cultural contexts affect how I may represent the stories of others.

In Chapter 3, I present the axiological, ontological, and epistemological underpinnings of this study. I describe the theoretical standpoints: anarchist, post-structuralist and allied theories of feminism, Indigenous standpoint theory and anti-colonial theory that have informed the underpinning research questions and the research analysis.

In Chapter 4, I describe the methodology informing the methods I employed to gather the narratives and other data presented in this study with Aboriginal people. This includes a detailed discussion of representation, discourse analysis and how ethical issues working with Aboriginal people, at all stages of the project, were negotiated.

In Chapter 5, I present a discourse genealogical study of masculinity, fatherhood, and a discussion of Aboriginal male roles in Aboriginal society. Discourses are not a reflection of reality, “but play an integral and inextricable role in constituting reality” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 5). Therefore, a discussion of discourses that includes knowledge reproduced through academic literature or popular literature is not a project in describing reality. The literature on Aboriginal fatherhood does not inform the study—the discourse(s) around Aboriginal fatherhood does. A discussion of discourse and what constitute reality has been considered (Chapter 3), in order to set a foundation for understanding discourse. Literature reviews present abstracted neutral knowledge to set context and justify the study, usually before other chapters. In a post-anarchist thesis the literature is not neutral. It is constitutive of its own discourse, rather than being reality, objectively describing its subject matter: Aboriginal fathers. Hence, I have placed it immediately before the narrative analysis, where it forms and constitutes part of the analysis. Here, I explore the roles of fathers in traditional central Australian Aboriginal society, the ways in which discourses of providers and protectors, as well as the new involved father have developed and continue to coexist whilst in seeming conflict. I discuss how and where fatherhood modelling and coping

discourses are located, as well as, how father generative care discourses are manifest, especially around education.

I present my narrative analysis in Chapters 6 and 7, drawn from the interviews and data sources collected during my field research. I consider the discourses the fathers reference and that I could identify in the genealogy of fatherhood where those discourses are present. I relate their struggles to enact fatherhood and their self-representations, the subjective self they aim to present during their interviews. I consider the contradictory space in which many fathers find themselves and look at the issues they raise in terms of support, identification, and family histories. In Chapter 6, I focus on discourses of fathers' roles and from where the fathers found their role models. In Chapter 7, I describe the emotional impacts of being fathers had for the participants and where they drew upon for parenting and emotional support.

In the Discussion and Conclusion (Chapter 8), I consider the theoretical and social implications of these narratives. I consider where the double readings of these narratives highlight or direct our attention to the struggles, hope, and desire that are present in their self-representations. Representations of fatherhood for this group of Aboriginal male participants can enhance community understanding of their experiences, with implications for policy development both locally and beyond.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how this research came about, my personal connections to the research, and how my own experiences shaped how I came to undertake this research. I have introduced my ethical and methodological approach to the work. I have discussed the value of the research in a brief overview of the social, political and policy contexts. An outline of the aims and research approach has been presented. A discussion of the theoretical analysis has been broached, which in turn shows how this informed the structure of the thesis. I have noted the delimitations and limitations of the research project and its findings. I have drawn attention to where issues are further developed in the thesis, particularly methodological and contextual matters. I have outlined each chapter to provide context for the structure of the thesis. The next chapter deals with the context of the study.

Chapter 2. Context

2.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I provided an overview of the context, genesis, aims, approach, limitations, and structure of the study. In this chapter, I introduce myself as the researcher and detail the social context of the study.

I start with my story, how I fit in and where I come from, so that the reader may know my social context. Such an introduction is the appropriate and accepted way of introducing oneself in Aboriginal communities in central Australia, and in Aboriginal communities elsewhere in the country. There is strong emphasis on family, social, and cultural background in this information sharing. Exploring these connections and personal stories enables trust; and understanding develops concerning issues, both personal and social, that a person may bring to the community (Sarra, 2011). Sharing my background at the outset also brings transparency to why I have chosen particular research methodologies and how my experiences bear upon the theoretical lens through which I approached the analysis of the experiences of the ‘other’ people I present in this thesis.

My interest in this project was grounded in my experiences as a father and through my work with Aboriginal people, particularly with males and by the social justice principles, which guide my life. I present a detailed theoretical discussion of positionality and the role of the researcher in Worldviews and Anarchist social theory and sociology (Chapter 3).

The context presented here deliberately does not dwell on ‘traditional’ statistics of Aboriginal disadvantage such as life expectancy gaps. In that path, lie roadblocks to understanding, the creation of despair, the creation of blame, and the perpetuation of an Aboriginal welfare industry seemingly caught in a web of deficit waiting to be addressed, “giving off the whiff of poverty voyeurism” (Walter, Kukutai, Gonzales, & Henry, 2023). Worse, these statistics, oft quoted, may promote a state of perpetual disbelief and ultimately lead to community disinterest. Where Aboriginal people stop being viewed as people, they become just numbing numbers (Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Dodson, 1995). I therefore limit the use of statistics in this chapter to illustrate disadvantage at a relative and fine-grained level. To illuminate the ground, not draw large pictures in the sky. I aim to contextualise the study in social and cultural realities of the Aboriginal people of Mparntwe /Alice Springs, framed as Aboriginal relationship to land, and the relationships amongst Aboriginal society and settler society historically and contemporarily.

My focus is on those elements I perceive bear upon the lives of Aboriginal fathers today, consistent with an anarchist position where “history is the discourse of the present projected onto the past” (Koch, 1993, p. 17). Any history is therefore by definition a partial representation (Nietzsche in Koch, 1993), bounded by what is included as well as excluded. I draw upon a critical view of colonial studies through an Indigenist Studies approach, where the impact of colonisation as process, rather than event (Kauanui, 2016), is critically considered as non-teleological colonialism, but rather as a process of conflict, resistances, accommodations, and change. Where Aboriginal peoples’ struggles are present and their ability to maintain connection to land and community space and structure are recognised (Konishi, 2019).

Finally, I present context through a mixture of text and images. Through images, I hope to stimulate and engage the reader in creating their own representations and the understanding of the context I have presented. This forms part of the hermeneutic double reading of text—⁴ what I write may seem obvious, but the reader may find further understanding beyond what I may have assumed or missed in my representations in these images.

2.2 My Background

I grew up in the industrial west of Melbourne, Victoria in the 1960’s and 1970’s. There, a teacher at our violently dysfunctional secondary school told me that our unruly behaviour and lack of safe educational learning environment did not matter, as we were not going anywhere where we needed an education. The local factories were our destination.

⁴ Discussed in Discourse Methodology and Methods (Chapter 4).

I am of English/Celtic settler descent; three of my grandparents were born in England, while my paternal grandmother, born in New South Wales (NSW), was the daughter of Welsh immigrant miners. My father's parents originally settled on the goldfields around Ballarat and Bendigo in Victoria. My mother's father was a factory worker and her mother was in domestic service.

I use the term 'settler' to highlight relationships culturally created through the unresolved invasion and theft of Aboriginal land that commenced in 1788⁵ with the arrival of a fleet of British ships, and continues today, regardless of the various legal instruments imagined by modern Australian legal systems to justify these events.⁶ I recognise the problem of the inherent binary notion settler/indigene, and do not embrace this as an erasure of true multicultural backgrounds and cultural reality (Konishi, 2019; Sarra, 2015). However, I use it cognisant of its limitations to illustrate a non-Aboriginal, or colonialist presence, rather than using other equally problematic and cumbersome expressions to highlight the unresolved issue of land in our country and society.

All my grandparents met in Australia and finally settled in the industrial suburb of Seddon in the west of Melbourne, for many years both families living unknowingly one street apart. When my parents married, they moved a few suburbs down the railway line to Newport. Newport was a solidly working-class and, in my time, an increasingly post-war migrant-based community.

⁵ It can be argued this theft commenced in 1770 with Captain James Cook's claim to take possession of the eastern coast of Australia. This 'claim' is contested. It is possible that Cook, post-departure made up that he had claimed the eastern coast of Australia, because he feared the French may claim the territory. <https://navyhistory.au/possession-island/>.

⁶ Discussed further in 2.3.4.

Figure 2.1

Images of the Industrial West of Melbourne: Newport Power Station and Petro-Chemical Refinery Nth Altona.



Sources. Left, Scott Sanders/Flickr

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Newport_power_station.jpg . Right, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering's *Technology in Australia 1788-1988*
<https://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/ti>

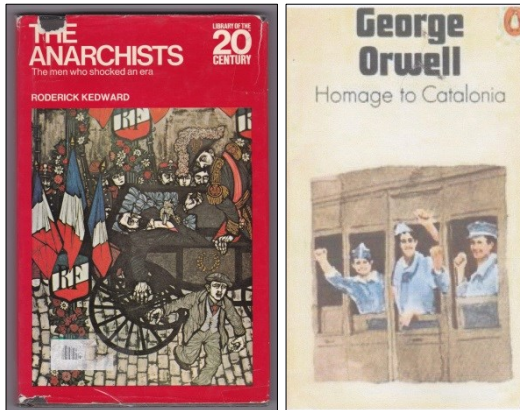
From the top of the elegantly curved brutalist concrete railway overpass, which finalised the bifurcation of the Newport shopping centre, that straddled the Melbourne-Geelong railway line, we could clearly spot our house amongst the suburban roofs. We were the only people with tall trees, a product of 'rescued' plants on school holidays spent in the country. Long driving holidays, which were inspired by my father's exposure to the rainforest of Queensland during wartime army training camps, gave us the opportunity to see many parts of Australia. These experiences were an obvious signifier that my father's white-collar job, an engineer with the State Electricity Commission, placed us in a slightly higher income bracket than my peers and most neighbours.

Factors like the teacher's comment, the awareness we lived on the wrong side of 'the river', our perpetually struggling football team, the streets bereft of trees, and many other factors helped create awareness that our part of town was the poor and shunned cousin to more 'leafy' affluent suburbs making up greater Melbourne. My personal early awareness of social inequality pushed me to look for ways to overcome these inequalities, in my personal life, and later at a broader societal level. I first became exposed to anarchism as a political philosophy through finding books on anarchism in

the local council library (Kedward, 1971) and then in Year 12 English Studies (Orwell, 1974), having completed secondary schooling at a new school after failing Year 11 (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Early Anarchist Literary Encounters



Source. Left & Right, author.

From there I became politically active at university; there I became further exposed to anarchism as praxis in the student and then later social justice movements in which I worked.

I moved to Alice Springs in 1998. I soon started working with Aboriginal people, with an increasing emphasis on working with Aboriginal males. I met my partner here and we have since raised two children.

I made a conscious effort to be a different type of father than what I experienced in my childhood and adolescence. Like others of his era, my father was a product of the masculine culture of his time, shaped by having experienced the deprivations of the Great Depression,⁷ and surviving violence during active duty in WWII (1939-1945) (Raftery & Schubert). He was emotionally private and not open.

When we decided to have children, my partner and I planned for one of us to be a 'stay-at-home parent', a role I fulfilled for over ten years. Based on the number of

⁷ Growing up my parents experienced the poverty of the 1920's depression, including food shortages and lack of employment. Just prior to WWII, my mother, as a young woman, provided the sole income for her family of five.

hours parents spend with their children and the types of roles they undertake, I would be considered an ‘engaged father’ (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000). My emotional experience of being a father of young children also resonates with those commonly identified in the fatherhood literature: pride, effects of changes in lifestyle, emotional impacts, enriched appreciation of my partner’s abilities and disposition, delight in what children bring, and a heightened sense of responsibility (Allen & Daly, 2002). I recognise this experience of fatherhood helped deepen my awareness to why this study was valuable.

2.3 Study setting

2.3.1 A town like Mparntwe – The ‘Land is really part of us’ and an ‘erasure’ narrative

2.3.1.1 *Indigenist narrative*

Situated in central Australia, Mparntwe⁸ is a vital cultural meeting place where many important Aboriginal storylines associated with ancestral beings meet, cross and continue around the continent (Figure 2.3) (Brooks, 2003; Kimber, 2011).

Like Indigenous people around the world (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; I. Watson, 2009), central Australian Aboriginal society is a land-based system. Land, being a continuous entity, is inescapably part of, and at the same time representational of, foundational cosmological belief. In Central and Eastern Arrernte, named *Altyerre*,⁹ the ongoing time ancestral beings populate and shape the land, spiritually, physically, and as species. How these spirit beings come to inhabit humans and how this spirit is enlivened in a person through ceremony are ontologically complex matters involving the land. Story and all beings are the foundation of Aboriginal society; they govern social and kinship relationships and responsibilities to protect and care for Country. This is expressed very clearly, “When people talk about owning land, they mean that

⁸ The Central and Eastern Arrernte name of the area upon which the settler town of ‘Alice Springs’ has developed since the 1890s. Central and Eastern Arrernte is used as the default Aboriginal language in this thesis.

⁹ Various terms are used across languages groups in the region and each have their own stories and manner of explanation. For example *Tnengkerre/Tningkarra* in Western Aranda, *Jukurrpa* in Warlpiri, again *Altyerre* for Kaytetye, *Tjukurpa* for Pitjanjatjajara-Anangu, *Wapar* in Yankunytjatjara (Green, 2012), or what to outsiders has been rightly or wrongly shorthand as the dreaming or dreamtime (Green, 2012; Nicholls, 2014).

stories are part of Country (De Ishtar, 2005; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Myers, 1991; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008).

Creation stories live as part of the landscape within people:

I'm a *ngintaka* (perentie lizard). I was born at Walyatjata, near the waterhole there. They told me that *ngintaka* story when I was a little bit older. They said 'This is *ngintaka wapar*.' Its real to me and it means something. '*Nyuntumpa ngura* (Your place)' they told me. (Lester, 1995, pp. 10-11)

The dreamtime laid everything out like a blanket, even the Kaytetye people (T. K. Thompson, 2003, p. 1)

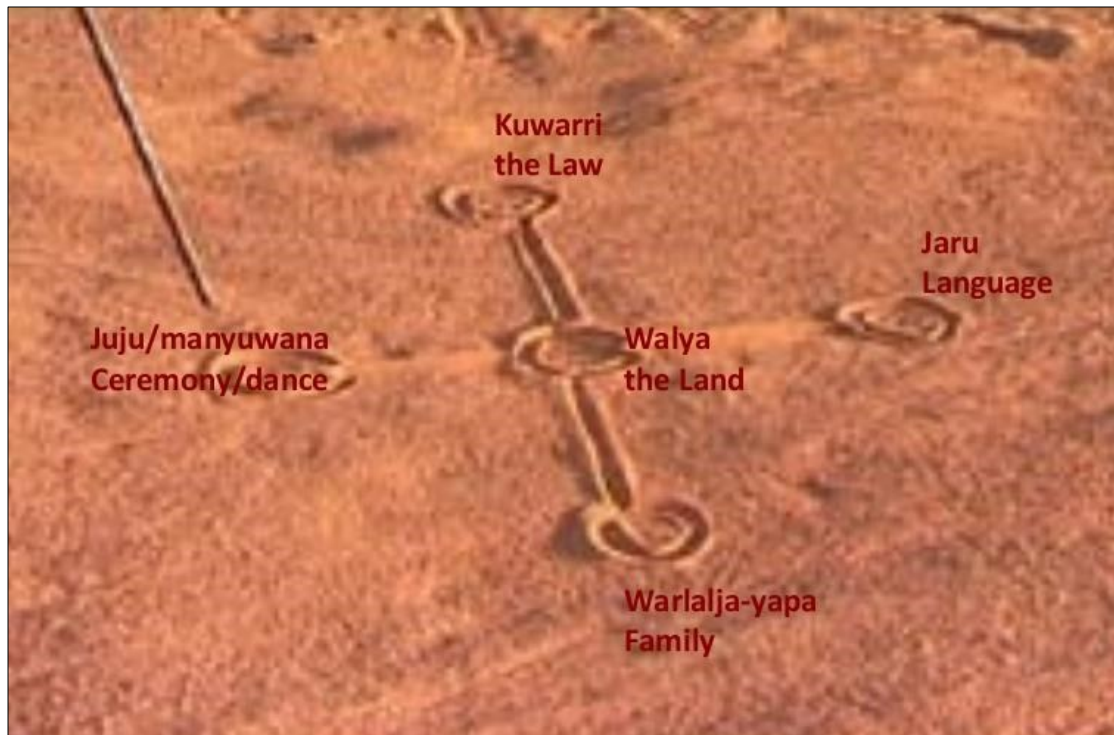
My *Altyerre* Dreaming comes from *Mpwerkingke* (near Burt Springs) I was born there ... I was found there. I am boss for *Mpwere* (Maggot) Dreaming. (Rubuntja & Green, 2001, pp. 14-16)

Here, both the knowledge of where the person is actually born is identified, as well as the place where they were found (conceived), also called the quickening (Berndt, 1982). This is when and where the entering of "an ancient spirit into the women's body to animate the child" is identified as occurring (Rubuntja & Green, 2001, p. 15). The cycle of life, death, and life continues and the human connection with the spirit world is embodied.

For Warlpiri people,¹⁰ Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu (2008) has described "Land, Law, Language, Ceremony, and Skin" (p. 3) as the five key elements of culture that interrelate (Figure 2.4). All elements must be strong or else people and the land will become sick:

If we don't respect our ceremonies and the rituals that belong to skin groups we will become sick and the country will become sick as well. If we disrespect the land we will forget what the **land** [emphasis in original] is trying to say. We will disappear as Warlpiri people. (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008, p. 4)

¹⁰ Traditional lands to the north-west of Mparntwe.

Figure 2.4*Key Elements of Warlpiri Culture*

Source. Pawa-Kurlpurlurnu et al. (2008) in Bat (2013).

For Central and Eastern Arrernte people, complex social relationships are illustrated by M.K.Turner (2017a), as “Forever Arising from and with Country” (Figure 2.5). In this society, primary responsibility for land is traced through patrilineal lines from a person’s father’s Country.

In this partial extract from the Alice Springs Native Title determination ("Hayes v Northern Territory [1999] FCA 1248,"), the complex nature of responsibility for land in central Australia is detailed (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6

Extract Alice Springs Native Determination: Land Responsibility

Members of patrilineal descent groups are often called *apmereke-artweye*. The word *apmereke-artweye* is derived from the words *apmere* meaning place, and *artweye*, which has a range of meanings covering concepts of ownership, belonging and relationship ... *Apmereke-artweye* are holders of an estate and have particular responsibilities for looking after it and authorising what goes on there, although this is always done in terms of ancestral precedent. This implies a relationship between current *apmereke-artweye*, the ancestors themselves and the landscape in which they have come to be embodied. People who are *apmereke-artweye* refer to the estate as their own country ... *Apmereke-artweye* have most often inherited their estate from their father and father's father or by some corresponding agnatic link (e.g., through their father's brother or father's father's brothers). Ultimately, these patrilineal links go back to the original ancestors themselves, although there may not necessarily be a hard and fast distinction drawn between a human ancestor and an ancestral totemic figure.

While *apmereke-artweye* are often designated as owners of an estate, they take care of it in partnership with others known as *kwertengerle*. The English term "boss" is sometimes applied to *apmereke-artweye* but may also be used for *kwertengerle*. ... *Kwertengerle* may intimately know the Dreamings for an estate and take the lead in discussions about it or during visits to sites. While *apmereke-artweye* have notional seniority, they often stay 'behind' *kwertengerle* in a gesture of modesty, since it is the role of *kwertengerle* to check that *apmereke-artweye* look after an estate according to the dictates of the law. *Kwertengerle* are involved in ceremonial activity with *apmerekeartweye* and hold the Dreamings in a similar, but not identical, way to their partners. Their sense of entitlement is as strong as that of *apmereke-artweye* and their rights and interests are well defined.

While a person's connections to, and rights in, all four grandparental estates are held simultaneously, those connections tend to be more or less ranked in people's minds. One belongs first to the estate of one's father's father; second to the estate of one's mother's father; third to the estate of one's father's mother; and fourth to the estate of one's mother's mother. However, there may be exceptions to this ranking system based on factors such as knowledge, seniority and long term residence.

Source. ("Hayes v Northern Territory [1999] FCA 1248,").

The statement illustrates two vital conditions of Aboriginal connection and responsibility with land, in addition to the personal relationship. Firstly, primary responsibility occurs through patrilineal descent. Secondly, both males and females have these responsibilities.

Observations by male settlers and explorers concluded that central Australian Aboriginal society was governed exclusively by men (Basedow, 1935/2004). Due to the highly gendered nature of separate social and spiritual domains present in both their own androcentric society (patriarch god and patriarchal family structured social systems) it is not surprising this view was projected onto Aboriginal people (Barney, 2010). The Aboriginal men's cultural business these informants attended was portrayed as secret from the women and highly spiritually important. On the other hand, the few ceremonies these male observers got to know about involving women were considered generally public and of lesser importance (Basedow, 1935/2004). Later when settler women (taking up more opportunities in their society) started to work with Aboriginal women, this obvious flaw in fieldwork became apparent and led to the recording of the importance of women's cultural business for western audiences (for a description and critique of pioneer work in this field see Barney, 2010; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Merlan, 1988). In all these cases, representations were created by non-Aboriginal people and, therefore, have been legitimately questioned about underlying cultural standpoints (Barney, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2006a).

Traditional-based central Australian Aboriginal society was/is highly gender segregated, with obvious gendered divisions of labour and with clear religious responsibilities for men and women to be carried out in gender separate locations (Lester, 1995; Lowe & Spry, 2002; Rockman, 1994). The spiritual lives of men and women in central Australian cultures can be seen as being inseparable, even if they are enacted in different locations and activities (Lowe & Spry, 2002; Rockman, 1994). In this society, women's law and men's law are both powerful and mysterious to each other (De Ishtar, 2005; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Lechleitner, 2013). I have adopted the expression 'inter-dependent gender relations' after Hinton Lowe and Frank Spry (2002), which describes this inseparability. They are not complementary binaries as in functional analysis, because their role is not to maintain a human created social

structure, instead they are given and bounded by the forces that shaped, and are shaped, in the *Altyerre* and regulated by the *Tnangkarra* (Lechleitner, 2013).

The argument whether, in traditional Aboriginal society (pre-settler/colonialism), violence by men towards women was a feature of gender relations (Sutton, 2009) or not (M. Adams, 2006c; Dodson, 2002) is not my focus in this section. How views on this relationship may be acted out today, in contemporary Aboriginal masculinity, are considered in the Aboriginal Fatherhood Discourse Genealogy (Chapter 5). Ascribing European power theories in a vastly different ontological sphere could do a great disservice to the complexity of customary Aboriginal complementary inter-dependant gender relations (Gutmann, 1997; Merlan, 1988; Myers, 1991). As Francesca Merlan (1988) has suggested, such theories may not help unravel contemporary social relations, perpetuating previously held misconceptions or over-simplifications of gender relations analysis.

2.3.1.2 Erasure narrative

Settler colonialism came later to central Australia than other parts of Australia. Exploration by John MacDougall Stuart (1860) was soon followed by the construction of the Overland Telegraph line and repeater stations (1872) and from 1876, the establishment of pastoral leases (Kimber, 1990).

Violence between Aboriginal people and pastoralists—the dominant developing industry, based on land and resource theft,¹¹ soon became common (Kimber, 1990). This relationship was policed by semi-autonomous Mounted Constables (MC) who vigorously defended the needs of the pastoralists, providing ‘summary justice’ towards Aboriginal people, particularly regarding the killing of cattle (Nettleback & Foster, 2007; Willshire, 1888/2015).

Violence was used towards Aboriginal people, especially towards Aboriginal men, to reinforce their subservient position. Such attitudes were regularly recorded, not just by those who found the attitude repugnant (Basedow, 1935/2004; Duguid, 1978), but openly in public statements (Willshire, 1888/2015). The last recorded massacre of

¹¹ The introduction of stock, itself can be seen as an act of unconscious ecocide against hunter-gatherer societies (Finzsch, 2017).

Aboriginal people in Australia occurred at Coniston Station,¹² in central Australia in 1928 (Bradley, 1991).

Government policy towards Aboriginal people was originally premised on the assumption Aboriginal people would eventually ‘die out’ in the face of the superior European ‘civilisation’. It was believed that modern ways of exploiting land, introduced diseases, firearms and centralised hierarchical decision-making structures would overwhelm the traditional Aboriginal land based society (Austin-Broos, 2011; Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, & Quartly, 1996; Kimber, 1990). The policy, characterised as “smoothing the dying pillow” (Austin & Parry, 1998, p. 13), aimed to minimise the most violent and destructive acts, allowing the original peoples’ demise, which was seen as an inevitability (Bates, 1938/1972), to occur with the least blood on the hands of the colonial state.

Initially there was a dramatic drop in the size of the local Aboriginal population (Austin & Parry, 1998). However, it became apparent that there was a growing population of children, the progeny of mixed relations between settler males and Aboriginal women (Austin & Parry, 1998). The development of a ‘mixed race’ was seen as a genetically backward step and there was concern a sub-race was being created (Austin & Parry, 1998). The *Aboriginals Ordinance 1911* (Cth) gave government officials, the Protectors of Aborigines (often police), the power to forcibly remove Aboriginal children from their parents—the beginning of what has become known as the ‘Stolen Generations’ policy (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 1997). Many removed children were emotionally, physically and sexually abused and the ongoing effects of these experiences, and lack of positive family modelling, are recognised as having intergenerational traumatic individual and collective community impacts (McGlade, 2012).

By the late 1930’s, the manner of dealing ‘with those now with us’ (Commissioner Bleakley in Commissioner Bleakley in W. Anderson, 2014, p. 127), was changed

¹² 250 kilometres northwest of Alice Springs. For an expanded discussion of this massacre see Bradley (1991).

under the influence of anthropologist A. P. Elkin, to one of ‘Assimilation’; where the expectation was for Aboriginal people to be absorbed into white society (Austin & Parry, 1998; Dewar, 1998; Grimshaw et al., 1996).

2.3.2 A town like Alice – Attempted exclusion, re-inscription and narratives collide

Nevil Shute’s novel *A Town Like Alice* (1950/2006) idealised the town as a place of frontier settlement gamely creating a white haven in the forbidding Australian outback. The tome is liberally laced with openly racist expressions and descriptions of segregation in general—however, Aboriginal people are totally absent from Shute’s description of Alice Springs.¹³

Aboriginal people had been excluded from the town boundary area in 1928 through the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918 (S.11)*(Cth) (Coughlan, 1991). Ordinances maintaining the policy of Aboriginal people being excluded from the town area, apart from during daylight hours if they had work permits, stayed in place until 1965 (Coughlan, 1991).

At the same time, there was the need for Aboriginal labour to be in relatively close proximity, in order to support the town’s menial tasks: refuse collection (including night soil and sewage pan removal and cleaning),¹⁴ wood gathering, and later as a source of manual labour to support the army camp in WWII. During this time Aboriginal people maintained close connection to their Country either in unofficial fringe camps, or later at the Catholic Little Flower Mission in town. At times, there were some relaxations of exclusion. For example, people were allowed into the town to sit at the back of the cinema on Saturday nights, including attending the world premiere of the movie version of *A Town Like Alice*.

A segregated housing area known as Rainbow Town was established south of the main town for Aboriginal people (of mixed descent), some of whom were granted

¹³ Despite its name, only ten pages of the (over) 400 page book are set in Alice Springs and, Aboriginal people are not mentioned. The racism behind the absence of Aboriginal people reflects the reality Shute would have encountered on his two-day visit to Alice Springs in 1949 while researching the book.

¹⁴ The last night soil workers camp was closed in 1965 when the town was largely connected to the sewerage system.

provisional exemption from the ordinance. Such exemptions, at the discretion of the Protector of Aborigines, could be removed for inappropriate behaviour, usually co-habitation with ‘full blood tribal’ Aboriginal people, alcohol consumption or other similar social misdemeanours.

The practice of assimilation meant children of mixed descent were separated from their parents and were housed at the old telegraph station (the Bungalow) immediately north of the town. This had the effect of attracting many Aboriginal parents to camp near the Bungalow to be close to their incarcerated children (Coughlan, 1991; Kruger & Waterford, 2007).

Fears surrounding sexual contact between settlers and Aboriginal women due to the influx of workers constructing the railway (1928) from South Australia, led to a roundup of Aboriginal campers who were moved to the Aboriginal Welfare Station Jay Creek ~32 kilometres west of Alice Springs (1928-1932). In 1942, the Australian Army took control of the town as part of the northern defence posture, with Alice Springs as the railhead for materials being then sent on by truck to Darwin. The Army also did not want Aboriginal people from camps in town near soldiers and the Little Flower Mission and many Bungalow residents were moved 110 kilometres east to dry bush conditions at the abandoned mining town of Arltunga (O'Grady, 1977). At the same time the army oversaw a new labour camp of Aboriginal workers at the old Bungalow (Kruger & Waterford, 2007).

After WWII, various pieces of legislation were introduced: the *Welfare Ordinance 1953-64*, the *Wards Employment Ordinance 1953-71* and the *Social Welfare Ordinance 1964-72*, which slowly extended rights previously denied to Aboriginal people.

However, paternalistic policies towards Aboriginal people continued including what social researcher Francis Coughlin described as the “assimilation laboratory” (Coughlan, 1991, p. 53). Here, Aboriginal people were trained how to live in the newer houses built in Rainbow Town along with the mass shifting of Aboriginal

people to the mixed language group ‘settlement’ of Amoonguna on the outskirts of the town, south of the ranges.

2.3.2.1 Re-inscription

The 1960’s campaigns for greater equality had both positive and negative effects on the lives of Aboriginal people in the region. For the pastoral industry, cheap Aboriginal labour (often low-waged, or with in-kind payments to male stock workers and no payment for female domestic workers) allowed the industry to be viable (Anthony, 2004). When Aboriginal workers sought to become part of the ‘real economy’ by gaining award wages, their labour was turned away and the industry moved quickly towards more mechanised and less labour-intensive practices (Sutton, 2009). This was a double blow, as Aboriginal people had been able to maintain close connection to their traditional lands by living on stations (Anthony, 2004).

Around the same time, new laws allowing Aboriginal people access to welfare and to purchase alcohol were introduced. The combined loss of meaningful work, the drift to the larger towns after being turned off the stations, and access to more cash and alcohol sowed the seeds of social pain that developed in the following decades (Austin-Broos, 2011; Mahood, 2008; Sutton, 2009).

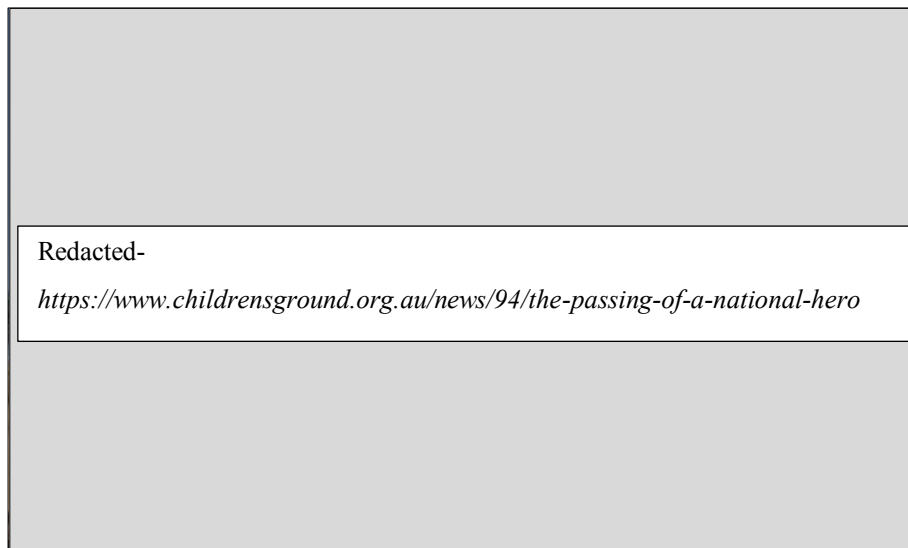
In the 1970’s Aboriginal peoples’ attention moved towards gaining greater control, both through the land rights movement, which sought the return of Aboriginal land to Aboriginal control and occupation through the outstation movement, but also through the establishment of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. Their aim was first to address social injustices, then provide legal services, health services, land councils, and housing services (Rosewarne et al., 2007).

An official Commonwealth policy of Aboriginal self-determination was adopted in 1972. This policy was often opposed by the settler community (Liddle (2003) in Rosewarne et al., 2007, p. 125). Within the settler/Aboriginal relationship, individual Aboriginal people’s ‘ownership’ of land via freehold settler title was not possible until the 1970s. The famous Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira, despite being given honorary Australian citizenship, was denied the right to own land in Alice Springs when he applied multiple times in the 1960s (Coughlan, 1991).

The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) explicitly excluded collective claims to urban areas. The Arrernte collective estate gained Australian settler legal status through the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) after the successful land claim over Mparntwe ("Hayes v Northern Territory [1999] FCA 1248,"). Despite being the lead claimant in the successful Arrernte Native Title claim for Alice Springs, including the land upon which her 'unrecognised' Town Camp had been established decades previously, M. Hayes never received title to White Gate, her traditional home. She passed away in 2017. White Gate (Figure 2.7) is still an 'illegal' camp, where the NT Government shut off its water supply in 2014.

Figure 2.7

White Gate Town Camp



Source : Children's Ground.

There were unofficial camps around Alice Springs from its earliest days and people continued to stay in and returned to these, by now, intergenerational living places (Coughlan, 1991; Rubuntja & Green, 2001). In the 1970's, support for Town Camps to become incorporated eventually led to the establishment of the Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation (service and advocacy body). Between 1976-1986 most camps became incorporated as community housing associations on *Special Purpose or Crown Leases* (Figure 2.8) (Coughlan, 1991; Heppell & Wigley, 1981). These camps have historically been poorly financed and are still commonly associated

with social problems related to poverty and marginalisation (Beck, 1985; Foster, Mitchell, Ulrik, & Williams, 2005; Ottosson, 2014). Town Camps continually host numbers of visitors from remote communities, usually relatives of residents who come to access services in Alice Springs, visit other relatives (in hospital, jail, or resident), as well as and when major sporting or other public events occur. These people can cause disruptions to Town Camp residents' lives (Foster et al., 2005).

Figure 2.8

Town Camp House.



Source. Author.

The continual movement back to the town by Aboriginal people throughout the settlement's history, the flowering of Aboriginal organisations during the early 1970s and the clearly identified connection to Country exhibited by Aboriginal claimants, male and female, during the Native Title case (as well as in prior Land Claims outside the town), show Aboriginal continual connection to Country and their resistance to the settlement process.

2.3.2.2 Collapse of the liberal consensus

Despite local and NT political opposition, the liberal consensus regarding Aboriginal Affairs policy after the 1967 Referendum (which gave the Commonwealth Government the power to make laws regarding Aboriginal people and required Aboriginal people to be included in the census population count) held for over thirty years. Both major political parties supported the policy of Aboriginal self-

determination when in government. During this time a number of key national decisions were enacted; *The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth)—introduced under the Australian Labour Party (ALP), but passed under the subsequent Liberal Party led government. In 1989 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established to oversee regional funding allocations and policy development and the ALP sponsored *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) was legislated after the Mabo High Court case (1992) overturned the legal fiction of Australia being *Terra Nullius* (Sharp, 1996).

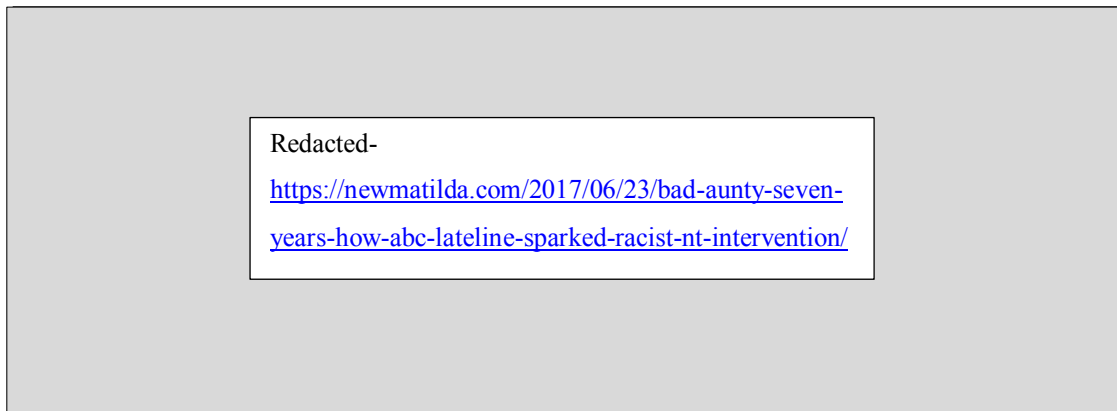
While the land rights movement and the development of service organisations grew, self-sustaining economies were not developed during this period. Poverty, social dysfunction associated with alcohol and substance abuse became common in remote communities that grappled with poor funding, social and cultural isolation and were left to struggle in, ‘an out of sight out of mind’ approach to remote social disintegration (Austin-Broos, 2011). By the early 2000’s, Aboriginal and settler voices were questioning policies which facilitated these problems (Ah Kit, 2002; N. Pearson, 1999; Sutton, 2001; Tatz, 1990).

This new dialogue coincided with the election of the Howard Liberal Government (1996-2007), with a strong conservative social and neoliberal economic agenda (Konishi, 2011). Howard championed, and was championed by, conservative social commentators associated with the magazine *Quadrant* and the Centre for Independent Studies (Austin-Broos, 2011). Historians—for example Blainey (1993) and Windschuttle (2002)—commenced what have been termed the ‘culture wars’, protesting the ‘black armband’ view of history, reinvigorating a modernist civilising narrative to Australian colonialism against a perceived blaming of white Australia for the current malaise in Aboriginal community development—for detailed critiques see Konishi (2011) and Macintyre and Clark (2004).

What resulted was a political environment driven by the neoconservative policies of the Howard Government, as various institutions were ignored, amended, or dismantled. This publicly commenced with the government refusing to accept many of the recommendations of the Stolen Generations report—including refusal to

apologise for the pain caused by the children's forced removal from their parents (1997). This was followed by the introduction of the Wik amendments (1998) to the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), which strengthened claims by the mining and pastoral industries against Native Title claimants. Later, the establishment of mutual obligation funding requirements with Aboriginal service providers (2004), coupled with the axing of the ATSIC (2005), changed the relationship between government and Aboriginal community organisations. In addition, Australia, along with the United States, Canada and New Zealand, were the only states to fail to ratify the *United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* when it was tabled in 2007 (Konishi, 2011).

There was considerable political pressure after the airing of horrific accounts of child abuse on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) program *Lateline* by NT prosecutor Dr Nanette Rodgers (2006) and subsequent, and later mainly discredited further reporting on child sexual abuse in remote Aboriginal communities (Figure 2.9) (Guiseppe & Randall, 2006; Mistilis, 2006). In response, the NT Government established the *Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse* (Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, 2007).

Figure 2.9*Controversy Arose Regarding the Lateline Reporting*

Note. Left—Aboriginal elders from Mutitjulu were angered by what they said, and later were proven to be, fabrications in the evidence presented by the ABC *Lateline* program regarding ‘sexual slavery’ by organised gangs of paedophiles in the community. Right—A key ‘witness’ in the program claiming to be a resident youth worker Greg Andrews, whose face and voice was disguised, was soon exposed to be a ministerial worker from the Dept. of Indigenous Affairs, who fabricated claims to the program. *Sources.* Left, & Right, new Matilda.

The Board’s report, *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* “*Little Children Are Sacred*” (2007), was delivered on 30th April 2007 to the NT Government and was finally released on 15th May. The Martin NT ALP Government prevaricated over its response. The Howard Australian Liberal Government moved quickly to use this as a trigger to unleash a raft of policies to intervene in what Prime Minister (PM) Howard, and his Aboriginal Affairs Minister Mal Brough, described on the 21st June, as a national emergency to protect children from sexual assault (J. W. Howard, 2007).

The *Northern Territory National Emergency Response 2007*, generally referred to as the ‘Intervention’, sparked partisan debate (Austin-Broos, 2011; Nathan, 2013). Many critics: Aboriginal local community leaders, national figures, and settler allies pointed out key recommendations from the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* report (2007) had been ignored, especially those relating to the need to consult with Aboriginal communities.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Board’s first recommendation that the situation was urgent also went to say that any action had to be done in conjunction between the Commonwealth and Territory Governments and Aboriginal people. Neither the NT Government—which was politically blindsided by the announcement, nor Aboriginal people, other than Noel Pearson 15 mins before the announcement was made, were consulted (N. Pearson, 2007b). Many Intervention policies had little to no bearing upon preventing

Support, other than in conservative media such as *The Australian* (McCallum & Reid, 2012), came from high-profile Aboriginal national figures, such as Marcia Langton (2007), Noel Pearson (2007b) and Warren Mundine ("NT intervention no land grab: Mundine," 2007), as well as anthropologist Peter Sutton (2009), who argued the rights of children must come before any other concerns.

In order to implement the policy, the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) had to be suspended and 500 pages of legislation drafted in a matter of weeks.¹⁶ This package of legislation was passed with virtually no debate in the Commonwealth House of Representatives the same day it was introduced on 7th August. "The quick passage of these Bills has been unusual, if not unprecedented" (Parliament of Australia, 2007). The bills were immediately introduced to the Senate (upper house of review). Minor parties combined to force an Inquiry by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which held a hearing on Friday 10 August. Its report was tabled on the following Monday by which time 154 submissions had been received. The final bills were passed Friday 17th August without amendment (Altman & Hinkson, 2007).

In the process, the NT government, most Aboriginal political leaders (other than those already mentioned), institutions and human rights bodies were sidelined, as the Intervention attempted to change the Aboriginal Affairs policy landscape in Australia, even if its aim to save Aboriginal women and children from violence and abuse was seen by many to be of secondary concern. There remains a question of the long-term efficacy of the policy in meeting even this aim (Gray, 2015; Rothwell, 2017; L. Thompson & Hil, 2009).

child sexual abuse or the safety of women in communities. Much of it seemed to package up a range of neoconservative policy aspirations that had been previously proposed—the breaking down of land rights legislative powers, income quarantining and income management, and the issue of child sexual abuse had been recognised through multiple previous reports across the country, so why the emergency now? (Altman & Hinkson, 2007).

¹⁶ All the following pieces of legislation had to be passed: *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* (Cth); *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Act 2007* (Cth); *Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Northern Territory National Emergency Response and Other Measures) Act 2007* (Cth); *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No 1) 2007–2008* (Cth); *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No 2) 2007–2008* (Cth).

Signs (Figure 2.10) were placed at the entrance to every proscribed area affected by the Intervention, including Town Camps in urban areas and at the entrance to every remote community or parcel of land held under the NT Land Rights Act. The original sign heading was 'No Pornography' this was later changed to 'Prohibited Material' Aboriginal people saw either design as shaming their communities (Doel-Mackaway, 2017).

Figure 2.10

Intervention Signs Placed at the Entrance to Aboriginal Communities



Sources. Clockwise from top left: Owen65/Flickr <http://flickr.com/photo/45267462@N06/5359257349> author; author; Sovereign Union of First Nations and Peoples in Australia, Intervention Rollback Action Group.

2.3.2.3 Alice Springs today—narratives collide

A brief description of ‘*A Town like Alice*’ today uncovers ongoing segregation and a white enclave mentality (C. Graham, 2019) alongside productive cross and inter-cultural livelihoods (K. Finnane, 2018; M. Finnane & Finnane, 2011; San Roque, 2018; Turner, 2017b). In what local journalist Kieran Finnane (2018) identified (after Bishop, 2011) as contact zones, where community members share space (physical, social and emotional), are found both positive and negative inter-cultural contact or attempts at avoidance (Ottosson, 2014). Culturally diverse workplaces, non-segregated schooling, and other positive inter-cultural contact spaces around families, friendships, sport, and music exist alongside unofficial segregation and at times open hostility, which can be expressed in racialised ways.¹⁷

Most interpersonal violence in Alice Springs is reportedly between Aboriginal people (M. Finnane & Finnane, 2011). However, in 2009, after they had been terrorising Aboriginal people camped in the bed of the dry Todd River, a violent physical attack by five young (18-22 year old) drunken settler males led to the death of 33 year old Aboriginal male Kumunjayi Ryder (Figure 2.11) (M. Finnane & Finnane, 2011; C. Graham, 2019). In a compassionate conciliatory speech, family members of Ryder called for greater understanding between Aboriginal and settler members of the community, in order to create a better social environment for everyone (K. Finnane, 2018). In sentencing, the judge of the subsequent trial stated he believed the fact the deceased was Aboriginal had contributed to the acts of the young men during the assault. In addition to the conciliatory statement from the deceased’s family, the interconnections between both the attackers and the deceased’s families made the case a highly nuanced situation of intercultural interaction that confounded a simple race-based explanation (M. Finnane & Finnane, 2011).

¹⁷ The practice of segregating Aboriginal guests at accommodation in town was nationally exposed in 2008 and again in 2019 (O. Gordon, 2019). One public house in Alice Springs has a lower-standard public bar, predominately frequented by Aboriginal people, unofficially called the ‘Animal Bar’ (C. Graham, 2019).

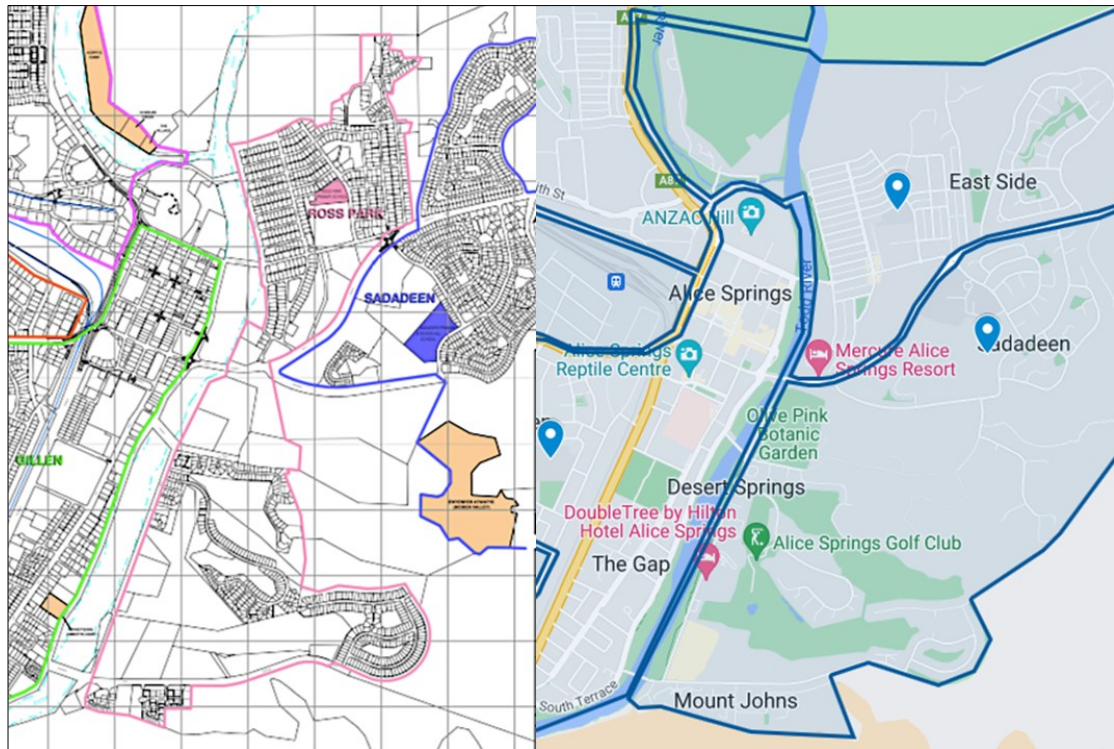
Figure 2.11*Kumunjayi Ryder Memorial & St Phillips College*

Note. Left—The memorial created by family and friends of Kumunjayi Ryder stands opposite the entrance of elite fee-paying school, St Phillips. It was at this site that the attack occurred. In 2016 a student at St Phillips, with the prior permission of a teacher, dressed up as Adolf Hitler for a book week activity, he won a prize for his costume. At the same time a delegation of students was visiting from a Melbourne Jewish college and attended the school assembly where the awards were presented (Hunt, 2016). Right—Anthelk Ewlpaye Town Camp is shown at the left of the school student/staff car park. In 2017, a student ran for election as school captain on a ‘build a wall’ platform, referring to the common fence between the school carpark and the Town Camp (pers obs).

Sources. Author.

While schooling is no longer segregated in Alice Springs, informal segregation occurred until quite recently through school zoning (Chlanda, 2018). Of the six Alice Springs government primary schools in 2019, two, Ross Park and Larapinta did not include any Town Camps in their catchments. Attitudes towards this segregation vary, as reported in the local *Alice Springs News*, “If Indigenous kids can’t get to know non-Indigenous kids, how can we have a harmonious community when they grow up? [Alternatively], why would I want my children to go to school with children from town camps? They are not by their doing, unhygienic, lice infected and dysfunctional. I don’t want my child subjected to that ” (Chlanda, 2018).

After a public campaign (Beavan, 2020) to address what was seen by some as an iniquitous situation, described as a gerrymander by one journalist (Chlanda, 2018), the school-zoning boundary was changed, and the Town Camps previously zoned to Braitling Primary School were re-zoned as part of the Ross Park catchment (Figure 2.12).

Figure 2.12*Contiguous Primary School Boundaries 2019-2023*

Note. Town Camps shown in sienna on 2019 map on left. 2023 boundary map on right shows Ross Park boundary extended to include the Town Camps along the Charles Creek – long banana shaped sienna area in the top left.

Sources. Left, Alice Springs News; Right, NTG Google maps viewer.

Data from the government's *My Schools* website (Table 2.1) show that the majority of children attending Ross Park Primary School come from the least disadvantaged educational backgrounds. Ross Park is the only primary school in Alice Springs with an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage above the national average. Students here attend a school with a lower percentage of Aboriginal students than other less advantaged nearby schools. While Ross Park has a lower percentage of Aboriginal students, those students have higher school attendance levels than their Aboriginal peers at the two other closest schools. In addition, Ross Park parents contribute higher per-student fees and charges. It is noteworthy that after the zone redistribution, this disparity in population profile, attendance patterns, and parental financial contribution has continued. In particular, while total Ross Park enrolments dropped by 8%, the Aboriginal proportion of enrolments also dropped.¹⁸

¹⁸ Source. *My Schools* website.

Table 2.1

Socio-educational Characteristics of 3 Adjacent Zoned Alice Springs Primary Schools (PS)

Indices	school population and finance data					
	Ross Park PS		Sadadeen PS		Braitling PS	
	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023
Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) National Average 1000	1050	1028	692	736	873	883
Band 1 (Bottom quarter) as %	11	16	78	74	53	46
Band 2 as %	20	21	12	11	27	23
Bands 1&2 combined—most disadvantaged %	31	37	90	85	80	69
Band 3 as %	31	31	10	9	15	19
Band 4 (Top quarter) as %	38	32	0	6	6	12
Bands 3&4 combined—least disadvantaged %	67^b	63	10	15	21^b	31
Percentage of school population identified as Indigenous	15	14	80	88	44	48
Indigenous students attendance Semester One as %	87	81	59	63	78	71
Parent generated fees total (AUD)	66,894	65,951 ^a	12,010	9,541 ^a	16,514	22,150 ^a
Parent generated fees per student (AUD)	157	169 ^a	90	94 ^a	79	107 ^a

Note. Band 1 is the most disadvantaged. Band 4 the most advantaged.

^a For year 2022, (2023) not available.

^b rounding error.

Source. Adapted from My Schools website <https://myschool.edu.au/> years 2019 & 2023.

The effects of these types of possibly embedded, segregated practices may not be known for some time, yet may contribute to social inequalities already apparent in the Alice Springs community, with 4.8% of Indigenous people never having attended school, compared to 0.3% of the non-Indigenous population. Efforts to address these disparities may be undermined by localised negative messaging (Figure 2.13). At the other end of the education experience, only 3.7% and 8.6% of Indigenous people having postgraduate or bachelor degrees, compared to 15% and 28% of non-Indigenous people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). In addition, low levels of

internet access (58% for Indigenous households compared with 85% in non-Indigenous houses) may potentially disadvantage children's ability to study at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Barwick, 2019; Haynes & Keane, 2019)

Figure 2.13

Graffiti Near Pre-school



Note. This graffiti was directly opposite a pre-school carpark and its play area where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families brought their children, at a time when policy aimed to increase Aboriginal children's enrolment at pre-schools. This graffiti stayed for most of the period of my study. It was sprayed on the unloading dock at the rear of the Aboriginal owned and heavily frequented supermarket near a number of Town Camps. The artwork to its right was created years earlier when sexually explicit graffiti was placed on the building next door, the offenders were apprehended and directed to create more harmonious art.

Source. Author.

Reactionary postings on public Facebook groups and in comments sections of newspapers are a common occurrence, particularly when 'youth crime' issues gain increased coverage (A. Morgan, Williams, Renshaw, & Funk, 2014). It is not argued here that racist attitudes exonerate the actions of groups of young Aboriginal people undertaking openly hostile and at times physically violent actions, usually late at night on the streets, although the town has at times seemed deaf to the violence on the Town Camps unless it impacts upon nearby suburbs. Remembering this occurs in a population of only 24,990 people, 4,597 (~18%) of whom identify as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), the degree of separation of potential antagonists is very small, even if the social and cultural divide may at times seem substantial (Figure 2.14).

Figure 2.14*Colonial Present*

Note. This caryard was located, until recently, in walking distance from a number of Town Camps. Whether consciously or unconsciously chosen by the proprietors, the business name can be read as highlighting inter-cultural issues within Alice Springs.

Source. Author.

Åsse Ottosson (2014) cautioned against characterising these contacts as being purely ‘racially’ based, seeing greater nuances and complexity, involving notions of orderliness and public private domains, highlighting possible social, economic and other cultural values being embraced by both Aboriginal and settler people. While socially and economically marginalised Aboriginal people may be obvious on the town’s streets (Ottosson, 2016), most Aboriginal people (75-80%) do not, for example, live in the Town Camps,¹⁹ and not all are outside the paid workforce.²⁰ Likewise, many Aboriginal people own houses or are paying off mortgages (30% of Indigenous households, compared to 56% for non-Indigenous households), with

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census total resident Aboriginal town population 4,597 people. There is recognised difficulty in establishing accurate population figures for Aboriginal people as this community is highly mobile throughout central Australia. The Town Camps have a high number of visitors; it is particularly difficult to make accurate estimates for this sector. Under enumeration in the ABS usually places the Town Camp population as slightly under 1,000 people; Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation estimates between 1,000 and 1,500 people. Population figures are an important indicator of the public housing funding so this discrepancy becomes an important financial issue in Aboriginal housing policy.

²⁰ Although median incomes for Indigenous people in Alice Springs are 38% that of non-Indigenous people and 9.4% report no income at all (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

average weekly mortgage repayments equal for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Socially constructed ideas of white enclave suburbs hide middle income and professional Aboriginal households that do not fit the public housing or Town Camp stereotype, indicating that considering class, in addition to a reductionist whiteness/race social lens, is necessary when describing social attitudes and relationships in the contemporary setting (Ottosson, 2014).

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, a focus on the statistics related to Aboriginal health disparities and social inequalities risks numbing readers to the real personal and community conditions from which they are drawn. “Knowing and naming the statistics does not change painful situations. In fact, much research work has been centred on putting statistics together while Aboriginal pain has continued” (J. Atkinson, 2003, p. 13).

These approaches further risk pathologising Aboriginality in a deficit discourse (Fforde, Bamblett, Lovett, Gorringer, & Fogarty, 2013), whereby ‘Aboriginal’ becomes negatively associated with social and structural issues, perpetually in deficit (Heath, Bor, Thompson, & Cox, 2011). Such a discourse helps maintain an Aboriginal industry of government policy advisors and government departments built on servicing deficit. As Fforde et al (2013) noted, it is hard to move outside of the deficit needs model, especially for Aboriginal service providers, as these indicators of deficit compared to mainstream Australia, become the performance indicators by which government funding such as the ‘Closing the Gap’ policy is benchmarked.

For this chapter, the purpose of which is to provide context in which the study occurred, and hence, partly, the social circumstances of the fathers involved, I reference one study that examines comparative socio-economic disadvantage between Aboriginal populations across Australia by gender. Mandy Yap and Nicholas Biddle (2009) analysed 2006 population census figures aggregated to the level of Indigenous Region to develop a Gender-related Index for Indigenous Australians (GRIFIA) by which to illustrate relative disadvantages between Aboriginal population groups. The range of socioeconomic variables used was: (a) number of people having completed Year 12 as their highest level of schooling; (b) those who did not attend school;

degree as non-school qualification; (c) individual incomes of less than \$250 per week; and (d) incomes of more than \$1,000 per week, (e) the nature of their occupation-managerial or professional and (f) employment as a percentage of the local population.²¹ The study did not directly compare other social factors such as law and justice issues, nor did it attempt to rate regions on Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) and self-reported health or mortality and morbidity rates, or cultural engagement, all of which were unavailable through census data at this regional level.²²

Rather than comparing Aboriginal people to non-Aboriginal people's current socio-economic status, Yap and Biddle looked at variations between Aboriginal people across Australia, which thereby provides localised context for my study. Having a gendered focus also isolated differences between Aboriginal males and females, which is relevant to this study. However, it is still important to remember considerable variation exists within any local population.

Apart from showing that the further Aboriginal people are from major population centres, the greater their socio-economic disadvantage, Table 2.2 shows Aboriginal males in the Alice Springs and the surrounding regions of Apatula and Tennant Creek, live within a community of males who are among the most socio-economically disadvantaged in the country. While Aboriginal women in the same regions are also on the lower end of this scale, as a group, they rank slightly higher than males in the same regions.

²¹ Two measures, *children engaged in preschool* and *core activity restriction* (here used as a health measure – relating to people who need assistance because of self-care, mobility, and communication issues), weren't included, as the loading in absolute value was less than 0.3 – not statistically significant.

²² For a discussion of later census data, with measures of connectedness and language use see (M. L.-M. Yap, 2017), which unfortunately due to changes in various data sets does not provide a comparative table, but does note that females' relative status was lowered where connectedness—as measured by time spent providing unpaid support to others, whether children or adults—was included.

Table 2.2*Absolute Ranking of Social and Economic Disadvantage – Indigenous regions*

Indigenous Region	Females	Males
ACT	1	2
Melbourne	4	3
Sydney	5	7
Brisbane	8	6
Perth	9	11
Torres Strait	10	14
Adelaide	12	23
Darwin	13	16
Queanbeyan	15	29
Cairns	17	30
Tasmania	19	18
Coffs Harbour	20	31
Townsville	21	22
Broome	24	50
Rockhampton	26	25
Non-Met. Victoria	27	28
Roma	32	33
Ceduna	34	54
Wagga Wagga	36	43
Dubbo	37	47
Narrogin	40	38
Tamworth	41	49
Mt Isa	42	39
Alice Springs	44	58
Geraldton	45	48
Bourke	46	52
Cape York	53	56
South Hedland	55	35
Kalgoorlie	57	51
Port Augusta	59	61
Derby	60	65
Kununurra	62	64
Katherine	63	69
Jabiru	66	68
Tennant Creek	67	72
Nhulunbuy	70	73
Apatula	71	74

Note. Ranking 1-74, 74 most disadvantaged.*Source.* (M. Yap & Biddle, 2009).

An examination of more recent census data of education indicators, Table 2.3, shows some of this comparative gender difference continuing, although not its causation.

Table 2.3

Educational Differentials: Alice Springs Aboriginal Population by Gender

Selected education levels	Male		Female	
Did not attend school	68	6.0%	73	4.2%
Having a Post-graduate qualification aged 15-65+	9	1.7%	40	5.5%
Having a Bachelor qualification aged 15-65+	23	4.5%	87	12.0%

Source. ABS Census Data 2016 sheets 106 & 115 a & b.

As a percentage, more adult Aboriginal males than females have not attended school although actual numbers were similar. However, there was a marked difference in higher education attainments by gender. There were fewer males with higher education qualifications and a marked age difference. All the males with postgraduate qualifications were above 45 years of age and of those with bachelor qualifications most were also above 45 years of age, (the only exceptions were six in the 25-34 age group). For females, postgraduate qualifications were evenly spread from 35 years up and for those with bachelor degrees from 20 years up. This suggests that fewer young males were completing tertiary education today than in the past.

2.3.3 Colonial impacts for Aboriginal males in the pre-Intervention era

Since the advent of colonialism in Australia, Aboriginal males have seen a transition from an inter-dependent gendered society to a patriarchal dominated gendered world, from an accrued knowledge/power male and female gerontocracy (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008) based sociality to one dominated by accrued/inherited, usually male, economic power. Here, land has been ontologically transformed from cosmology and entity into a commodity. In addition, the new society's various social systems are seemingly internally at odds. This is illustrated by conflicts between missionaries and police (Coughlan, 1991; Kenny, 2013), intra-religious bigotry (Duguid, 1978) and most recently between policy and law in the Intervention, which saw the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) in order to introduce government programs by which to control Aboriginal social behaviour and remove rights previously bestowed (Sunrise Male Health Summit, 2009).

As previously discussed, the new settler colonial paradigm caused conflicts over land and social organisation and as a consequence previously held social positions of Aboriginal males²³ became eroded through disruptions to traditional cultural practices. This in turn caused difficulties for many males to maintain positive gender subjectivities (M. Adams, 2006c; J. Liddle, 2008; Lowe & Spry, 2002; McCoy, 2008).

The traditional role of Aboriginal males as providers of larger game became limited after contact with the pastoral industry. Then adapted provider roles as stock workers were removed after the equal pay ruling (1966-1970)²⁴ and concurrent mechanisation of the pastoral industry (Anthony, 2004; Peterson, 2005; Robertson, 2000).

Aboriginal males' abilities to act as protectors of Country became increasingly difficult due to land alienation. Their roles in protecting their families were removed when Aboriginal people were made wards of the state and subsequently moved to church missions and government reservations (B. McCoy, 2012). The undermining of parenting roles was further eroded where children were removed as part of the assimilation policy (M. Adams, 2006c; Lechleitner, Nathan, Silver, & Rosewarne, 2018; National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 1997).

Intergenerational trauma, experienced through various iterations of colonialism are recognised as being an important factor in understanding social and psychological problems confronting contemporary Aboriginal communities (J. Atkinson, 2003; McGlade, 2012; Petchkovsky & San Roque, 2002). For some Aboriginal males, the introduction of alcohol around the same time as being restricted to reserves and

²³ This is not to argue that Aboriginal males experience greater hardship than women through colonial impacts, but to highlight the particular experience of males, the focal group of the study, within the settler colonial relationship.

²⁴ The Commonwealth Arbitration and Reconciliation Commission in the 1965-66 *Equal Wage* case removed the racially discriminatory clause from the Federal Pastoral Industry Award. Prior to then Aboriginal males were (when) paid, paid substantially less than settler males. Aboriginal women and children, who also contributed to station life, were usually not paid wages at all, as a distribution of government rations was used as in-kind payment. Award wage coverage was gradually applied across northern Australia in the following years (Anthony, 2004, 2007).

becoming reliant upon welfare, provided a disastrous mechanism for avoiding their new social realities (M. Adams, 2006c; Langton, 2008). Aboriginal males' exposure to 'successful' settler masculine role models—highlighted attributes of violence towards Aboriginal males and, an even greater disrespect for women—as well as high levels of male competitiveness, interpersonal violence, and heavy drinking (M. Adams, 2006c; Anthony, 2004; Behrendt, 2000; d'Abbs, 2012; Moore, 1998; Nathan, 2013).

2.3.4 Negativity in contemporary policy debates and Aboriginal males

An important element in contextualising Aboriginal fathers' social position has to include recognition of the impact of the NT Intervention. Many Aboriginal males felt deeply, both as a group and individually, that they had been targeted and publicly shamed as perpetrators of domestic violence and child sexual assault (Aboriginal Male Health Summit, 2008; A. Brown & Brown, 2007; "Scrymgour flexes political muscle," 2009; Sunrise Male Health Summit, 2009). This hurt became a national experience, but it was particularly apparent in central Australia where the Intervention was imposed, especially in communities like Mutitjulu, which were at the epicentre of the original falsified claims of rampant child sexual slavery. The genealogy of this discourse is discussed in Section 5.4. Here, it is noted that it is ever present. One example arose during this study with the publication by *The Australian* newspaper of a cartoon by Bill Leak (Figure 2.15) on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (Leak, 2016). A negatively framed cartoon depicting an Aboriginal father (holding a can of beer), being told by an Aboriginal police officer to take responsibility for his child led to a vociferous debate on the purpose of, and pain caused by, its publication.

Figure 2.15

Bill Leak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day Cartoon



Source. News Ltd / Newspix.

In a popular riposte, Joel Bayliss, a Youth Justice Coordinator in the South Australian courts, led a community campaign with a tweet: #IndigenousDads on 6th August (Figure 2.16). This garnered hundreds of posts from Aboriginal fathers and children disavowing the characterisation in the cartoon. When asked what had motivated him, Bayliss stated that it was important positive stories be told (Karvelas, 2016).

Figure 2.16

Joe Bayliss #Indigenous Dads.



Source. Twitter/@jb_bays.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined how my social values were formed growing up in the industrial west of Melbourne and how those experiences, along with my own reflections upon being a father, shaped my interest in this research project. By highlighting these issues, I aim to make my own voice more transparent in how I have framed my analytic approach. This is explored further in the next chapter: Worldviews, Anarchist social theory and sociology (Chapter 3).

I have shown the deep connection to land and place evident in the continued occupation and engagement with the land of Mparntwe shown by Aboriginal people since time immemorial. I have also shown how Aboriginal people have maintained this connection despite efforts to erase their presence from the town area throughout the early phases of colonisation.

I have attempted to show that racist attitudes continue and, intentionally or unintentionally, drive certain actions or events in contemporary Alice Springs. At the same time, there exist close inter-cultural relationships, connections, and interactions that are positive in nature.

In discussing contemporary national issues related to the NT Emergency Response, I have shown that Alice Springs Aboriginal fathers do so in a volatile and changing political and social policy environment.

How representations of Aboriginal fathers and Aboriginal males are portrayed is considered further in the Aboriginal Fatherhood Discourse Genealogy (Chapter 5). Where I draw upon what Irene Watson (2009) and Shino Konishis (2011) conceptualised as the discourse of gendered colonialism, as well as cultural complexity theory, to show how these representations inscribe and reinscribe community and individual behaviours.

In discussing contextual issues, I have highlighted that a simple race-based analysis would be inadequate. Power disparities and inequalities are complex and interconnected, at times mutually reinforcing and at others seemingly contradictory.

The issue of power relationships, and how to understand these power dynamics, are issues discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Worldviews, Anarchist social theory and sociology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explain how anarchist philosophy—encompassing axiology, ontology and epistemology, together with anarchist social/political theory, determines my theoretical approach and also frames my relationship with other people's worldviews and their social experiences. I describe how this philosophy addresses my research topic: how and what degree do Aboriginal fathers have the freedom to enact fatherhood and develop their fatherhood subjectivities? I describe how this philosophy informs all stages of this research being cognisant that anarchism as a philosophy is also a praxis (Jun, 2018).

The discourse relating to anarchism is often reduced to representations of bomb-throwing 18th-century assassins or black bloc alter-globalisation street protesters hurling objects through the windows of Starbucks and Nike.²⁵ Richard Day (2005) noted in the case of the Black Blocs (and various offshoots such as the LGBT Pink Blocs), popular and media representations narrowly focused upon certain activist tactics, misrepresent the ethos of such groups to maintain a fiction of the necessity of state based, often repressive counter measures.

The discourse around anarchism, thus misrepresented, needs to be explicated because, assuming like others before me (Levy & Newman, 2019; Shantz & Williams, 2013), I see this is a necessary detailed task, possibly more than for some other better recognised 'isms' familiar to audiences working in the social sciences.²⁶ Therefore, I commence by outlining the axiological and worldview foundations of my research, which is situated in both an anarchist philosophical approach, and a cross-cultural setting. I then describe anarchism as a valuable and appropriate social theory and research approach for this sociological study. I show how this approach recognises

²⁵ See for example (Cohn, 2006, p. 1515), also (Burdon & Martel, 2017).

²⁶ Anarchism as a legitimate social science approach has been excluded from the academic cannon whether through misrepresentation: anarchism as chaos and violence (Cohn, 2006; Franks, 2012; MacLaughlan, 2015; Wigger, 2016), anarchism as out of date 18th century utopianism (Cohn, 2006; MacLaughlan, 2015; Springer, 2014), anarchism as an incoherent or disparate philosophy (M. S. Adams & Jun, 2015; Morland, 2004; Vodovnik, 2012), or through deliberate erasure or ridicule by Marxist academics (Antliff, 2012; MacLaughlan, 2015; Springer, 2014; Wigger, 2016).

multiple forms of power and appreciates the mutuality of power relations. I discuss how, when problematizing power relations, rather than just describing them, anarchism allows for the creation of new meanings and understandings rather than the imposition of a unified view.

3.2 Research worldview

Research comes with assumptions of a worldview. Kurin Minang Noongar legal academic Hannah McGlade described research as, "...a personal process that invokes place, culture, histories and futures" (McGlade, 2012, p. 25). From this 'invoked place', we draw upon assumptions about our world. Michael Crotty argued worldview assumptions:

Shape for us the meaning of research questions, the purposiveness of research methodologies and the interpretability of research findings. Without unpacking these assumptions and clarifying them, no one (including ourselves!) can really divine what our research has been or what it is now saying. (Crotty, 1998, p. 17)

Without wishing to essentialise Aboriginal peoples' beliefs, I am conscious that some Aboriginal people do hold different worldviews to my own. Some may hold Christian views; some may not. Some may hold to a worldview based wholly in Aboriginal law and culture. Some may not. They may situate themselves across these or many other worldview positions.

In order to address how to locate differing worldviews and be sensitive to how our view as researchers can be a *de facto* normative position, I will commence with another important aspect of research: the axiology or moral position that accompanies the assumptions that are brought to research. Our morality frames our worldview and attitude to other peoples' worldviews, as well as how and why we engage in the research process.

3.2.1 Axiology

The clarity of our intentions for 'doing' research is an important part of undertaking research. It brings to the fore the question, 'Why am *I* doing *this* research?' I have begun to deal with this question in the Introduction and Context (Chapters 1 and 2). There I identified how the project came about, my own social background, my

observation of the impact of recent government policy upon Aboriginal males whom I know, my commitment to social justice, and how, as a father myself, I was moved to respond.

Axiology is often left out of the discussion of worldviews in academic texts on research. Crotty (1998) did not mention it and Sotirios Sarantakos (2005), whilst discussing the aims and motives for doing research, also did not openly address axiology. John Creswell (2013) does briefly in relation to how the researcher makes known their values in a study. Yvonna Lincoln, Susan Lynham and Egon Guba admitted that they underplayed the importance of values in their earlier works, including three editions of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. “We would make values or, more correctly axiology a part of the basic foundational philosophical dimensions of paradigm proposal. It is ...—the place—where the spiritual meets social inquiry” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 116). Stacey Carter and Miles Little described axiology as essential to epistemology, as being in epistemology itself, the values and choices researchers make about what constitutes trustworthy knowledge and in the cultural context that informs epistemology, how a project is ‘discussed, evaluated and justified’ (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1322).

Aboriginal people do not leave axiology out of their analysis of the research process, whether this is explicit in framing research paradigms (S. Wilson, 2003), critiques of ontology (Arbon, 2008), epistemology (Sarra, 2011), settler disciplines (M. Nakata, 2007; Walter et al., 2023), or implicit in outlines of best practice in ethics and methods (J. Liddle & Shaw, 1983).

3.2.2 Anarchist Axiology

As a settler/non-Aboriginal person growing up in a western cultural tradition and as an adult considering myself an atheist, in this study, as in life, I draw my ethical position from the philosophy and set of practices of anarchism (Cohn, 2006) rather than from a religious or Indigenous belief paradigm. Nathan Jun described anarchism in an axiological sense as being “understood as: (a) universal condemnation of and *opposition to all forms of closed, coercive authority* (political, economic, social, etc.), coupled with (b) universal affirmation and promotion of freedom and equality in all spheres of human existence.” (Jun, 2012, p. 116).

The ethical core of anarchism is the claim that all forms of closed, coercive authority are immoral. Notice that the form of this claim is evaluative rather than normative; it is not a prescription or a recommendation but rather a value judgement, one that asserts that coercive authority is morally condemnable. This strongly suggests that anarchism is founded first and foremost on....an axiology—rather than on a conception of the right. (Jun, 2012, p. 121)

Closed and coercive authority is morally condemnable because it stops the ability of individuals to seek their potential to create freedom. The axiology of anarchism is based in a belief that all individuals have the capacity and creative potential, ‘a freedom to’ create something, to develop their own capacities and subjectivity (Chomsky in Chomsky & Foucault, 2006; Jun, 2012; Newman, 2016). Therefore ‘freedom from’ closed or coercive authority is a necessary social condition for this development (Jun, 2018; Rafael, 2018).

Hence, excessive individualism is condemnable because the excessive freedom of an individual may impinge upon the ability of another person to create freedom (Jun, 2018; Shantz & Williams, 2013). However, it is only through mutually supportive social relationships with others that an individual can be aware of their freedom—an isolated individual does not know they are free (Cohn, 2006; Jun, 2018). Therefore, equality is a necessary conjunction with liberty in order to allow for the creation of freedom. In anarchist theory, ‘equality of opportunity’ rather than ‘equality of outcome’, is important, as equality of opportunity allows people to create freedom. Noting the outcomes of this creative process will be different for all individuals and should not presuppose a social outcome or a homogenisation of people—equality of outcome (Jun, 2012).

In the current Australian social and political climate, government policies and dominant coercive discourses negatively impinge upon Aboriginal fathers’ abilities to create positive subjectivities. Instead, their fatherhood experience becomes the subject of policy intervention and social censure. Here, we see coercive authority, the State,

its policies and the socially constructed negative discourse and cultural complexes²⁷ around Aboriginal males/men, act as restrictions on their freedom to enjoy being fathers.

This anarchist position guides my approach to the research project, both theoretically and ethically. Here the anarchist conception of prefiguration, that the means used in pursuing ends must be congruent, is relevant. (Cohn, 2006; Franks, 2008; Graeber, 2004; May, 2009; Shantz & Williams, 2013). Jun (2012) described anarchist prefiguration as:

Coherence between means and ends. That is, if the goal of political action is the promotion of some value and, by extension, opposition to whatever is at odds with that value, the means and methods employed in acting must reflect or prefigure the desired end. (p. 130)

To reflect this concept in research requires that the research methods chosen for this thesis have needed to model throughout the research process those values of respect for freedom and the right to creativity and the fulfilment of life of those with whom I have engaged.

3.2.3 Ontology/epistemology

For researchers, our ontology, our conception of ‘what is’, and our epistemology, ‘how do we know what is?’ (Crotty, 1998; Kincheloe, 2005; S. Wilson, 2003) provide justification for our knowledge (Carter & Little, 2007).

The basic dicta of ontology inform how we live, the decisions we make, what alternatives we see, and what possibilities we imagine, in a way that is often invisible in everyday contexts. It is invisible because these dicta tend to be experienced even in the form of background notions we largely take for granted as common sense, and concerning which we often barely conceive that alternatives are possible. (Reddekop, 2014, p. 44)

Our worldview includes the principles or assumptions that we bring to our methodological approach (Carter & Little, 2007; Dew, 2007; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; S. Wilson, 2003). I use the term ‘worldview’ the same as Creswell (2013) to

²⁷ As discussed in Chapter 2 (Context) and expanded in Chapter 5 (Aboriginal Fatherhood Discourse Genealogy).

encompass ontology and epistemology; what are also called ‘paradigms’ (Lincoln et al., 2011) or ‘theories of knowledge’ (Carter & Little, 2007).

In scaffolding an understanding of epistemology, Crotty provided three dominant research epistemologies: objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. Notably only western philosophical epistemologies were privileged (Crotty, 1998). Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, who argued for a liberating social science, listed seven paradigms: positivist/post positivist, constructivist, feminist, Marxist, cultural studies, queer theory and ethnic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus cosseted in western epistemological and ontological frameworks, a western worldview reproduces assumptions implicitly ignoring Indigenous or other non-western worldviews. Alternatively, it finds these in a place termed ‘ethnic’ where the ‘other’ (Walter et al., 2023), presumably, finds its way into a liberation theory ironically calling for complex paradigmatic understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.2.4 Indigenist Ontology and epistemology

Educational scholars, Maori (Ngati Awa and Nagti Porou) Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Veronica Arbon (2008), Lester-Irabinna Rigney (Nurungga) (1999) and other Indigenous researchers note the assumptions of western ontology and epistemology exclude Indigenous peoples’ ontologies and epistemologies or distort Indigenous thinking to fit dominant western paradigms.

It is a source of frustration then, that at a time in our history when we need to produce creative, tangential, critical, fearless, and independent Indigenous thinkers, Indigenous intellectualism is predominantly orthodox and predictable in its engagement with Western knowledge and theory, its forms of analysis, and its production of new knowledge for use in Indigenous contexts. (M. Nakata, 2013, p. 292)

Indigenist theorists have extensively articulated this criticism (Foley, 2003; M. K. Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012; Rigney, 1999; Walter et al., 2023). From a non-Indigenist perspective Raewyn Connell (2012, 2014b) has seen this asymmetrical relationship in the global political economy of knowledge (particularly in sociology), being driven by imperialism, whereby the central metropole (the west) mines the

periphery (the rest) for data and intellectual expertise (and allegiance) and exports back theory to dominate the frameworks of analysis.²⁸

It is important to critically understand the limitations of this “universal history” (Smith, 1999, p. 63) and recognise the imperative to question these underlying self-limiting biases. “Many of the most consequential philosophical commitments we make transpire at this level; and these commitments are both fundamentally interpretive and contestable.” (Reddekop, 2014, p. 44). Operating from within western paradigms there is also a tendency to conceptualise and internalise a homogenous history of western society and the development of thought (Feyerabend, 1993; Vodovnik, 2012)—which not only excludes Indigenous peoples’ worldviews (Graeber, 2004; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1999; Walter et al., 2023)—but also marginalises critical philosophies and social theories such as anarchism within the academe (Day, 2005; Shantz & Williams, 2013; Wigger, 2016).²⁹

When Yankunytjatjara man Yami Lester (writing in English), states “I’m a *ngintaka* (perentie lizard). ... It’s real to me³⁰ and it means something. ‘*Nyuntumpa ngura* (Your place)’” (Lester, 1995, pp. 10-11), I accept this as an ontological statement about what is “real” and what relationship it recognises. This representation of being perentie is not a symbolic statement as understood in western epistemology (Sahlins, 1976) rather, as another cosmological reality, an example of the reality of ‘other’ relationships (Blaser, 2009; Reddekop, 2014).

Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson argued that an Indigenist epistemology is an epistemology of relationships.

It is not the realities in and of themselves that are important, it is the relationship that I share with reality. It is not necessarily an object that is important, it is my relationship with that object that becomes important.

²⁸ This critique applies in philosophical relationships between western research and other non-Indigenous cultures. See James Liu (2011) for a western/Asian worldview intersection and Mario Blaser (2009) for conceptualisations of modernity (western) and other ontologies and Breno Bringel and José Domingues (2017) on dominant western sociology and what they termed ‘Contemporary (Semi) Peripheral Sociology’ and is repeated in other disciplines (Thomas, 2021).

²⁹ And even those operating in the western philosophical margins, such as anarchist projects, often display ‘eurocentrism’, commonly ignoring non-European currents of anarchist thought, or exoticise them for special study (Black Rose Anarchist Federation, 2016; Evren, 2012, 2014; Ramnath, 2011).

³⁰ Emphasis added.

....ideas and concepts, like objects, are not as important as my relationship to an idea or concept. This language speaks from an epistemology that is totally foreign to the other research paradigms, ... where relationship is more important than reality. (S. Wilson, 2003, p. 177)

Wilson continued that it is not just relationships with people and objects but also relationships “with the cosmos, ideas concepts and everything around us” (p177). The affinity this position has with anarchism is explored when discussing the congruence of Indigenist methodology with anarchism in 3.3.6 Anarch@indiginist Power Theories, and when I discuss my own focus on relationships, subjectivities, and experience in this study (p89).

3.2.5 Object orientated ontology: an ontology of relationships

Recognising there are ontologically and methodologically particulars to an Indigenist research paradigm, and that I do not and cannot work within this ontological space, I have found the work of the ‘object orientated ontology’ of Levi Bryant (2011) valuable in helping me situate my worldview. Crotty observed that people often conflate ontology and epistemology or assume a causal connection between a particular ontology and an epistemological stance (Crotty, 1998). In *The Democracy of Objects*, Bryant working within a western paradigm, outlined an ontology of ‘objects as beings’ that separates ‘the being of objects’ independent of our ability to describe, have access to and ‘know objects’ (epistemology) (Bryant, 2011, p. 18).

Bryant argued the confusion Crotty (1998) noted is caused because epistemology is privileged in western philosophy over ontology and many descriptions of ontology are epistemological teleological explanations, derived from subjectively derived understandings of what we perceive, explaining what we think might be. In western philosophy whether positivist, realist, constructionist or relativist, these are all derived from a human experience or ability to describe phenomena.

Objects, things that we think exist, are described through our ability to understand them, or our ability to know or describe them. For example, realist and positivist views of the physical world rely on our ability to show they are there; even when that

includes black holes, which we cannot see,³¹ we ‘prove’ they exist by showing how they affect other matter, which we can ‘prove’, exists. Social constructionist views of social phenomena such as power, even poststructuralist ones, rely on human subjects to identify power flows (Rousselle, 2012). Bryant argued these are epistemological approaches, they do not explain what exists rather, how we have come to know what is. Thus, when Lincoln, Lynham & Guba (2011) noted that many different strands (of epistemology) have ‘echoes of each other in them’ and that boundaries between categories change all the time (p. 100), they were recognising the human subject derived categories of explanation.

Bryant proposed an ontology of objects, including what we may conceive as physical objects (at various complexities of structure), and other objects, “technologies, symbolic entities, fictional entities, groups, nations, works of art, possible beings, artificial entities, and many other entities besides as belonging to the domain of real being” (Bryant, 2011, p. 41). All of which are equal in and amongst other objects (the democracy).

First, humans are not at the center of being, but are *among* beings. Second, objects are not a pole opposing a subject, but exist in their own right, regardless of whether any other object or human relates to them. Humans, far from constituting a category called “subject” that is opposed to “object”, are themselves one *type* of object among many. (Bryant, 2011, p. 249)

No object has a relationship of power or importance over any other as objects. Objects exist, whether we are aware of them or not.

For ontology, Bryant (2011) called for a decentring of humans. For epistemology, cognisant this is how humans create knowledge of ontological objects, he calls for a de-privileging of only human actors. Recognising that natural objects influence how our social world is construed and constructed, a decoupling of the nature vs human divide (we are part of nature and we experience natural objects sensually) is necessary. Therefore a recognition that a broad approach that encompasses both

³¹ Up until recently there were no pictures defining a black hole, recent photos still don’t show a black hole—all matter disintegrates upon entering one—what we can now see is the sped up gas that heats up giving off light surrounding the event horizon of a black hole.
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2019-04-10/black-hole-event-horizon-telescope-announcement-astrophysics/10989534> accessed 11th April 2019.

realist and constructionist means of understanding to enhance our knowledge of objects as they exist for us is required (Bryant, 2011).

In western philosophy, questions of epistemology, that is how we know about objects, are claims to legitimate knowledge and are therefore claims to power (Bryant, 2011, p. 17). Establishing that there are legitimate pluralities of epistemologies destabilises claims to monopolise knowledge/power. The value of *Democracy of Objects* as an ontological base for my approach to research is the conceptualisation of multiple epistemologies, including Indigenist ones.

Although the ontology of the *Democracy of Objects* is not an Aboriginal ontology,³² for me as a non-Aboriginal person it assists in registering an ontology (what is), that accommodates conceptual intersection with other ontologically derived epistemologies, in addition to western derived realist, constructionist and relativist ones (Reddekop, 2014; Rosiek, Snyder, & Pratt, 2020).

3.2.6 Anarchist ontologies and epistemologies

In describing a social world; which includes those elements of “subjectivity, signs meaning and narrative, texts and discourses, power social forces and so on” (Bryant, 2011, p. 287); it is people who are the architects of this socially constructed understanding, both at the individual level and, through power relations that circulate amongst people (Purkis, 2004). “Anarchist thinkers alike all affirmed in various ways that individuals are socially constructed and that subjectivity is socially produced” (Jun, 2012, p. 143). At the same time it is important to remain cognisant of those non-human objects that ‘perturb’ (Bryant, 2011) and work to translate the relationship of objects, including amongst people. For example, the spatial distribution of objects such as, water sources, grasslands and minerals, clearly influence social relations; especially in colonial structures. Being ‘of nature’ ourselves, our understanding of our world is also a form of modified realism. Jesse Cohn, discussing Jacques Derrida’s³³ recognition that our world whilst constructed is constructed from something that

³² A discussion of ‘plurality of ontologies’ is beyond the remit of this thesis but is dexterously addressed by (Reddekop, 2014) from an Indigenous standpoint.

³³ As cited in an interview see Cohn Chapter 3 footnote 22 p264.

proceeds signification, saw “nature (as) the set of materials from which a cultural world is constructed” (Cohn, 2006, p. 61).³⁴

As the focus of this study is around subjective representations of societal relationships which Bryant noted “draws attention to subjectivity, signs meaning and narrative, texts and discourses, power social forces and so on” (Bryant, 2011, p. 287), I will be drawing primarily upon constructionist epistemological approaches. I recognise there are other relationships that constitute the collective between human and non-human beings, contextualising the entangled relationships of beings within the research space and place. In constructing reality (recognising a modified realism as a precondition of our physical selves), knowledge of our surroundings is socially constructed from the meanings that we make with other people and where, as individuals interacting with these social constructions, we create our subjectivity.

The subject constitutes himself [*sic*]³⁵ in an active fashion, by the practices of self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group. (Foucault, 1987, p. 122)

How these “relationships of power” (Foucault, 1987, p. 122), beyond the epistemological, inform the research analysis in this study are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

At the ontological level, Crotty (1998) argued that social constructionism is relativist. This means a relative standpoint, not an alternative meaning of relativism in that all positions are equally correct or agreeable. We construct what we think things are and the sense we make of them. We see that our understandings are historically and culturally affected interpretations, rather than eternal truths. Crotty noted this in relation to cross-cultural comparisons. “We need to recognise that different people

³⁴ For further exploration of this ontological direction; see Colson (2007) and *The Speculative Turn: Continental materialism and realism* Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman (2011).

³⁵ Foucault when writing in English (see for example Foucault, 1982) also uses the masculine pronoun to mean both male and female, so this is not an artefact of translation. Although philosophically/politically/ethically jarring to see the masculine as universal pronoun, in quotes from Foucault, in this thesis I will not compound this by the visual jarring of placing [*sic*] after each further instance.

live in different worlds and these constitute for them different ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings and separate realities” (p. 64).

Erick Heroux (2010) argued that incommensurability between worldviews is not the problem, “...domination is the problem. The problem that modernity bequeathed us is the hegemony of a single way of thinking, of talking about truth, goodness, beauty” (p. 27). An anarchist approach recognises power relations, understanding that people hold different worldviews, particularly colonised peoples. This creates an incumbency in respecting those positions and problematising the power relations between colonial/settler and non-colonial constructs to create new meanings and understandings rather than imposing a particular view. Heroux argued that accepting as equal the right of views to be heard, does not necessarily lead to relativism, as he affirms a postmodern view of dialogue that includes dissensus.

A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions or values; it is a division inserted in 'common sense': dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given. ...This is what I call a dissensus: the putting of two worlds in one and the same world. (Ranciere, 2010, p. 69)

Heroux went further:

A better name here is dialogue—and not simply any old dialogue, but following Bakhtin, “the dialogical,” a logic of polyphony that includes dissonance. Moreover, in postmodern science this dissensus-as-polyphony becomes what Lyotard called “paralogy”—in which scientific models and paradigms pursue paradoxes and proliferate a broad array of theories, approaches, objects; branching out and away with innovative modes of representation, multiple epistemologies and discourses. (Heroux, 2010, p. 26)

Therefore, in the light of this philosophical understanding, I will adopt the position of Jarrad Reddekop (2014) that, “the modern Western account of things, and its presumed ontological dicta, are contestable, necessarily interpretive, and culturally and philosophically particular” (p. 24). I will now proceed to outline those particulars that apply to my approach to the research.

3.3 Contribution towards an Anarchist Sociological Imagination

The relationship between anarchism and sociology has at times been antagonistic (Shantz & Williams, 2013; D. M. Williams, 2013). The conservatism that developed in sociology as an academic arena of study precluded an interaction with the more radical and revolutionary aims of anarchism (Ferrell, 2009; Rafael, 2018; D. M. Williams, 2013). This caused some anarchist sociologists to rail against this conservatism and statist orientation of sociology as a discipline. US sociologist Howard Ehrlich (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, nd) left his academic post to pursue social science and research outside of the constraints of the academe (D. M. Williams & Shantz, 2016). Another modern exemplar of sociology, C Wright Mills (in Mills, Mills, & Mills, 2000), declared himself “a goddamned anarchist” (pp. 217-218) in his rebuttal of both the liberal and Marxists views and analysis of contemporary society.

In *The Sociological Imagination*, being his critique of sociology as a discipline, Mills (1959/2000) argued that a key role for sociologists was to have a ‘sociological imagination’. This would “enable its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals” (p5) and enable “us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society” (p6). This approach is relevant to this research. How do negative discourses and governmental policies (the historical scene) impact upon Aboriginal fathers’ ability to enjoy fatherhood and find the space to create their own subjectivity (their inner life and career) as fathers?

There is a growing anarchist literature on the value of creating anarchist sociology (M. S. Adams, 2016; Grizzle, 2017; Kinna, 2019; Purkis, 2004; Rafael, 2018; Shantz & Williams, 2013), where an,

Anarchist-sociology would involve a particularly radical *praxis*. Anarchists must look deeper at society (using sociology!), and interpret it and its social problems, for the purposes of devising strategies to transform society. Both these critiques and the corresponding prefiguration efforts ought to fit within anarchism’s ethical framework. (Shantz & Williams, 2013, p. 5)

Anarchism, increasingly being coupled with poststructuralism, is taking up a previously underprivileged and underutilised place in sociology to create an anarchist

sociological imagination. (This is concurrently occurring across a range of other social research see Amster, DeLeon, Fernandez, Nocella, & Shannon, 2009; Cohn, 2006; Heroux, 2010; Jun, 2013; Kinna, 2012; Levy & Newman, 2019; Robinson & Tormey, 2012; Wigger, 2016).

3.3.1 Anarchism in the 'post'-age as critical theory

Anarchism is critical theory (Cheek, Shoebridge, Willis, & Zadoroznyj, 1996) in that it problematises power and how people understand power and how to transform society (D. C. Barnett, 2016; Landstreicher, 2009; Wigger, 2016). "Thus anarchy is not (or not just) the abolition of domination so much as the process of creating alternatives to it, of gradually relegating it to obsolescence, of replacing it with other ways of being and acting" (Jun, 2012, p. 140).

There are many strains of anarchism and many exponents of anarchist thought, making up 'the canon of anarchism'. However there are no Bakuninists, Kropotkinists or Goldmanists, as there are Marxists, Leninists, Maoists³⁶ etc. in communist philosophy to whom anarchists would owe an allegiance, (Shantz & Williams, 2013). Rather, anarchism is a broad philosophical direction and social movement that should not be reduced to one writer's approach or to one time, place or form of struggle (J. Adams, nd; M. S. Adams & Jun, 2015; Ramnath, 2011; Shantz & Williams, 2013).

Therefore, creating a description of anarchism risks confusing some essence with an understanding that components are essential(ised). However, for clarity in this research I characterise anarchism after Cohn (2006) as being a form of socialism different to others.

By its primary commitment to ethics, expressed as

1. a moral opposition to all forms of domination and hierarchy (particularly as embodied in the institutions of capitalism and the state, but also as manifested in other institutions, e.g., the family, and in other relationships, e.g., those of city and country or empire and colony) and
2. a special concern with the coherence of means and ends. (p. 14)

³⁶ Even Microsoft Office spellcheck recognises the communist philosophers.

The relationship between anarchism and poststructuralism has led to the creation of the term ‘post-anarchism’³⁷ which has led to considerable robust debate within anarchist studies (Cohn & Wilbur, 2010; Evren, 2011; Franks, 2007).

In this study I follow Gabriel Kuhn’s (2009) definitions of *postmodernity*, as a socio-cultural condition (after Lyotard); *poststructuralism* as referring to a body of theory associated with the French intellectual movement that developed post Paris May 1968, that broke with structuralist social theory. *Postmodernism* is described as “a movement of thought” which includes both poststructuralism (theory) and an awareness of the postmodern condition to examine all cultural forms (for example, film, literature, music and philosophy, political theory and ideologies), “it might include every expression of thought that does not navigate around pillars of God, human nature, or historical determinism” (Kuhn, 2009, p. 19). Sureyya Evren (2011) in commenting on the development of post-anarchism noted, “We witnessed a growing interest in rereading anarchism through postmodern/post-structuralist lenses, namely through/with Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Derrida, Lacan, Nietzsche, Baudrillard and others” (p. 88).³⁸

Postanarchists,³⁹ such as Andrew Koch (1993), Todd May (1994) and Saul Newman (2008), have detailed intersections between anarchism and postmodernism and poststructuralism, identifying essentialising shortcomings of traditional enlightenment based anarchist ideas. Their criticisms were leveled at the works of 19th/early 20th century European anarchist philosophers, who they classed as the formative canon of ‘classical’ anarchism, believing that anarchism needs to be renewed in light of the postmodern critique (Newman, 2008). Benjamin Franks (2007) labelled this as the ‘transcendent postanarchist position’.

Vocal anarchist critics of this version of postanarchism (Cohn & Jun, 2007; Cohn & Wilbur, 2010; Franks, 2007; Jun, 2007, 2012; Kuhn, 2009; Türkeli, 2012); have not

³⁷ The term post-anarchism is attributed to the poet and essayist Peter Lamborn Wilson, writing under his pseudonym of Hakim Bey in 1985 (Call, 2009).

³⁸ Following Emma Goldman whose anarchism was influenced by reading Nietzsche in the late 1800’s (Goldman, 1931/1970a).

³⁹ Here I am cognisant of Evren’s caution (2011), that we are talking about a set of English speaking writers, not the many non-English published works on post-anarchism.

argued against the useful insight of poststructuralism *per se*, they have argued the ‘transcendent position’ is:

- a) a misreading of their chosen texts, themselves creating essentialist readings of their subjects, particularly promoting the incorrect assertion that ‘classical anarchism’ entails an essentialist view of human nature (Cohn, 2006; Franks, 2007; Kinna & Prichard, 2009; Kuhn, 2009; Türkeli, 2012) and that ‘classical anarchism’ is preoccupied only with class and the state as power determinants (Franks, 2007; Kinna, 2007);
- b) often reliant upon secondary readings (Türkeli, 2012) or simplistic misreading (M. S. Adams & Jun, 2015; Franks, 2007; Kinna & Prichard, 2009; Kuhn, 2009);
- c) Eurocentric and narrow in its historiography, including ignoring non-European anarchist thought altogether (Ferretti, 2017a; Türkeli, 2012) and other non-dead white male anarchist writers within the European/north American canon (M. S. Adams & Jun, 2015; Kuhn, 2009; Türkeli, 2012) and
- d) is linear and anthropocentric in its outlook (Ferretti, 2017a).

These critics argued that anarchism stands against essentialising concepts of human nature or essentialising or normative concepts of representation. These arguments aim to refute the notion of postanarchism as renewal, and rather posit it as a current interpretation, based in particular spatial context, as has been the continual processes of interpretive anarchism historically (Franks, 2007; Kuhn, 2009; Türkeli, 2012).

Unlike May (2009) who asserted “One does not normally think of anarchism and recent French philosophical thought as having a natural affinity” (p. 11) an increasingly—arguably predominant— number of contemporary anarchist writers see anarchist principles having obvious congruence with poststructuralist theory.⁴⁰ However, anarchism, to them predates the post project and instead much of the postmodernist/poststructuralist canon is anarchism in all but name (Jun, 2007).

⁴⁰ Exceptions come from modernist anarchists including Chomsky and Bookchin (and others) who characterise poststructuralism as hopeless relativism and anti-revolutionary (Bookchin, 1995; Chomsky & Foucault, 2006) and from the radical south the South African Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF) who maintain that postanarchism creates liberalism and is too culturally bound to create dynamic political action (Schmidt, 2003).

A number of anarchist writers have highlighted poststructuralist ‘French theory’ having causation in the experiences of the anarchist influenced political events of May ’68 and therefore locate postanarchism as a continuation of the anarchist inspired moment (J. Adams, 2003; Jun, 2007; Kuhn, 2009; Türkeli, 2012). Michel Foucault (1984) reflected that May ’68 ushered a process—“an act of questioning”—that found politics, in the form of Marxism, incapable of answering, “there was now a plurality of questions posed to politics rather than the reinscription of the act of questioning in the framework of a political doctrine” (p. 386). “I don’t see why the words ‘anarchy’ and ‘anarchism’ are so pejorative that the mere fact of employing them counts as triumphant discourse” (Foucault, 2012, p. 78). Foucault was not dismissive of anarchism as a potentially useful social theory. However, he distanced himself from what he saw as anarchism’s representation of power as essentially bad and that it should be abolished. In a 1980 lecture he noted that he was open to discussion on this characterisation of anarchism and went on to state that he was not opposed to the use of the term anarchism, only that the approach to power was different to his, he coined the term “anarcheology” and went further in highlighting the work of Feyerabend as worthy of reading on anarchy and knowledge (Lecture 1980 in Foucault, 2012, pp. 78-79).

Duane Rousselle (2012, 2013) argued that the debate over whether anarchism is or was a modernist or pre-postmodern theoretical work should be laid to rest (Rousselle, 2012), and more recently allowed that ontologically and epistemologically “post-anarchism is a space that opens up anarchism to its own unconscious productions” (Rousselle & Adams, 2013). Heroux (2010) has argued that a polythetic definition of anarchism, one that embraces post structuralism, as it does for example feminism, be embraced and that, this definition would be “consonant with what anarchism aims at” (p. 30). Such a polythetic definition is the anarchism enacted in this thesis.

3.3.2 Power Theory

In this study, I ask ‘how do Aboriginal fathers enjoy the freedom of creating their own subjectivity as fathers?’ One way to interpret power for anarchist theorists is to examine how social relations may work against people’s ability to configure meaning and freedom. However, this is only one aspect of power, for there is also a desire to see how individuals resist negative imagery/discourses or exercise their own power in

social relations. A question, therefore, is wherein lies imagining and enacting positive rather than reactive subjectivities?

In anarchist theory, power is understood not as a force residing in social relations external (transcendent) to individuals, rather, as something immanent in individuals created and maintained through social relations between and by people and in social institutions (Antliff, 2011; Cohn, 2006; Jeppesen, 2019; Jun, 2011, 2012).

3.3.3 Post-structuralist Power Theory

I consider power, as Foucault⁴¹ described relationships of power, not as a thing—power happens in all “human relations, ...—whether it be a question of communicating verbally, ... or question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic relationship, power is always present: I mean the relationships in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of another.” (1987, p. 122). Power in this sense, is therefore neither good nor bad, (Foucault, 1987) rather power is productive of reality (Foucault, 1995). People “are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). For Foucault relationships of power only exist when subjects are free (Foucault, 1982); even if in only limited ways “(if) one were completely at the disposition of the other” and they had full control, there would be no relationship, the person becomes an object, therefore not free to resist or participate in any form in the relationship (1987, p. 123). What for anarchists, as for poststructuralists, such as Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, is condemnable in relationships of power is when they are expressed as domination over our ability to enjoy freedom. Such as where our own actions stop other people’s enjoyment to create their future or our own internalised view of the world stultifies potentiality—the curtailment of desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and where practices of governmentality and the failure of the ethos of care for self (Foucault, 1987) limit freedom.

⁴¹ In this discussion of relations of power I draw primarily upon the later work of Foucault. As he noted, his later writing tended to clarify and extend his earlier work on power and in many interviews he articulated thematic approaches that he hadn’t developed while undertaking earlier writing (Foucault, 1983, 1987).

Foucault described power as circulating through chains between individuals and their social relations. It is not a top down hierarchical structure, although it can be “employed or exercised through net like organisation, people can be its inert or consenting target, [but] they are always also the elements of its articulation” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Therefore, Foucault saw two relationships of power: “strategic games between liberties—strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others—and the states of domination which are what we ordinarily call power” (Foucault, 1987, p. 130). What he sees bridging these two are the practices of governmentality—meaning more than the institution of Government and its instruments. It includes how we manage ourselves (the care of self) how we relate to others and institutions (governmentality) (Foucault, 1982, 1987), “of mechanisms and procedures intended to conduct men, to direct their conduct, to conduct their conduct” (Foucault, 2012, p. 12). An important Foucauldian (1980) concept is the *apparatus*.

A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. (p. 194)

These apparatus, as Matteo Pasquinelli (2015) argued, create normative projects, projects that create an imagined standard, as a means of control.

For Foucault it is through these practices that states of domination are created and maintained. “In my analysis of power, there are three levels: the strategic relationships, the techniques of government, and the levels of domination” (Foucault, 1987, p. 130). Relationships of power, when asymmetrical, become relationships of domination.

Or states of domination, in which the relations of power, instead of being variable and allowing different partners a strategy which alters them, find themselves firmly set and congealed. When an individual or a social group manages to block a field of relations of power, to render them impassive and

invariable and to prevent all reversibility of movement by means of instruments which can be economic as well as political or military—we are facing what can be called a state of domination. (Foucault, 1987, p. 114)

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used the image of the rhizome to imagine the complexity of forces (which following Jun (2007), can be considered more or less synonymous to Foucault's power and desire. Similar, but even more erratic, interwoven and dispersed than Foucault's 'chains of power',⁴² "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be ... A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8), through these mechanisms social formations operate.

Power connects in nodes of the rhizome, around these nodes assemblages and multiplicities territorialize within the rhizome. It is these comparatively rigid territorialized assemblages that repressive relations of power are enacted, "You will be allowed to live and speak, but only after every outlet has been obstructed. Once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it's all over, no desire stirs" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 15).

The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. ...the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. (p. 23)

Part of the changing process is how lines of flight allow deterritorialization—the escape from the rhizome—but can then be reterritorialized back into the rhizome.

Recognising the difficulty of being this subject they suggested we: "Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still!" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 27). Such word play has left their work open to criticism of elitism and inaccessibility (E. Atkinson, 2002). It is however a valuable reminder that the task of imaging in writing

⁴² Deleuze described his view of society as it being a fluid or like a gas whereas he characterised Foucault's view as being more architectural (Deleuze, 1986).

the complexity of power within/through social relations is not a linear or structural analysis.

3.3.4 Anarchist Power Theory

These views of power being everywhere and in all our social relationships are consistent with many 18th and 19th century anarchist writers (Cohn, 2006), this was captured by German anarchist Gustav Landauer (1870-1919) when he spoke of the relationship between people and the state:

The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently..... We, who have imprisoned ourselves in the absolute state, must realize the truth: *we* are the state! And we will be the state as long as we are nothing different; as long as we have not yet created the institutions necessary for a true community and a true society of human beings. (Landauer [1910] in Kuhn, 2010, p. 214)

This marks all of us as being part of the power relations that currently cause reterritorialization and domination.

Power can be considered as a typology (Vodovnik, 2012). Uri Gordon, after anarchist-feminist Starhawk (1988), described three manners through which power can be envisaged:

‘power-over’ to refer to power through domination... ‘power-from-within’ [which is our mastery or creative power], which I will call here ‘power to’... and ‘power-with’ or ‘power among’. This is ‘the power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen’. (Starhawk quotes from U. Gordon, 2008, pp. 49-50)

Here I will consider how ‘power-over’ and ‘power-to’ relate to an anarchist analytic within this project. Power-with may be considered in this project as whether this research is useful research for the community as an outcome of this project. ‘Power-with’ is also an embedded anarchist position regarding research ethics, already discussed and will be further elaborated in the discussion on positionality and subjectivity in Chapter 4.

Relations of domination operate in many forms in our society, and they are multiple, and expressed through for example: economic, political, gender, sexual, ableist, and race-based relations amongst others.⁴³

Importantly, no form of dominating power is more or less important than any other—rather they are often congruent (Ben-Moshe, Hill, Nocella, & Templer, 2009; Jeppesen, 2019; Lazar, 2018). “Anarchists have always contended that domination exists in mutually irreducible forms that arise within multiple sites” (Jun, 2012, p. 135). Without limiting anarchism to a Eurocentric view, Evren (2014) detailed how anarchists across the world connected multiple forms of opposition to all forms of oppressive power. It is worth noting within the European context where leftist politics gave economic relations primacy whilst accepting patriarchal and racist supremacist values, anarchists spoke against these norms. “Much to the chagrin of Marx and Engels, Bakunin adamantly refused to subordinate oppressive political and religious institutions to ‘economic requisites’ and to reduce domination to the economic category of ‘enslavement’” (Jun, 2012, p. 135). Emma Goldman (1869-1940) advocated for gay rights (Goldman 1923 in Maclellan, 2004, pp. 112-113) and women’s liberation, famously taking to task one of the ‘founding fathers’ of anarchism Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921) for not understanding the importance of sexual liberation for the overthrowing of male power-over women⁴⁴ (Goldman, 1931/1970a). Louise Michel (1830-1905) both condemned and took the condemnation of her fellow exiled Paris Communards when exiled in Nouvelle Calédonie, for siding with the local Kanaks against the French Colonial power in 1878, “The Kanaks were seeking the same liberty we had sought in the Commune” (Michel in Maclellan, 2004, p. 95). French geographers and brothers Elie (1827-1904) and Elisee Reclus (1830-1905) condemned the eurocentrism that created racialised versions of the ‘other’ in cultures Europeans violently colonised.

In several so-called savage tribes, the average individual is not morally, nor intellectually, inferior to the individual of our so-called civilised states ...

⁴³ Dupuis-Deri (2016) identified 29 systems or categories in contemporary literature in his study of the inclusion of the state as a dominating relationship of power.

⁴⁴ Kropotkin, as strong advocate for the equal rights of women, upon being chastised recanted for not having seen the relevance of the connection himself.

These peoples were described only by their invaders, those able to understand them the least. (E Reclus, *Les Primitifs*, in Ferretti, 2017b, p. 115)

Many examples can be raised of this positionality of radical anarchists recognising and challenging multiple relations of dominating power.

Despite Jun's (2012) assertion that anarchists have always recognised mutually irreducible forms of domination, not all anarchists have been prepared to question privileging practices or question assumptions that maintain relations of dominating power. Some like 'founding father' Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) openly championed the patriarchal family structure as the foundation of social organisation⁴⁵ (Gemie, 1996) and derided the role of women. This view was taken up by many other male anarchists who accepted women's role as being close to nature and child raising within the family and unsuitable for political activity, themes that resonated through the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), leading anarchist women to form their own organisation *Mujeres Libres* in order to gain political voice (Gemie, 1996; Jeppesen, 2019).

In contemporary praxis Erica Lagalisse (2011), Jeff Shantz (2002), Lara Coleman and Serena Bassi (2011) have illustrated how men display relationships of 'power-over' in the alter-globalisation movement. Richard Day (2005) highlighted the nomadic anarchist male activist, free of responsibility (in exercising white male mobility privilege) as current manifestations of patriarchy as domination within anarchist circles. Such examples moved Sandra Jeppesen (2019) to state, "the challenge of unlearning oppressive behaviours remains a daunting task for the anarchist movement" (p. 23).

People experience multiple forms of social power relationships simultaneously. For example, someone is not an Aboriginal person in one instance and a father in another; they are simultaneously an Aboriginal father within and amongst other possible concurrent social relationships. Anarchism provides a useful theoretical tool for

⁴⁵ Proudhon was openly criticised at the time by anarchist compatriot Joseph Dejacque (1821-1865), "Listen, master Proudhon, do not speak about woman, or before you do study her; take lessons. Do not describe yourself as an anarchist, or be an anarchist through and through. . . Instead, speak out against man's exploitation of woman" (Dejacque (1857) in R. Graham, 2005, p. 69).

creating understanding of complexity in social relations. Here, the congruence of anarchism and other theories of power become evident and are now briefly discussed.

3.3.5 Feminist Power Theories

Arising from the work of American black feminists, power conceptualised as multifaceted and inter-related has been widely adopted in studies of power. Patricia Hill Collins highlighted the “interlocking notions of oppression in her concept of the ‘matrix of domination’” (Collins in Lazar, 2018, p. 163). This is unlike Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) ‘intersectionality’,⁴⁶ which has been critiqued for its additive modelling of dominance relationships (Carastathis, 2014). In Crenshaw’s schema, the individual represents the intersection of different forms of dominance and therefore by implication these forms of domination travel along different roads, or axis of power (Lazar, 2018). Also, ‘intersectionality’ has been critiqued for being unable to address non-identity forms of oppression, such as ecological oppression (Jeppesen, 2019). The matrix of domination model, redolent of the Deleuze and Guattari rhizome, describes greater interconnectivity (Collins, 1990). The matrix model also grounds power as being both negative and positive “power as energy can be fostered by creative acts of resistance” (Collins, 1990, p. 2). Some like Freya Schiwy (2007) have argued even this sense of interdependence misses or understates the intradependence of forms of domination.

As Anne McClintock put it in her analysis of British colonialism, ‘race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other’. (McClintock quoted in Schiwy, 2007, p. 275)

Action in opposition to one obvious manifestation of dominance needs to address all forms of dominance. bell hooks (2010) stated she does not talk about patriarchy, she talks about “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 4). Further queer/poststructuralist theorist Judith Butler (1990) argued political action based upon identity issues, reinforces binary notions of an established theme, from which the

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the historicisation of the term Intersectionality, see (Nash, 2017).

subjugated place themselves in opposition, men (dominant) women (subjugated), whites/blacks, heterosexual/homosexual etc. However, we know these binaries do not stand alone; some men can be subjugated to other men or to some women in given historical configurations. Queer theorists also question ‘why express identity?’, particularly based upon these binaries, when people across all domains may exist in their own views and by destabilising identity, attempts to define those outside of normalised figurations cannot be labeled as deviant (Lazar, 2018). Discussing forms of domination within a larger historical configuration, where all forms exist, both in reinforcing and contradictory manners, allows for all people who are subjugated in any social relationships of power to see how these relationships also affect others (Collins, 1990; hooks, 2000; Shannon & Rogue, 2009).

3.3.6 Anarch@Indigenist Power Theories

Anarch@indigenism (alternatively anarcha-Indigenism), how Indigenous views and anarchist approaches are placed in dialogue, is an emerging field of work. It was first articulated by Kahnawà:ke Mohawk philosopher and activist Taiaiake Alfred (2005) and extended and developed mainly through dialogue in solidarity work between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in the context of Indigenous peoples’ struggles in Canada (Barker & Pickerill, 2012; Coulthard, 2010; A. G. Lewis, 2012), and other parts of the Americas (J. Adams, 2011) including the South Amerindian experience (Cusicanqui, 2007; Falleiros, 2018; Mujeres Creando).

Jacqueline Lasky (2011) characterised anarch@indigenism as an approach that:

Forges intersectional analysis and fosters a praxis to de-center and un-do multiple axes of oppression. In other words, anarch@indigenism attempts to link critical ideas and visions of post-imperial futures in ways that are non-hierarchical, unsettling⁴⁷ of state authorities, inclusive of multiple/plural ways of being in the world, and respectful of the autonomous agencies of collective personhood. (p.4)

⁴⁷ Unsettling as defined in the original footnote (4) by Lasky: “‘Unsettling’ here has a double connotation: to disrupt the order and make one feel ill at ease; and also to literally un-settle settler colonial states, which doesn’t necessarily equate to physical relocation (although it can) but the diminishment of settler authority in states and the indigenizing of state forms” (2011, p. 32).

Anarch@indigenism is a project that takes an anti-colonial approach, one that aims to decolonise practice and people, both the unsettled settlers and Indigenous people.

Anarch@indigenism places emphasis on how anarchism, Indigenist and feminist views, as three strands of analysis can interface to create fertile encounters to address multiple forms of dominant power relationships (J. Adams, 2011; Day, 2012; Ferguson, 2011; Hall, 2017; Johnson & Ferguson, 2018; A. G. Lewis, 2012, 2015). They parallel other anarchistic and non-anarchist de-colonial projects (U. Gordon, 2008; Ramnath, 2011; Schiwy, 2007).

Gendering the work of decolonisation is about renewing original governance systems, inclusive of family and communities that embody principles of egalitarian and caring traditions. Weaving theories in this way can keep conversation flowing away from the state-centric legislative approach that sees collective rights pitted against individual rights, toward a deeper reclamation of Indigenist-feminist principles in practice, rooted as they are in Indigenous Knowledge and traditions. The implications of this kind of work are far-reaching, basically requiring a recentering of Indigenous and Two-Spirit politics. (Hall, 2017, p. no number)

This interaction places emphasis on the nature of representation and subjectivity within colonial settings.

The politics of recognition within the framework of the colonial settler state is questioned because it legitimises the role of the state in the dispossession of Indigenous people (Corntassel, 2006; Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Coulthard, 2007). This perspective calls for a decoupling of Indigenous identity from the colonial construct as a means for empowering Indigenous people (Alfred, 2009) rather than furthering Indigenous supplication through asking to be recognised. This decentering of struggle removes resistance from the practice of state (colonial) centred political action and subjectivity (Barnsleya & Bleikerb, 2008; Day, 2005).

In Australia, Aboriginal politics is dominated by the politics of recognition, either through formal constitutional means, or via government recognition and funding of representative community organisations. Examples of decentering approaches include

the 'Pay the Rent' campaign (Pay the Rent- Victoria) and care of Country undertaken outside of the Native Title regime or funded Aboriginal community ranger programs (Vincent, 2017). Recognition based campaigns become problematised in considering sovereignty campaigns (Moreton-Robinson, 2006b; I. Watson, 2002, 2009), particularly in how negotiating with the colonial government means Aboriginal people give it legitimacy (Grieves, 2018).

Apart from the clear articulation of Indigenous problematising of relations of power in the colonial setting; this dialogue between Indigenous politics and anarchism raises important questions of solidarity work across cultural boundaries. This highlights the necessity for anarchist activists to understand the Indigenous prior right to, and relationship with, land and permanent connection to Country (Barker & Pickerill, 2012; Coulthard, 2010; A. G. Lewis, 2012).

Questioning white privilege, those norms of cultural behaviour that settlers, particularly western European descended settlers may see as 'normal' experience and behaviours (Lazar, 2018; A. G. Lewis, 2015), is therefore central to questioning relationships of power. This has implications for the behaviours of non-Indigenous settler allies when working with Indigenous people(s) (Barker & Pickerill, 2012; Cornthassel, 2006; A. G. Lewis, 2015). Again, anarchist practice needs to be openly questioned, whether this be the whiteness of the alter globalisation movement (Bey, 1985/2009) the anarchist movement in general (Alston, 2016; Burkowicz, 2014; Evren, 2012) or people's interactions in solidarity groups (Barker & Pickerill, 2012; Day, 2012; Day & Haberle, 2006; U. Gordon, 2008; A. G. Lewis, 2015). Whether being an ally in struggle is a deep enough commitment or should non-Indigenous people be forming relationships as accomplices, recognising that as allies we give up less privilege and exposure to risk than an accomplice experiences (Indigenous Action Media, 2014). All these meanings of decolonisation: of power relations in political action and between and within ourselves can address the 'daunting task of unlearning oppressive behaviours' (Jeppesen, 2019) and underlies Ramnath's (2011) claim of decolonisation being the highest form of anarchism.

In these outlines of feminist and Indigenist analytics of power, I have identified two key concepts, on which I now elaborate. The first is resistance or ‘power to’ and the second is what becomes of resistance.

3.3.7 Resistance or ‘Power to’ and ‘Becoming’

Inherent in every relationship of power is resistance of power towards other forms of power. Power is not a one way force. This is a fundamental aspect of Foucault’s outline of power (D. C. Barnett, 2016; Butler, 2001; Foucault, 1980, 1987). The same occurs in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) writings on desire and lines of flight from coercive power, there is always power moving away and out of the rhizome. Hence an analysis of power based upon these premises means resistance to relationships of dominating forms of power is inherent in this way of conceptualising power (D. C. Barnett, 2016, p. 252).

This is where poststructuralism and anarchism address the sociological structure/agency debate.

The government of men through the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity... such a deep bond between the exercise of power and the obligation for individuals to become themselves essential actors in the procedures of manifestation of the truth. [and] in the procedure of manifestation of the truth the subject may be the active agent thanks to which the truth comes to light. (Foucault, 2012, pp. 80-81)

Power, being everywhere, is possible to be resisted everywhere, or reinforced. Subjectivity, formed through power relationships, including what are the ‘truths’ of society, means that all individuals are active agents in these relationships of power; even when individuals act subjectively to limit their own freedoms.

It is through a praxis of decentering (Heroux, 2010); that otherwise, after deterritorializing (reform or revolution) when dominating power is able to reterritorialize (capitalist neoliberal commodification, appropriation or punishment of resistance—or authoritarian regime conformity, control, repression and liquidation); that escape may be actualised in specific spatial and historical configurations. This breaking with the ‘hegemony of the hegemony of politics’—where the state is the instrument through which the politics of demand (recognition, reform, revolution)

opens new spaces for creating relationships of equality amongst otherwise dominated individuals. Instead of counter hegemonic politics, resistance is decentered as anti-hegemonic (Day, 2005).

Decentering and other forms of non-compliance, such as non-binary identification (gender, sexual, ableism, cultural), and the rejection of proclaiming identity as identity to others, break with normative processes of working within the parameters of existing hegemonic forms of struggle (Newman, 2016). “Resistance is formulated against a background of plurality. It is plurality that cultural and political institutions oppose as they promote one form of subjectivity over another” (Evren, 2011, p. 39).

Along with his ethic of care, Foucault’s presentation of critique, “the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth” (1996, p. 386) is valuable. It is by this process that individuals, dissatisfied with the inadequacy of existing answers provided by current discourse as explanations of society, move outside of the thinking involved in chains of power.

Postanarchist readings of Max Stirner (1806-1856) (Newman, 2001) and of Kropotkin and Bakunin (Cohn, 2006) also highlight within ‘classical European anarchist theorists’ that it is from individual self-questioning of existing ways of being that liberation develops. This can be expressed as the decolonisation of ourselves.

If people are not cast to be perpetually entrapped in rhizomic dominating relations of power, what form does a decolonised social relationship take? Where the decentered individual places themselves is not a futuristic individualised utopia. Dominating social relations will continue to exert pressure (through learnt behaviors, self-censure of desire or totalising normative external social relations) to reterritorialize the individual (Cohn, 2006; Jun, 2011).

Decentering is a current practice, the idea of becoming (Cohn, 2006): becoming a better self—the ethos of self-care (Foucault, 1987), of following lines of flight of desire outside the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), of perpetual change and

challenge, of becoming a future other than that which has been identified as deficit (Ferguson, 2011; Heroux, 2010; Jun, 2011). The anarchist position on ‘becoming’ as resistance, is highlighted by Bertalan (2011) giving recognition of Emma Goldman’s observation that “Eternal change ... is forever at work, life always is in flux, new currents flowing from the dried up spring of the old” (Goldman, 1931/1970b, p. 524).

Life is then a perpetual becoming. And if this becoming is an act of self-creation (Jun, 2011), or self-forming (Cohn, 2006), how does the individual identify themselves and with their community? From an anarchist perspective this would best occur outside of the hegemony of current dominating processes of individualism, or the politics of identity or cultural recognition under multiculturalism.

Individualism is a privatised act under current conditions. It alienates the individual from their social relationships and these atomised individuals become easy subjects of totalising control processes of subjectivism—religion, psychology, sexuality, patriotism (D. C. Barnett, 2016; Foucault, 1982; Jun, 2011; Newman, 2016).

Individuals thus created as subjects form identity within discourses of power (Foucault, 1982, 1990). As queer theorists identify, this identification is by definition binary, as it creates identity from oppositional relationships, hetero/homo, men/women, white/ black, settler/Indigenist, with the oppositional dominated constituting the other to the normative dominant. Identity, therefore, is inscribed by what is different from normative values, presumes rigidity and singular identity and, as will be discussed in the section on representation, prescribes essentialised behaviors to be enacted (Avery-Natale, 2010; Day, 2005; Lasky, 2011).

Multiculturalism, as practised within existing state relationships, ‘gifts recognition’ to subjugated cultural groups, again setting the parameters of cultural identity and also tolerance of difference within the overarching dominant power paradigm (Day, 2005).

Instead of hegemonic relationships and identity, what is called for by postanarchism is an embrace of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of ‘singularities’, ‘fluid identity’ and ‘becoming minor’.

Singularities, whilst being individual, are not individualised. They may be many forms of oneself, the multiplicity inherent in one's sense of oneself. We take many different relationships as part of our social relationships that are historically formed through life course and circumstance (Day, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Our identity is fluid not fixed.

Fluid identity, which is not only non-binary but self-identifying, across multiple forms:

Is represented by the shift from the noun 'identity,' which implies a singular thing that exists in the world to the verb 'identification,' which emphasizes the act of taking on a self. Though this multiplicity and fluidity of identification fits the nature of our understanding of subjectivity in the contemporary postmodern age in which humans are "to be understood as multiple and without center". (Call, 2002: p. 130 in Avery-Natale, 2010, p. 96)

This is how singularity enacts relationships of community, cultural expression, gender, and so forth.

Finally, to be non-hegemonic, not seeking identity recognition through existing apparatus of control means not to become part of the majority culture. Instead, it means being minor. Whilst classical hegemonic forms of politics would pursue a program of seeking to become the majority (-view, -policy), non-hegemonic programs aim to stay outside of this territorializing power process. Therefore, to be minor does not convey *less* than, but *other* than—the majority totalising processes. Indigenous minor, means retaining control of representation and cultural practices outside of the state. Women and workers can remain minor, although a population majority in most circumstances, as they are minor in relation to the majority normative, dominating programs of patriarchy and capitalism (Ferguson, 2011).

Instead, the new accent in all postanarchism is on neither preserving nor returning, but rather on becoming. The pure image of authentic proletarians or aboriginals or precolonial subalterns is now transformed and opened up to future "becoming minor". Neither majority nor purity; but of vital concern here is the endlessly open process of becoming different from what one already was, creating a singularity rather than being an individual, branching

outward rather than digging for roots. Singularities are unique clusters formed of both pre-individual elements and trans-individual elements, making up their own spaces and times. ...what Deleuze and Guattari have listed as the source of the people to come: “an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race”. (Heroux, 2010, p. 21)

This community of singularities, who have affinities across and interwoven through their experiences of existing hegemonic forms of dominating power, then become the actors in creating, of becoming, the alternative to dominating relationships of power.

The coming community is networked and it arrives through networked structures, and it enacts a network: polycentric when it wants to be, and yet always already decentered or acentric if it wants to be. The network both enables and results from the self-organizing system of singularities in mutual connectedness. (Heroux, 2010, p. 22)

Anthropologist Barbara Glowczewski (2011) noted during her work with Warlpiri the deterritorializing nature of Warlpiri resistance to modernity and land alienation, the rhizomic similarities with kinship and land relationships and how these relationships were assemblages that contained both human and non-human actors, and how this had resonance with, and impacted upon the development of, Felix Guattari's theories.

Having worked with and lived among the Aboriginal community in Mparntwe/Alice Springs (for over 25 years), this idea of the ‘be-coming’ community and local Aboriginal social networks offers me, as a researcher, congruence. Here are highly networked social systems, decentred of state control (despite the efforts of anthropologists and politicians to control these through the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the Native Title Act), that are self-organising in both contemporary and traditional⁴⁸ social relationships, with individuals being multiple singularities across the various roles and social processes that they live through/with.

⁴⁸ Whilst Aboriginal traditional social relationships are based in foundational law, they also change over time and adapt to change; Aboriginal culture whilst ancient is not static.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined how my worldview informs my approach to this research. I commenced with a discussion of axiology as the moral foundation of my approach to this research, underpinning both why I undertook this research and how this directs my methodology and methods. The articulation of this value system addresses not only the ‘why’ of doing the research but also guides the ‘how’ to do the research. Axiology or the values that guide the research operate at the worldview and methodological levels, and obviously guide the ethics of interaction with research participants and their culture. This level of ethics is articulated in the chapter that follows.

In this chapter, I focused on axiology as ethics/morality. Here I identified how I draw my axiological position from the philosophy of anarchism. Based in a belief that all individuals have the capacity and creative potential to create freedom and develop their own subjectivity free from closed or coercive authority. This moral position is very relevant to the circumstances of Aboriginal males having the ability to develop their subjectivity in fatherhood. As I have argued in Chapter 2, public policies that can be characterised as being closed and coercive have created negative social experiences for Aboriginal fathers, inhibiting their free capacity to explore their roles as fathers.

I discussed how this moral position also addresses how to locate differing worldviews and be sensitive to how a researcher’s view can form *de facto* normative position, as our morality frames not only our worldview but also our attitude to other peoples’ views.

I identified that in the social world reality is socially constructed, subjectively and through the power relations constructed by people. I also recognise that people may hold different worldviews from my own as a researcher and, therefore, in interacting with other people as a researcher I must not act coercively or in a closed authority manner. I accept that there are ways other than my own to make meaning of the world. This is particularly important when, as a critical theorist, addressing issues of power, and working with people marginalised by colonial power relations and constructs, I do not perpetuate this inequity in interacting with other people and their

worldviews. Also from anarchism, I have drawn upon the concept of prefiguration, that the means in pursuing ends must be congruent. This highlights the need for my research methods to model values of respect for freedom, the right to creativity and the fulfilment of life.

I have explained how I utilise the social theory of anarchism to guide my analysis. I have outlined the value of this theory as this approach recognises power relations and multiple forms of power. When problematising power relations, rather than just describing them, anarchism allows for the creation of new meanings and understandings, rather than the imposition of a view. I also note how anarchist theories consider how power is internalised and the expression of power through positionality.

In the next chapter I outline key issues in applying an anarchist sociological research methodology.

Chapter 4. Discourse Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to address issues of representation in-depth, as a critical focal point of analysis in this particular settler/Indigenous research situation. I address the complexity of working as a settler with Aboriginal people in creating a representation (analytic text) of how Aboriginal people represent themselves in a research space. A space that, while mutually created, exists within a context of deeply embedded asymmetrical power relations.

I do this by outlining how I apply an anarchist sociological methodology. The value of anarchism as a sociological analysis was enunciated in the previous chapter and in this chapter; I will outline key elements of an anarchist research methodology.

After outlining the relationship of methodology with previously discussed issues of axiology, ontology and epistemology, and how these influence methodological choices, I will then discuss why I have chosen an anarchist hermeneutic methodology, combined with critical discourse analysis. I will outline how this approach seeks to address my deep concerns regarding representation, subjectivity, positionality, and validity in research.

Finally, I describe the various methods chosen to collect and analyse the interview narratives to ensure congruence between the methods, methodology, and integrity of the findings.

4.2 Methodology

There is an iterative relationship between what researchers want to achieve in doing research, the question(s) asked, what the objectives are and the methodology chosen (Carter & Little, 2007). The choice is in part based on identifying the methodology that best meets the aims of the research, but there may be no one methodology that does this. Also, the choice of methodology may change over the course of the research as the research approach, aims and methods are reviewed (Crotty, 1998). Carter and Little (2007) noted that perceptions of methodologies can be idealisations “that will always be somewhat abstracted from” how they are actually used (p. 1318).

However, they argued that each of these identifiable methodologies are always interacting with researchers in different research moments and develop, vary and borrow from other theoretical and methodological positions. They argued for an approach to methodology that is thoughtful, historically and theoretically situated, and flexible rather than dogmatic (Carter & Little, 2007). Poststructuralist approaches to methodology highlight how “any single theoretical perspective or method might not be separately capable of capturing the complexity of a researcher’s interests and questions” (Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005, p. 293).

Complexity, always present in how we understand our world and social theory, is therefore a necessary social reality to factor into research. Efforts to present social research as closed theory do not relate to the complexity of the social world in which people live (Kincheloe, 2005; Koro-Ljungberg & Greckhamer, 2005; K. McCoy, 2012; Orenstein & Luken, 1978). David Orenstein and Paul Luken (1978) argued that single closed theory models of analysis force researchers into a narrowed set of findings. Ultimately taking responsibility for research findings away from the researcher, they (the researcher) lose their “autonomy of inquiry” (p. 65). This produces neither valuable research nor creative useful social researchers.

Undertaking research that ‘borrows’ from various methodologies, requires a sound understating of the important aspects of those methodologies and to recognise which aspects may work coherently with others—an ability to enact ‘autonomy of inquiry’. The important issue is that there are clear connections between all aspects of the research process and that this is apparent and justifiable making research trustworthy and outcomes transparent (Carter & Little, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Kincheloe, 2005; Salmon, 2003).

4.3 An Anarchist Methodology

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that anarchism as philosophy, social theory and praxis is a broad-based movement of ideas and practices. There are as many anarchisms as there are anarchists (Jun, 2013; Novak, 1958). Therefore, it is unsurprising to find many differing interpretations of what form anarchist sociological methodologies take and that these may be shaped by sub-discipline and other methodologies being employed in tandem (Levy & Newman, 2019; Martel &

Klausen, 2011; Shantz & Williams, 2013; White & Springer, 2022). Hence, an anarchist sociological methodology draws upon a range of methodologies and methods. It is a bricolage, like anarchist theory and philosophy (Orenstein & Luken, 1978; Purkis, 2004). However, like my characterisation of anarchism after Cohen (2006) in the previous chapter, key elements of what anarchist sociology should look like as methodological praxis are the concern about dominance in social relationships and a prefigurative practice (Donaghey, 2016; Shantz & Williams, 2013; White & Springer, 2022).

I have discussed prefigurative practice, how it underpins the axiological approach to this research, in the previous chapter. Here I will restate that this guides not only the impetus to address the research aims, but also guides the practice in how to address power in the research space, including representation and positionality, as well as the role of the community in validating findings, and choice of methods.

Writers on anarchist sociological studies predominantly focus on the use of an anarchist lens at the level of sociological critique and not as a research approach (Rafael, 2018; Shantz & Williams, 2013). Where they describe research methodology they usually focus on activist or movement studies (Shantz, 2002; Shantz & Williams, 2013). These are mainly ethnographic and action research style studies (See for example Burdon & Martel, 2017; Coleman & Bassi, 2011; Donaghey, 2016; Duckett, 2006; U. Gordon, 2008; Lagalis, 2011). I have not been able to identify any sociological studies with people regarding their experiences of social inequities outside of social movement studies. I have taken up Duane Rouselle's (2011) suggestion, "My best advice is to take what one finds useful in the post-anarchist literature and to dispose of what one finds to be in the service of the 'university'; here, we can only offer the tools and it is your job to build your own shelter" (p. viii). I have sought, whilst working 'with the university', to take what useful pieces I found in post-anarchist literature, to build an anarchist methodological 'shelter'. This led me to develop my own bricolage approach to 'work in the middle' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of a range of paradigms, methodologies, and discourses around research practice.

I have chosen an anarchist hermeneutic discursive approach to analyse the interview narratives and present my findings. This methodology endeavours, as I will outline, to address the issues of representation, positionality, and validity in social research.

In using this approach I aim to describe the relationship between the individual, and their biography as presented in their interviews, and the ‘troubles’ (Mills, 1959/2000) that occur because of their situated history. I am concerned with questions of relationships, subjectivities, and experience.

4.3.1 Anarchist Discourse Analysis

I use the term discourse analysis to describe the analysis of the text of the interview to explain how discursive practices are referenced during the interviews—and how these may be present in those representations being made by the interviewee—and potentially myself in creating this representation in this thesis (Taylor, 2001).

The term discourse can have multiple meanings (Taylor, 2001). In this thesis I use the term, as it is used in poststructuralist parlance, to describe the ways in which socially constructed daily beliefs (as truths) are reproduced to create or reinforce discursive practices (Rabinow & Rose, 2003), rather than in a linguistic or language study to specifically analyse how language is used, although this approach can also be included. Discourse includes ways of representing people, ideas, knowledges, constructions of reality and subjectivities (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Discourse as discursive practices include text, social and embodied practices, and knowledge formations (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014).

How people relate to these discourses, both in reflecting upon them and reconstituting them in their daily practice, in turn create the subjectification of individuals.

Discursive practices are both constitutive and subjectifying (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Bacchi & Bonham, 2014; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

In their critical discursive psychology study of masculinity Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1999) emphasise discourse as the “site for investigating men’s identities because (we are persuaded) of the central role discursive practices play in the

constitution of subjectivity” (p. 337). People draw upon a variety of discursive practices in creating subjective representations, as well as when conjuring cultural complexes of ‘others’ (Singer & Kaplinsky, 2010). “That is, what it means to be a person, the formulation of an internal life, an identity and a way of being in the world develop as external public dialogue moves inside to form the ‘voices of the mind’” (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 337). These various discursive practices occur in differing historical and spatial settings. And conflicting assemblages of practice can be inscribed in male discourse and behaviours depending upon the setting and how the individual proposes to represent themselves (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

Therefore, representation is a vital process in discourse analysis. How do the fathers in this study relate to or reference dominant discourses related to Aboriginal males and fatherhood? In what form do these discourses appear in their narratives and in what ways are they constitutive? In the second section of my findings, I consider how these fathers frame their emotional responses within current discursive practices of male emotional behaviours.

The genealogies of the discourses referenced in this study are established in Chapter 5. Text and visual representations are both creative of discourse and knowledge and are subject to them (Taylor, 2001). For that reason, I have not presented in this thesis a literature review, but rather a discourse genealogy. In this I have followed a Foucauldian approach to examining the genealogy of discourse (Foucault, 1996; Rabinow & Rose, 2003) around fatherhood, masculinity, and particularly Aboriginal fatherhood in Australia.

How did the Aboriginal fathers participating in this research represent their social relationships in the context of their fatherhood practices? How did they choose to represent themselves in relationship to constitutive discourses and the conflicts therein contained in their subjective selves? Are lines of flight present in their representations? Can emergent singularities speak through their interview data? And how do I represent them and their ideas?

Here, I return to the axiology of anarchist philosophy, where the practical issues of my research approach, as outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, is revisited—to whom is this research of value? What happens to the findings and how they are constructed are important issues that I address later in this chapter when looking at the role of the Aboriginal Male Reference Group and the role of the researcher as relayer of knowledge(s) (Day, 2005).

I now deal with the theoretical issue of representation and subjectivity, how the fathers are represented by the study. How can one look for/read how the fathers represent themselves in this study's forum—both the audio recording of the interview and the disassociated transcript/text? I recognise that readers will create their own subjective understandings from this resultant thesis text.

4.3.2 The Problem of Representation

An ongoing question for qualitative research is the question of representation (Cohn, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). How does the researcher represent the views of other people, given what they present is their interpretation of those other people's understandings, actions, ideas or self-representations? How do research participants represent themselves to the interviewer and the audience beyond?

The issue of representation is inextricably entwined with subjectivity, both that of the researcher and that of the participant. Entwined because our subjectivity informs how we represent others and ourselves. What issues do the participants in the interview raise as issues that form their subjective self? How does the researcher understand their own role, and how are they represented in the research process?

This leads into positionality. How do I as the researcher understand my own role and how I am represented in relation to the people I am trying to represent?

I do not here address semiotic concerns with representation. The interpretiveness of symbols and anti-representationalism of deconstruction theory I leave, after Cohn (2006), these as 'false critiques', as circular sophism of subject/object theoretical blinds (pp. 37-38). However, language is a form a representation, albeit one that

cannot be avoided in order to express meaning (even anti-representational meaning), and,

as such cannot simply be discarded, but only seen through as a construct even as it is necessarily employed. There is no pregiven natural presence that guarantees the ultimate truth of a re-presence of representation; nevertheless this also implies that all we have in terms of meaning are representations.

Presence we can assume is indeed there, but the meaningfulness of this or that meaning is always a re-presentation. (Heroux, 2010, pp. 23-24)

I now move to a consideration of the problem of representation in research in which: “The animating concern behind it, [is] the concern for violating the otherness of the other, [this] is a legitimate response to a civilisation that had for too long indiscriminately pursued and violently imposed sameness” (Cohn, 2006, p. 39). How does one create text that allows for this understanding of meaning that does not violate the ‘other’?

Through representation, domination occurs where people’s imagined selves are created by others.

The principal mode of political domination is representation, ... the generic process of subsuming the particular under the general. ... domination is not reducible to aggression. ... On the contrary, it is an operation characterized chiefly by “speaking for others” or “representing others to themselves”—that is, by manufacturing images of, or constructing identities for, individuals and groups. (Jun, 2012, pp. 127-128)

4.3.3 Labelling, Patronising and Focalising Representation

In this study, I am primarily concerned with processes of domination at work in the act of representation. First, those practices that create an image of the people that participated in the project, what Cohn (2006) called ‘labelling representation’.

Secondly, the practice of speaking on behalf of others ‘patronising representation’.

Thirdly, the analytic practice of limiting the scope of the described reality when choosing aspects of peoples’ stories and lived reality in the presentation—choosing to include or exclude material in the thesis—that is ‘focalising representation’.

The act of labelling representation takes away from people their right to describe themselves, and an imaginary self is externally created. Also labelling representation, where it aims for universal description of those being identified, creates an essentialised or normative identity or type—against which individuals can be compared or authenticated.

Labelling representation becomes the authoritative image and any person who does not fit that image loses their right to self-identify (hooks, 1984). Maddie Clark (2014) described this in relation to Aboriginal authentic identity, “Anyone from a marginalised background can tell you that representation is important” (Clark, 2014, p. np). If idealised types are created around Aboriginal identity, it excludes people from being able to identify with their culture if they do not fit the ‘type’. This is where, Aboriginal people can be ‘unmade’. Not a ‘real-Aborigine’, because of any signifier that is given primacy in the essential notions of a culture, skin tone, eye colour, income, social status, and sexuality. All of these are used against Aboriginal people in creating an authentic essentialised character where Aboriginal people become ‘unmade’.

The hypostatisation, the making of the concept of what it is to be an Aboriginal person into a reality, in this case of what is an Aboriginal person, has implications for subjective formation of the individual. “The labelled object may even respond by internalising and enacting its label” (Cohn, 2006, p. 41). I will return to this process of subjective identity formation later in this thesis.

In order to give marginalised peoples voices amplitude, it is necessary not to mute the tones and variations found in these voices. Difference needs to be represented in social research rather than seeking essentialised sameness. As Joe Kincheloe & Peter McLaren (1998) stated, “Traditional notions of community often privilege unity over diversity” (p. 275). Yet it is in diversity, those singularities, that the richness of life is realised. By aiming to present the variety of views voiced by people in the research process, researchers can avoid essentialising and creating limiting universal constructions of identity for others.

Patronising representation, the talking on behalf of others, is particularly germinal to this study. I have discussed this previously in Chapter 3 and in the introduction to this chapter in how it has shaped my approach to representing the information shared by the fathers who participated in this study. It is also important when later I consider the dominant, and dominantly negative discourses pertaining to Aboriginality and most notably how settler society represents, or speaks on behalf of the ‘subaltern’ (Spivak, 1988).

In the context of this study, this is especially noticeable during debates around Aboriginal male violence and the federal government intervention into Aboriginal child protection in the Northern Territory in how government speaks on behalf of Aboriginal women and children (McGlade, 2012; Motta, 2016). This is discussed in detail in 5.4.3 The Northern Territory Emergency Response (the Intervention).

Focalising representation comes with an inherent constraint on research involving social interaction as it delimits the boundary line of social reality that is included in ‘the rich’ description of participants’ lives.

The research act of interview transcription itself can be understood as focalising representation, how literal a transcription is it, does the transcription include all the ‘umms’ and ‘arhs’, pauses and tenor of the voice? As these aspects of language are part of how we try and convey meaning in conversation, what is obviously also lost is the visual expression, shifts in posture and so forth that also illuminate emotions (Leffers, 2012).

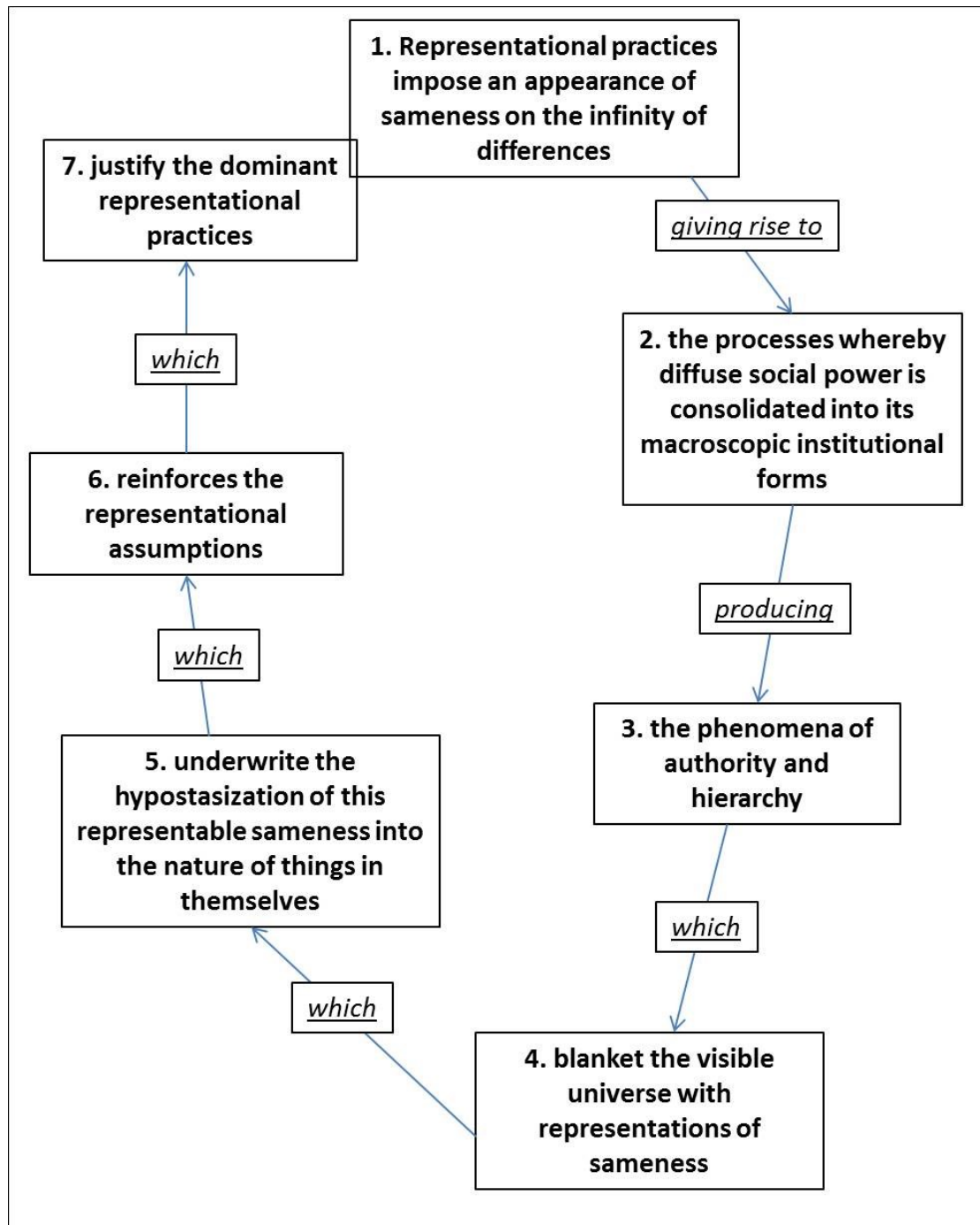
As previously discussed, through an awareness of difference, multiplicity and singularity, anarchist theorists can aim to resist the tendency to give primacy to any one form of social relationship as being the determinant of others, sensitising the researcher to complexity within as well as between social relations (Ben-Moshe et al., 2009; Day, 2005; hooks, 1984). This promotes an expansion of our consciousness around factors that influence social realities and subjectivity. Therefore the study becomes one of “an exploration of social positioning, rather than viewing participants as representatives of a group” (Chadderton, 2012, p. 371).

4.3.4 Anarchist ecological model of Representation

As researchers cannot avoid creating representation, it is important they avoid the problematic nature of closed representational cycles (Figure 4.1) (Cohn, 2006). The foreclosing of escape or questioning inherent in the closed form of the cycle is an essentialising normative process. In place of the closed model, an anarchist hermeneutics—as we read interview transcripts and a thesis in research – needs to reflect a dynamic, developmental ‘ecological model’ of representation.

Figure 4.1

A problematic closed representational cycle.



After Cohn 2006 p 51

Cohn (2006) used the term ‘ecological model of hermeneutics’ to describe the process of representing dynamism: in how representation has a past, from which it develops, and has within it, unknown future potentialities. Considering interview transcription—as text, people discuss their background ideas about being, and in the process lay out

values and goals. An ecological developmental reading of the ‘text’ of the interview avoids a static ethnographic present. It allows for multiple (conscious or unconscious) subjectivities being present, and the choosing from a range of options for self-representation. People reflect during their interview on those factors that have led to their behaviours and how they choose to represent themselves during the interview. Within the interview space, multiple representations and expectations are expressed.

As Heroux (2010) observed, “Every representation is partial at best, distorted, perverse—including self-representation. We do not always give the best or rather only representations of ourselves” (p. 25). Instead of seeing participants contradicting themselves—if they present different views on their experiences—rather this approach allows for consideration of how they draw upon multiple representations (in this study of fatherhood and masculinity) to illustrate their subjective selves (Varga-Dobai, 2012), often while attempting to portray a stable identity (Avery-Natale, 2010).

Similarly, an ecological approach to developing the written thesis, as text, recognises the focus and aims change over time during the ‘life’ of the thesis. While formative factors may continue to exert influence, new ideas and experiences during the research act to cause developmental changes in direction—analysis or research question (discussed in the Introduction). Whether within a paradigm of the research act as a career path—or considering it one of creating useful community knowledge; how this research (in various written forms) may develop invites an ever-present reading (and rereading) of the text. “In short, we hold that an *actual* text conditions its multiple *potential* meanings for different readers in different times and places” (Cohn, 2006, p. 88).

Highlighting anarchist feminist Voltairine de Cleyre’s (1866-1912) call for a double reading of texts, in *Literature the Mirror of Man*, and to “acquire the habit of reading twice, or at least with a double intent”, (de Cleyre in Cohn, 2006, p. 88), Cohn takes this developmental, ecological approach to include the role of the reader. If the text is to have in it both its past and its future options, then reading of the text will encompass this textual review. The doubling of reading means critically reading the

text for the meaning being presented by the author, whether as interviewee (from transcript) or the researcher (for thesis). The first reading is about the meaning, those representations made in the text by the author and our understanding of those meanings presented. This is a listening and sympathetic reading. The second, the re-reading, the doubling, is to read behind the text. What is the background that is being utilised to justify the representation presented, and what information is being included and what seems to be excluded? This reading involves critical thinking about ‘what interests the author’ (Cohn, 2006, p. 89). The first reading captures our attention to guide us through the narrative presented. The second critical reading asks if there is enough knowledge of the author’s view to understand their conclusions and what information is missing or what alternative view could be gleaned from what is presented. What focalising representation has occurred? This is critical reading that occurs during and after the research, the research itself (as text) is developmental. Thus representation(s), positionality and subjectivity(ies) are represented in the hermeneutic study of the interview (as text) and encouraged in the reading of the text (as thesis).

4.3.5 Positionality and subjectivity in research

Having a critical understanding of power, how people represent themselves or are represented by others and how power resides in social relations, requires, I believe, researchers to look at how this relates to them as researchers. For, in our relations with the people we work with—how they may see us and they see themselves—the researcher’s positionality and the research itself contains power relationships.

As researchers, we must understand something of ourselves in order to attempt this task. This understanding goes deeper than questioning motivations for doing research. It needs to include an ability to be reflective about our position in relation to others and social structures. Being “conscious of the significant role of positionality in informing one’s analytical place of departure” (Malott, 2012, p. 276).

Finally, as a researcher who has been brought up to have access to western knowledge and the power that goes with that in our society, I am conscious that I have a privileged position in our society. As someone who identifies as a cisgender male, non-Aboriginal/settler, enabled and heterosexual, I also recognise how power

relations around gender, whiteness, ableism and sexuality create beneficial circumstances within the society that, whether or not I wish to take these up, exist embedded in social relations because they create and recreate the context of those (power) relationships.

D. Soyini Madison (2012) stated that this understanding of our position makes claims to critically evaluate social relations more robust.

Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing dominating power. A concern for positionality is sometimes understood as “reflexive ethnography”: it is a “turning back” on ourselves. (p. 77)

However, Charlotte Chadderton (2012) cautioned that, “just being reflexive about how one is complicit in the oppression of others does not make this oppression excusable or acceptable” (p. 368). Being aware does not give us a ‘get out of jail free card’ when it comes to traversing the terrain of inequitable power relationships within the research process. Researchers need to confront and deal with these power relationships.

Post-structural critical perspective recognises power as being innate to discourse creation and research acts (Day, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Varga-Dobai, 2012). Foucault argued this is where the researcher (intellectual),

is rather to struggle against those forms of power where he is both instrument and object: in the order of “knowledge,” “truth,” “consciousness,” and “discourse.” So it is that theory does not express, translate, or apply a praxis; it is a praxis ... A struggle against power, a struggle to bring power to light and open it up wherever it is most invisible and insidious. (Foucault in Lotringer, 1989/1996, p. 75)

Therefore, while I aim as a critical theorist to show how power relations exist in social constructions, I understand I exercise power in attempting that activity. This moves me, as researcher, away from a research process that tries to remove power relations from the research process to one that recognises power and finds ways of ensuring that this is represented.

Power needs to be represented in as transparent manner as possible in research. In my positioning as researcher in this study, I seek to do this in conjunction with the people I work with. I am located in relationship to someone else. These ‘other’ people also have opinions and views about me that are reflected in how they engage with the research process (or not) and what is said, or not said, as part of that process. They will have views of me as a settler/non-Aboriginal person. These may be based upon prior experiences with settler/non-Aboriginal people, with me individually or other institutional experience, education, research or other settler power structures (hooks, 2009). This will affect how people talk about their lives, what they say may have different meaning than that which I am acculturated to interpret. How they choose to represent themselves is in part formed by the act of participation in the research moment. There may be issues not shared with me because of internal community understandings, including but not limited to, relations/tensions/alliances, or because there are social silences surrounding cultural, or worldviews that I am not privy to as non-initiated and settler male.

How I question and decentre whiteness (Chadderton, 2012; Hitchcock & Flint, 1997/2015; Kincheloe, 1999)—meaning those values accepted as normative values within our colonial culture—and to what extent I critically evaluate my own experiences and cultural values in the project, contributes to the making of transparency within the research process.

Madison (2012) described this relationship between positionality and subjectivity as being connected but not the same.

(Ethnographic) positionality is not identical to subjectivity. Subjectivity is certainly within the domain of positionality, but positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or subjective selves. Instead, we attend to how our subjectivity in relation to the *Other* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of the *Other*. We are not simply subjects, but we are subjects in dialogue with the *Other*. We understand that our subjectivity is an inherent part of research, but in critical ethnography it is not my exclusive experience—that is autobiography, travel writing, or memoir (or what some people call autoethnography). I contend that critical

ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the *Other(s)*, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the *Other's* world. (p. 99)

We cannot write ourselves out, we are always there, and we must find honest ways of writing ourselves in. This writing of ourselves in must not be, as a researcher, at the cost of the people for whom we work. I have attempted to constrain my presence in the thesis to these introductory chapters to avoid the thesis becoming auto-ethnographic or to project my own experience onto 'others'. My presence in the interview moments is recognised in the interview transcript, as obviously my interactions with those participants had a role in shaping the conversation and narrative. I believe it is important to be open and transparent when attempting to create meaning with other people.

In attempting to create meaning I accept that I am dealing with complexity and that, as researcher, I cannot, and probably should not, expect that I can entirely unravel this complexity because of its dynamic nature. "Further, critical researchers understand that individual identity and human agency form such a chaotic knot of intertwined articulations that no social theorist can ever completely disentangle them" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 276). What can be disentangled is how individuals represent their experiences. The focus of this study is to understand how these fathers relate their experiences within their social relationships.

Categorising people for research purposes is only ethically defensible if the focus of the study is not their ethnicity (or indeed, gender, disability), but rather their experiences of the ways in which they are positioned in social structures, in order to better understand the process by which inequalities are maintained. (Chadderton, 2012, p. 372)

Hence, a method for partial disentanglement starts to suggest itself.

Philip Salzman (2002) critiqued reflexivity in ethnography—which is relevant to other strategies of inquiry.

The way to improve ethnographic research is, thus, not for the solitary researcher to delve within him or herself, or to make him—or herself the subject of the account, but to replace solitary research with collaborative, team research, in which the perspectives and insights of each researcher can be challenged and tested by the others. (p. 812)

This moves us from a process of expecting, “the data to emerge from the interview” (Chadderton, 2012, p. 374)—where it runs the risk of being heard only by the cultural vocabulary of the white/settler researcher—to having meanings interrogated by a range of perspectives, who may not all agree, so that multiple voices are raised to be heard. By placing myself in dialogue with senior Aboriginal males/men there exists a greater possibility that, while I attempt to disentangle threads of experience within the research process, we can jointly create meaning from this which can be useful and have meaning to the community from which, and within which, the research experience exists.

In the vein of Foucault, then, researchers do not “struggle for some ‘insight’ or ‘realization’...but...struggle to undermine and take power side by side with those who are fighting, and not off to the side trying to enlighten them” (Foucault in Lotringer, 1989/1996, p. 75). They seek to provide “a ramified, penetrative perception of the present a topological and geological survey of the battlefield” (Foucault, 1980, p. 62). And, like Day (2005), the researcher seeks the role of ‘relayer’, taking these perceptions, ideas and passing them around to see new relays of ideas being created by those who create their own subjectivity.

Jacqueline Lasky (2011) argued,

Where we stand and whom we stand with, what we say and who we say it to, is important. Given current political economies and sociocultural registries it’s impossible to disavow our privilege, rather, it’s essential to utilize our privilege towards changing these very economies and registries (p. 36).

I believe this standpoint regarding research acts is important given the concerns I have outlined regarding the manner with which current policies impact upon the freedom of Aboriginal fathers to create their own positive subjectivity around fatherhood.

4.3.6 Validity

How can this research be considered as having valid findings? I have addressed this in one way above. Are my findings valid in the eyes of the community the research serves? Is this valid research because it contributes something of value to the community? These issues, from an anarchist research perspective are critically important aspects of validity, linked back to the prefigurative nature of the research act (Burdon & Martel, 2017; Purkis, 2004).

However, the local community also demands that this work is internally coherent and that what I conclude as written findings can be justified from the various sources I have included: interviews, discourse genealogies, and observations. Validity in this discourse based study, rests in part upon the rigour I can show in my understanding of the philosophical and methodological cohesion of my approach, and that the methods are appropriate (Carter & Little, 2007; Kincheloe, 2005). This can be addressed by embracing the characterisation of validity presented by Mirka Koro-Ljungberg and Thomas Greckhamer (2005),

(that) doing qualitative research, be it based on an ethnographic or any other approach, should be justified, theoretically and epistemologically situated, and exemplified. Readers have to be able to know how the author claims to know and how the author is producing his/her arguments. The ‘writing technologies of the subject’ or writing apparatuses must be made more visible (see Clough, 1992). We emphasize that readers do not need to agree with the author(s) nor with the author’s ways of knowing. However, communication related to the research process is essential in order for readers to follow the research process and the author’s argument structure. We also believe that disagreements between the author and the reader or between texts mainly present discursive differences that should be acknowledged. This would mean that readers ought to accept the absence of other desired texts, positions, and interpretations while reading and analyzing produced scientific critiques. (p. 302)

I have characterised these main points to check how this research is to be considered valid. If someone else, having read this thesis, accessed the same interviews,

considered my discourse analysis and saw my field notes, they would understand why and how I have created this interpretation:

- Because the theoretical perspective that has informed my approach is openly stated.
- Because the process of information collection is obvious.
- Because the interpretive tools (social theory and methodological analysis) used to process how the information has been read is unambiguously present.
- How I undertook the reading and analysis to make this interpretation is transparent.
- They would understand through what community mechanism this interpretation may be considered validated.
- That all of these processes are internally consistent with the stated methodology.

As Koro-Ljungberg and Greckhamer (2005) noted, there is no requirement that the reader would agree with my interpretation. Another person's theoretical lens, utilising different philosophical or methodological approaches, may lead to a different or varied interpretation. There is no single way of creating an interpretation of social reality. Therefore, while an outside reader cannot read or listen to these interviews, I believe what I present as my findings stand up to this 'validity' test.

4.4 Methods

The call for a pragmatist approach to choice of methods and practice in order to ensure that we can do useful research is echoed by many researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe, 2001; Patton, 2015; Tracey, 2013). "There is no one way of doing interpretive, qualitative inquiry. We are all interpretive bricoleurs" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. xiii). The expression 'bricoleur' describes researchers who draw upon aspects of different research approaches, use multiple methods, and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2011; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005).

This is not to deny that particular methods of data collection and analysis are primarily, or historically, associated with particular research approaches (Kincheloe &

McLaren, 1998) or that some approaches and methods may be incommensurable due to paradigmatic conflict (Tracey, 2013).

In this study, I used multi-methodological research approaches. Research methodologies can be conceptualised as the strategies for approaching research—the justification of the methods, not the methods themselves (Carter & Little, 2007; Salmon, 2003). I have therefore adapted research methods for information and data collection, and analysis, as the study developed to meet the particular needs of myself as researcher and the particular context of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe, 2005).

From an anarchist perspective, seeking to capture the diversity of understandings that these Aboriginal fathers have of their experiences, in part this can be “honoured through [the use of] flexible guidelines. There is not a set procedure that must be followed” (Norum 2008 p739 in Patton, 2015, p. 123). “The methods of qualitative inquiry now stand on their own as reasonable ways to find out what is happening” (Patton, 2015, p. 154).

4.4.1 Aboriginal Male Reference Group (AMRG)

For the study, a locally based Aboriginal Male Reference Group (AMRG) was recruited, comprising Aboriginal fathers who brought a range of experiences to the project including their own involvement in their children’s schooling, senior cultural knowledge and extensive knowledge of their local community.

I established the AMRG using my personal contacts in the community. Some senior men had been involved in a previous study with me others were personal contacts. Cognisant of the various levels of inter-community relations, not always enabling of close working relationships, I targeted my approaches to people who I knew could work together. Each was a father and expressed strong interest in the project and the potentially valuable contribution it could make to the local community. A number of group and one-on-one meetings were held over the course of the project. AMRG members were not paid for their time, although at times I provided lunch or paid for refreshments. Early in the project, one of my co-supervisors attended two such meetings on visits to Alice Springs. Three group meetings were held in the first 18

months of the project. Due to a number of disruptive issues during the life course of the project, delays caused by my personal health issues, COVID 19, and the mobility and the health issues of AMRG members, group meetings were not continued. Instead, I maintained one-to-one contact with participating members and discussed issues as they arose checking my interpretations. I received critical feedback throughout the duration of the project.

All information provided to Aboriginal males about the project, an *Information Sheet*, *Consent Form*, and *consultation theme list* were designed in consultation with, and informed by, the AMRG. Individuals also reviewed presentations on the project, as they were prepared. For example, preliminary findings regarding what recruitment methods had been most effective along with participants attitudes and experiences of fatherhood were, after discussion with the AMRG, presented firstly to the 7th National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Male Health Convention Brisbane (*October 2013*) and then to the La Trobe Faculty of Health Sciences Post-Graduate Research festival (*December 2013*).

Meetings with the AMRG members were an opportunity to share analysis and findings with the local community. I consulted with AMRG members during my analysis to check that how I understood the conversations I had with the fathers resonated with their understanding of what a local Aboriginal male may have meant. This was important to ensure that context was not being lost through my non-Aboriginal/settler analytic lens. One member of the group was very active in supporting me when I was trying to locate fathers during the recruitment stage. Without his local community knowledge, many (more) fruitless hours would have been spent trying to locate males within a highly mobile population.

By working with the AMRG, where findings were discussed, useful and meaningful research outcomes were created, that resonated with their community experiences.

4.4.2 Ethics

The Chief Executive Officer of the local Aboriginal community-controlled health service, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (hereafter referred to as Congress as it's known locally), gave support for the project's development, recognising its

potential value to the service (D. Ah Chee, personal communication- support letter, October 10, 2012). This was an important element in grounding the project in the local community and meeting long standing demands that Aboriginal community organisations be part of the development of research occurring in their area (National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party, 1989). There were also strong and obvious linkages between some members of the AMRG and Congress that further strengthened community recognition of the project and assisted in developing participant trust in the project.

I chose a local primary school as potential site from which to identify and recruit participants. Based on my own experience with the school as a parent and tutor, I knew there were a number of Aboriginal children at the school and that the school administration might be receptive to assisting with my project. In 2010, I started discussion with the school principal and council. The project was positively received by both the principal and council chairperson and an in-principle support letter was provided. Following the election of a new school council (2011) I gave a presentation to the school council and the project was again given in-principle support. Later, other forms of assistance were provided and these are outlined later in this chapter. I was invited by the principal to give a presentation on Aboriginal male health status to her staff in mid-2012.

Institutional ethics approval was gained from the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee (CAHREC) in September 2012, project number HREC-12-93. The La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee accepted the CAHREC approval in November 2012⁴⁹. Concurrently an application was made to the Department of Education and Children's Services NT Government for permission to work with the school and be based upon school premises, this approval was also received in November 2012.

Prior to commencing interviews, I developed a *Directory of Health and Social Services for Aboriginal Males in central Australia* for Central Australian Aboriginal

⁴⁹ See Appendix A Ethics Approvals

Congress. I recognised that I needed such a resource in case I had to refer a participant to a service to assist with any issues that may have arisen during recruitment or as a consequence of discussions during an interview. When it was apparent that such a referral list did not exist, Congress requested that I assist in developing one. Services were listed under the following nine categories: Drop-in centres, Health, Counselling (non-financial), Financial counselling, Youth, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Emergency Accommodation, Carers support and Training & Employment. A full version was distributed to twenty-two organisations representing over thirty-four different programs and services.

4.4.3 Ethics in practice: people know each other in a closely bound community

As discussed in Chapter 2, in Alice Springs many Aboriginal families are large and are interrelated through marriage. People know each other through social organisations, have grown up together, have ceremonial connection, have worked together or live in very close proximity. In such a closely bound community maintaining anonymity during the project, and the non-identification in reporting for participants and AMRG members, was difficult and brought particular ethical challenges. This occurred at a number of points during the research, including interviewee recruitment, selection and during participation. Therefore, while participants have been ascribed aliases and the content of their interviews kept confidential, there are a number of factors which could arise in a close community that can compromise anonymity. I have tried to limit this possibility while not creating a ‘fabricated composite dialogue’ (Markham, 2012).

I have endeavoured to avoid identifying the school from which participants were recruited in order to protect everyone’s anonymity. However, people familiar with either my family or the local community will likely be able to identify the school from descriptions necessary to understand the context of the project. Likewise, the presentation of information on their life courses given by participants during interviews may make them identifiable to locals reading this thesis or papers that arise from it. All participants were aware of this from pre-participation discussions and the *Project Information Sheet*. In a more immediate sense their participation in the project was apparent to those people who assisted with recruitment. This included the male

school Aboriginal & Islander Education Worker (AIEW) and the senior Aboriginal man who assisted with finding and introducing me to fathers. Staff at the school, with whom I liaised, also knew I had access to a room to conduct interviews and the fathers who were interviewed on the premises.

A local Aboriginal woman working at the school, who previously worked as a legal secretary at the Aboriginal legal service, offered help with transcribing recorded interviews. This was a welcome offer as, due to an existing repetitive strain injury (RSI), I was struggling with the transcribing process.⁵⁰ As many participants knew her, I checked with each person at the end of their interview to ask if they would be okay with her transcribing their interviews. Each participant when asked was happy with her to do so, confident in her ethics that she would keep their confidentiality. As one participant put it, “she’s a good person”. She transcribed three interviews before being unable to continue due to other commitments. All other interviews were transcribed by a commercial transcribing service in Adelaide.

At the first meeting, one of the then four members of the AMRG asked that his involvement in the group be kept anonymous and that the AMRG session not be recorded. I had asked if I could record the session so I could have an accurate record of ideas for myself. The reason was his concern was that as a result of my activity there may be some community repercussions that could come back on the AMRG members, and they could be seen to be responsible for my actions, including what I wrote. Except when a member of the group has decided to be openly associated with the project, such as helping to recruit, anonymity of members has been maintained.

4.4.4 Participant selection criteria

A purposeful selection criterion was adopted for participant selection (Creswell, 2013, 2014). The criterion for participant selection was that they were an Aboriginal male with a child with whom they fulfilled a parenting role while the child attended the school. The participant did not have to be the biological parent and could be an

⁵⁰ Permission was given by my supervisors to have the interviews externally transcribed due to my RSI recurring while trying to transcribe. All transcribing service providers signed the La Trobe University transcribing confidentiality agreement.

extended family member who had the primary male caring role for that child. The child could have been of any gender.

Originally, a single school was chosen to provide a constant setting from which Aboriginal fathers would draw their experiences and examples. However, it became apparent after the first three interviews that fathers had children over a number of different stages of their lives and they wanted to relate their experiences with all of these children, some of whom did not attend this school or were now post school age. Some fathers were relatively new to town and so their experiences of their children and schools were mainly being drawn from other schools in other places.

In addition, during the project a number of staff changes occurred at the school, which changed the nature of the school interactions with parents. This included the appointment of a new principal just before I started interviews and the complete turn over in Aboriginal liaison staff during that first year. The implications of these changes are discussed later in Chapter 6.

4.4.5 Participant recruitment and sample size

At the commencement of the study in-school enrolment records were used to identify Aboriginal males in a parenting role of children at the school and their contact details. This work was undertaken by the male AIEW.

Table 4.1 shows the school enrolment data⁵¹ recorded 154 children identified as being of Aboriginal descent from 114 different families. Of these there were no male contact recorded for 68 children or 42 families (44% of children or 37% of families). The significance of under-identification of fathers in enrolment details held by the school is discussed in Section 6.2.4.

Of those Aboriginal children with a father listed on their enrolment details, Aboriginal staff identified that 16 children had non-Aboriginal fathers. The remaining 70 children represented 59 families with an Aboriginal father or Aboriginal male noted on enrolment as taking a fathering role.

⁵¹ Accessed February 2013.

Table 4.1*Father Status of enrolled Aboriginal identified children February 2013*

Father enrolment data status	Number of children enrolled	Number of families
No male contact recorded	68	42
Identified as non-Aboriginal father	16	13
Identified Aboriginal father	70	59
total	154	114

Recruitment of fathers took place between February and November 2013 with an initial aim of recruiting up to twenty participants, which would have represented 34% of Aboriginal fathers. This sample target was to be recruited either as individual interviewees or as participants in a group discussion.⁵²

Direct recruitment, either through one-to-one personal contact or via cold calls on the phone, was used for initial contact. I attempted to call all identified fathers, sometimes leaving recorded phone messages or messages with family members. Often phones were no longer connected. After phone calls, house visits were undertaken to introduce myself or to leave information with household members if fathers were not home. A senior Aboriginal man, a member of the AMRG, accompanied me on a number of occasions to Town Camps. His local knowledge helped in locating some fathers and his role as interlocutor encouraged trust in other family members to help locate fathers and for some fathers to participate. One-to-one follow-up contact sometimes occurred through local community networking, such as at the sports oval at children's Saturday football, through other family members or chance meetings at local shops. While undertaking observational work on morning drop-off behaviour, fathers were approached in the school car park.

⁵² I had initially envisaged that some group discussion may have been a suitable way for fathers to share stories in a less intensive setting than a one-to-one interview. No group session took place and no fathers expressed a desire to be involved in a group discussion when this was offered.

Indirect forms of communication included a letter from the principal informing fathers of the project, a flyer and information in the school newsletter. The principal's letter was sent home to all Aboriginal families with each enrolled Aboriginal child and was often included in any package of information requested by fathers contemplating joining the project. In May I created a flyer that was sent home with children and used in the school newsletter and as information to hand out to males around the school to promote the project. Also in May, with the assistance of the male AIEW, we organised a BBQ attended by ten Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal fathers, where the project was promoted.

All fathers recruited to the project were through my approaches, there were no contacts initiated by fathers. Indirect contact, i.e. school newsletters and letters from the school, although useful to give out when having personal contact, did not have direct recruitment value, although it is hard to measure what impacts they may have had when or if they were read at home prior to any direct contact.

Of the potential fathers identified from school data, Table 4.2 shows that of the 59 fathers identified as potential participants, eighteen (30%) moved from the school during the period of recruitment. Another thirteen (22%) proved nearly impossible to locate or contact. This characterisation of the absent Aboriginal fathers is discussed in the findings of the thesis. Of the remaining 28 males, I was able to recruit twelve and only had five direct refusals. Although by avoiding contact or putting off participating some fathers may well have been exercising their right not to participate (McCoy, 2004). It is noted that there can be hesitancy on behalf of males to participate in potential personal interviews (Sopcak, Mayan, & Skrypnek, 2015). Whether the other eleven who expressed varying degrees of enthusiasm to participate would have participated is unknown.

The recruitment strategy was time intensive involving multiple phone contacts and direct efforts to locate and provide face-to-face information to fathers as can be seen from Table 4.2.

Table 4.2*Recruitment outcomes and number of contact events.*

Recruitment status	Number of fathers	Average number of contact efforts per individual	Modal number of contact efforts for individuals	Least number of contact efforts for an individual	Most number of contact efforts for an individual
Interviewed	12	4.25	1 & 3	1	8
Agreed to participate had trouble finding a suitable time	3	7.6	-	5	12
Some contact, uncommitted considered as unlikely	8	8.25	5 & 6	3	13
Couldn't contact	13	1*	1	1	5
Moved from school	18	>1**	1	0**	4
Declined	5	4.6	1	1	11
Total	59				

Note: * Letter sent home. ** Some families left school before a letter could be sent home.

Of those who participated, I knew three through previous work contacts and one from my son's junior football team. I knew two sons of other fathers—one was in the same age cohort at the school as my son and the other had previously been in his football team. These contacts were not explicitly brought up in the interviews. I allowed the fathers to take the initiative if they wished to acknowledge our mutual relationships. The first three interviews were with people I knew, this was probably why they were easy to recruit.

The rationale for the initial target of twenty was that it would allow for a range of different fathers' experiences to be captured, whilst not generating too large a database of reported experiences to manage. As this was not a grounded theory design the issue of data saturation was not considered, instead the need to do justice to representing the fathers' experiences and to manage the complexity of experience being presented was paramount. Utilising Patton's (2015, p. 314) practical purposeful sampling approach, this target number was flexible as new issues emerged for both the richness of the data, the ability to recruit and my ability to maintain contact with participants.

After ten months, I had twelve fathers participating in the project. There were other fathers who had expressed an interest in the project, but it was proving difficult to organise suitable times to interview them. The remaining potential fathers identified by the school were not able to be contacted. At this point I decided that sufficient in-depth material had been collected from which valuable descriptive findings could be presented.

4.4.6 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants. This mode of interview allowed for participants to raise issues when and in ways they found appropriate. This approach also allowed me, as the researcher, to reveal my own experiences with participants, thus assisting in building a better understanding on behalf of the participants of my interest in the research. All interviews, with the consent of participants, were electronically recorded and later transcribed. Where practical, depending on their availability and willingness, participants were interviewed two times during the project. Participants were not paid for their participation in the project. All participants were given copies of the *Information Sheet and consultation question theme list* prior to the interview. These were also provided again just before the interview commenced and *Consent forms* were signed and the right to *Withdrawal consent forms* were given. Participants were immediately given a copy of their signed *consent form* after the interview, or this was given to them as soon as a copy could be made.

The thematic questions used in the interviews included:

- how would they measure their own wellbeing,
- their views on their roles as fathers,
- how did they feel others perceive their roles as fathers,
- how did they see their children affecting their own personal wellbeing,
- did they place value on education, whether for themselves or for their children,
- what forms of education did they value,
- what role did they see for themselves in their child's schooling,
- what interactions did they have with their children within a school context and

- what were the enabling or barrier issues to their involvement with their children in the school context?

Following the interview a transcribed copy of the interview was sent to the interviewees where possible, (being a highly mobile population some interviewees could not be contacted), for their corrections and additional comments.

First round interviews were held at the school (7 interviews) or the father's home (5), whichever was their preference. All interviews were held at times suitable to the participant, all were on weekdays and for some of those in work, during their lunchtime. Others had flexible work arrangements just before school ended, and one after school. This latter interview had the school aged children present elsewhere in the house, and one other home interview had younger children in the house. One interview, at the father's request, had his partner present.

4.4.7 Observations

I undertook a range of observation activities during the period that I was interviewing fathers at the school. Some were linked to events and others were opportunistic. All observations were recorded in diary notes.

My structured observations were aimed to collect data on fathers' activities at the school. I chose two spaces of interaction. Firstly, I collected information on the number of Aboriginal males who were dropping off children at the 'kiss and go' vehicle drop off point. While this process was open to a degree of error, if I did not correctly identify fathers as Aboriginal, the aim was to see if there were broad patterns that could be identified. This also provided me with the opportunity to talk with fathers, who were walking through the car park into the school, about the project as a recruitment strategy.

During this time, I attended school assemblies and observed the numbers of parents who came, how long they stayed and other behaviours. This material was also useful in conversation with fathers during interviews.

I organised with the male AIEW a lunchtime BBQ for fathers, where the project was discussed as well as other issues that school staff wanted to raise. The aim was to hold

multiple BBQs. However, due to staff turnover and the principal's interest in turning this into an after-school social event, allowing alcohol, further BBQs did not occur.

In addition, I was an active parent in the school community and had previously been a literacy tutor. While I was at the school organising interviews, I had many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal/settler staff have conversations with me about how to get Aboriginal fathers more involved in the school. These interactions were also diarised, as were discussions with the AIEWs about the school and the project's progress and issues arising within the school space and recruitment.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the need to have a methodological approach that is able to deal with complexity in people's lives (including the interests of the researcher), not a closed methodology that shapes experience according to a theory. I have outlined key elements of an anarchist methodological praxis based on the key principles of concern about domination in social relationships and prefigurative practices—including how to address power issues in research, particularly the issues of representation, positionality, and subjectivity.

I have described why I chose an anarchist hermeneutic discursive approach to analyse the interview narratives and present my findings. I have argued this methodology endeavours to address the issues of representation and positionality but also validity in this research.

I defined discourse from a poststructuralist view, as describing the ways in which socially constructed daily beliefs (as truths) are reproduced to create or reinforce discursive practices. Discourse includes ways of representing people, ideas, knowledges, constructions of reality and subjectivities. Discourse as discursive practices includes text, social and embodied practices and knowledge formations. How people relate to these discourses, both in reflecting upon them, resisting them and reconstituting them in their daily practice in turn create the subjectification of individuals. Discursive practices are both constitutive and subjectifying.

I have shown how discourse analysis will be applied in this thesis in analysing the text of the interviews. Interviews were undertaken as the central source of information provided by the fathers for the research project. I have described how discursive practices are referenced during the interviews and how these may be present in those representations being made by the interviewee, and potentially myself, in creating this representation in the thesis.

In my discussion of representation, positionality, and subjectivity I have placed the emphasis on how I will not avoid having my voice in conversation with the participants to ensure that the reader knows how material is being presented and where my voice, as well as the voice to others, are represented. Through dialogue with Aboriginal males—including the people interviewed, those who worked at the school, and importantly senior Aboriginal men and community leaders—I have aimed to create the greatest possibility to disentangle threads of experience within the research process. Thereby create meaning which can be useful and have meaning to the community from which, and within which, the research experience exists.

Finally, I have described the various methods chosen to collect and analyse the interview narratives to ensure congruence between methods and the methodology and integrity of the findings.

In the following chapter I explore the genealogies of the discourses being referenced in this study. I have followed a Foucauldian approach to examining the genealogy of discourses and discursive practices around fatherhood, masculinity, and particularly Aboriginal fatherhood in Australia.

Chapter 5. Aboriginal Fatherhood Discourse Genealogy

5.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, I have outlined the methodological and analytic approaches applied in this study and the social and cultural contexts of the research. In this chapter, I examine discourses and attendant literature(s) pertaining to Aboriginal fatherhood within these methodological, social, and cultural contexts. I have organised this chapter around genealogies of Aboriginal practices, settler discourses of masculinity and fathering/fatherhood and problematised colonial discourses.

I have chosen a Foucauldian genealogical (Foucault, 1995) approach to understanding how coercive discourses have evolved and function to affect practices of masculinity, fatherhood, and subjectivity formation. In this section, following Yawuru historian Shino Konishi (2011), I review historical and grey literature, contemporary media and academic writings which create modern discursive formations that describe Aboriginal males, and how these can be understood as deeply embedded colonial cultural complexes (Singer & Kaplinsky, 2010). In this approach I consider how these discourses shape relationships of power and are replicated and constitute present policies impacting upon Aboriginal fathers.

Critical feminist, decolonisation, and poststructuralist theorists emphasise the history of colonialism and gender formation in Australia as necessary requisites to understand how contemporary coercive discourses about Aboriginal masculinity formed, and entered Australia's cultural complexes regarding Aboriginal communities.

“Colonisation and patriarchy are interlocked and interwoven systems of oppression that subordinate and abuse Aboriginal men, women, and children alike, *although in differing ways* [emphasis added]” (McGlade, 2012, p. 95). In this approach, mutually enforcing relationships between colonialism and gender, including dominant discursive masculinity practices can be explored (Lugones, 2016; McGlade, 2012; Our Watch, 2018; Stanovsky, 2007), particularly how these inform current Aboriginal performative masculinities (M. Adams, 2006c; Konishi, 2011; Prehn, 2023; Robertson, 2000), including fatherhood.

Within social science frameworks fatherhood is predominately understood to be a social relationship. “Fatherhood is predicated on a biological act (procreation), the enactment of fatherhood is more social than biological and has even been asserted as primarily a ‘social intervention’” (Bartlett, 2004, p. 160). It is therefore important to remember not all biological fathers enact fatherhood post-partum, while others, for example step fathers, adoptive parents, uncles, brothers or grandfathers, take on this social role without being the biological parent (Astone & Peters, 2014; L. Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsley, & Dominelli, 2009). Fatherhood can therefore be understood as a social role, formed through both biological and gendered discourses and practices. Fatherhood is both a signifier (Whitehead, 2002) and resource (Pini & Conway, 2016) through which masculinity is enacted, and it is concurrently shaped by ideals of masculinity (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Pini & Conway, 2016).

I will now attend to exploring the complex social context of understanding Aboriginal fatherhood in contemporary central Australia in the following sections:

- 5.1 Gender and fatherhood in central Australian Aboriginal cultures: creation and reinforcement.
- 5.2 Settler based masculine and fatherhood discourse and subjectivities.
- 5.3 Genealogies of Aboriginal male and fatherhood discourses.
- 5.4 Contemporary Aboriginal fathers’ voices.

I have structured this chapter to commence with Aboriginal voices and to conclude with Aboriginal voices as a method to focus attention on those people about whom this thesis speaks.

5.2 Gender and fatherhood in central Australian Aboriginal cultures: creation and reinforcement

In the Introduction (Chapter 1), I discussed how the terms ‘man’ or ‘men’ are reserved for Aboriginal males who have passed through the ceremony of initiation. As men continue over years to engage in ceremonial law their power and knowledge increases and they are recognised by their community as being important bearers of cultural knowledge. *Wati* is the term, common to many central Australian languages, referring to these men and until a boy goes through this ritual he would not be considered an adult. The term ‘male’ would correctly be used to describe a non-initiated adult, ‘boy’ would usually be used only for children or teenagers not of an age, or just about to

enter into law. Each language group has a range of more precise terms to describe these varying states of cultural maturity (for Arrernte examples see Dobson & Henderson, 2013).

This section provides an overview of local Aboriginal cultural, masculine gender and fatherhood discourses and discursive practices. Recognising Yawuru lawyer Michael Dodson's (2002) observation, "these representations, these supposed 'truths' about us, our voices and our visions have been notably absent" (p. 4), I have therefore predominantly drawn upon published material from central Australian Aboriginal males. This is neither an anthropological study nor a study of Aboriginal men's cultural business, it is therefore limited to publicly accessible accounts of Aboriginal male's cultural and social practices and *Altyerre* stories.⁵³

How the world was formed and a person's position and relation to this, in central Australia, are the laws related to *Altyerre* and *Tnangkarr* (the time, beings and actual events of creation) which are the basis of Aboriginal law (Lechleitner, 2013).

Various described depending on language groups, the domains of *Walytja* (Family), *Ngurra* (Land) and *Kanyini* (connectedness) are vital components of Aboriginal identity and existence (A. Brown et al., 2012; McCoy, 2008; Rubuntja & Green, 2001). Arrernte elder MK Turner stated "Land, Story, Kinship and People hold everything together in sacredness" (Turner, 2017a).

It is from these domains of practices and relationships that central Australian Aboriginal men (and women) gain their identity, which is then enacted through daily life in accordance with these laws. Gender identity has important stages in life, which in addition to birth, are brought into being and empowered during ceremony (Lechleitner et al., 2018; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008).

Tjitji kiungkatja (young teenagers) like me have to be frightened of *nyiinka* (boy in ceremony stage) My father had told me all these things before at

⁵³ I have limited this literature to locally produced material to avoid generalisations about Aboriginal culture(s). While there may be many commonalities across Australia, regional and even language group estate cultural differences make generalisations open to challenge on the basis of essentialised distortions of living cultural values.

Wallatina.⁵⁴ I knew the rules about how to behave to *nyiinka* and to the men.
(Lester, 1995, p. 74)

From these teachings about behaviour, young boys can show they have learnt responsible and respectful behaviours in caring for others and following instructions (Lechleitner et al., 2018; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008).

Kinship systems in central Australia are complex in how people relate and understand their relationships across multiple generations (Rubuntja & Green, 2001). The terms ‘grannies’ and ‘brothers’ for example are used for both close relations, as in western families, but also for more distant relations of the same generation. The system of skin names inherited from your mother and father, codify who you in turn can marry ‘right way’ (Dobson & Henderson, 2013). Through these classificatory systems Aboriginal males know who they are related to, their position in society, who they are responsible to, and what they are responsible for (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008).

A single man who has been away hunting thinks about his family. ‘I should go back to the others, to where the old people are. Back to mother’s mother and her brothers and sisters, my two old relatives that are sisters-in-law to each other (my grandmother and my grandfather’s sister), my daddy, grandpa, mother and my auntie’. He heads into the single men’s camp. When he gets there he sits down in the camp. A person whom he calls nephew is there, it’s his mother’s mother’s sister’s daughter’s daughter’s son. His nephew is also his future father-in-law. He has a child, an adolescent girl who the single man is thinking about. ‘Her mother’s brother might give her away in marriage soon. The teenage girl is the daughter of my mother-in-law and my father-in-law, who is also my classificatory sister’s son. (T. K. Thompson, 2003, p. 16)

It is during ceremony from boyhood to manhood that marriage arrangements are made. Only when a man is deemed to be a “provider and maintainer of cultural civic(s)” that such right to marriage would occur (Lechleitner et al., 2018). This right however is governed by maintaining appropriate cultural behaviour.

(I as potential future father in law, induct my Jampardiyi/Thampartey, that I kill as a boy to transform into a man), with the rights to be married to my

⁵⁴ Aboriginal community in the NW South Australia, part of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands Trust.

daughter with all associated cultural roles and responsibilities to ensure the safety and welling being of my daughter and my grandchildren as my lineage, with respect to me and my wife for offering our daughter as a gift. If he was “beating up on my daughter, I would intervene and take my daughter away from the Jampardiyi/Thampartey because he is not respecting the cultural law and I can also break the cultural law and not give him, my daughters hand in traditional marriage... after all he is breaking the cultural law, and therefore, I would not be obligated to accommodate that cultural contract. (Lechleitner et al., 2018, p. 38)

It would be the right and responsibility of the bestowing father to intervene if his son-in-law should hurt his daughter, even to having the right to take the daughter away from her assailant. This description of parental obligation to intervene indicates family violence is not traditionally sanctioned. This is confirmed in a report by Pitjantjatjara⁵⁵ women.

Pitjantjatjara women interviewed on this matter gave an example of how the uninvited attentions or harassment of a man would be dealt with.

A woman was out gathering food and from behind a man stalked her and then grabbed hold of her. The woman was able to shake free of the man and ran back to her family to whom she reported the attack. The woman's brother or mother's brother then went after the man and speared him in the thigh (Nganinytja, translator L. Rive, Field Notes, Lloyd, J., 12 October 1992).

They said that a man could be put to death for rape or speared in the thigh, and if a man continued to sexually harass a woman he would certainly be put to death. Although women made distinctions on the nature of the assaults and the accompanying forms of punishment, the underlying issue remained that the assaults were serious and totally unacceptable. (Lloyd & Rogers, 1992, pp. 150-151)

In central Australia, males have responsibilities in traditional cultural practices to be the providers of large game and to feed family members and the community (Lechleitner et al., 2018). Certain cultural obligations occur through these systems.

⁵⁵ N.W. South Australia.

For example, a male may have to avoid or alternatively provide gifts of support to another person in their community (Dobson & Henderson, 2013).

From knowledge of customary law, Aboriginal males derive other codes of conduct to fulfil the embodiments of masculinity and responsible fatherhood. In the traditional Warlpiri telling of the Spotted Cat, a man hero protects his and others' children by changing shape into another animal to slay a man-eating giant. At the end of the story, after he slays the giant he returns to his family whom he has ensured are hidden from the giant. "He had destroyed that thing in the east. He went on to where he found his wife, the mother of his children. He took his children in his arms" (Tasman, 1994, p. 19). In another retelling, a man takes many wives, who he should not marry, 'wrong way wives', he kills any male offspring from these associations. But two of his wives sneak away with their sons, who when they are older, return and take retribution on the husband (Rockman, 1994). There is the story of the father who mistreats his children and in turn causes upheaval and retribution (Nampijinpa, 1994). In each of these retellings, when the law is broken, men from the community deliver retributive justice. This is not to say all stories are about men, but these Warlpiri stories capture how law provides a moral and social compass for generations of men to find their direction.

In addition, through enacting cultural and ceremonial business men have a pivotal role in maintaining social order (Lechleitner et al., 2018; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008). Western Aranda and Anmatjere researcher Kenneth Lechleitner (2018) describes this as the burden of responsibility being "part and parcel of being a man". That men take this role on with "gusto in teaching younger males...how to be a man of cultural responsibility", and how unfortunately this burden of responsibility has been taken away "and placed in the Westminster system of control" (p. 1).

5.3 Settler based masculine and fatherhood discourses and subjectivities

5.3.1. Genealogies of masculinity discourses

Compared to other areas of gender studies, a discursive approach is (still) relatively underutilised in studies of masculinity and fatherhood, where structuralist analysis is most commonly employed (Beasley, 2012; Berggren, 2014; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Petersen, 2003). In Critical Studies of Men and Masculinity (CSMM) and fatherhood, the pioneering and ongoing work of Raewyn Connell, particularly her structuralist theoretical framework of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ has become “omnipresent in CSMM scholarship” (Beasley, 2012, p. 753). More conservative approaches to gender relations, which can be grouped broadly as anti-feminist (Ashfield, 2007; Farrell, 1994; Macdonald, 2006; Macdonald & Crawford, 2002),⁵⁶ draw heavily from the essentially biologically based and determinant variants of Talcott Parson’s inspired Gender Role Theory (Parsons, 1955, 1961). Because of the pervasive nature of both structuralist hegemonic masculinity theory and gender role theory in contemporary discourse, I outline the genealogies of these dominant discourses to examine their presence in current imaginations of masculinity and fatherhood (Petersen, 2003; Whitehead, 2002).

During the era of social change in the 1970’s existing gender relations theories were opened to challenge by second wave feminist and later queer theories and activists (Hearn, 2004; Petersen, 2003). However, the study of masculinities (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985) and fathering has only developed more recently as a separate area of gender studies (Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014; Doucet & Lee, 2014; Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000). This allowed for men, their experiences, and behaviours, to be analysed as gendered beings rather than generic beings. Masculinity and gender relations became the lens through which to view their experience (Mankowski & Maton, 2010). Lupton & Barclay (1997) noted that for many years studies of masculinity did not include studying fatherhood, and ask us to imagine feminist studies of women excluding motherhood as a site of inquiry as to the formation of women’s experiences or social perceptions of womanhood. Academic discourse of

⁵⁶ For critiques of these positions see Salter (2016) and Saunders and Peerson (2009).

masculine gender relations, even when inspired by progressive social theory, effectively downplayed fatherhood as part of male discursive practice.

In general, the research literature on fatherhood is drawn from studies of predominantly white middle-class urbanised communities (L. Brown et al., 2009; Doyle et al., 2015; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2004; Reilly & Rees, 2017; R. Williams, 2009a). Fatherhood is understood to be enacted in particular social and cultural circumstances (Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014; Gettler, 2016; Lamb, 2000; C. Lewis & Lamb, 2007) and hence influenced by particular discourses immanent to those communities (Gregory & Milner, 2011; Murray & Hwang, 2015; Pini & Conway, 2016). Therefore, generalisations from the mainstream literature to central Australian Aboriginal situations could be problematic when seeking to understand local culturally shaped experiences (Heath et al., 2011). This contextualisation is discussed later in this chapter.

In modern Australian settler society gender relations are theorised as patriarchal, whereby males as a collective have a dominant socially privileged position in relation to women, and some practices of masculinity are more highly valued over others (McGlade, 2012). This understanding holds whether premised as natural socio-biological difference in functionalist role theory (Parsons, 1955, 1961) or recognised as structural inequality in gender relations theory (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995). While overarching grand narrative terms, such as patriarchy, are usually eschewed in post-structuralist writing, dominating gendered power relationships, a gendered order which privileges certain aspects of masculinity as deemed superior is theorised (Stacy/ Sally Darity, 2012). Further, gender identities themselves are understood as unstable and fluid (Butler, 1990). This does not mean the “abandonment of gender categories as sites of analysis, [however] it does require a reconfiguring of them [to be] rendered permanently open and contestable” (Beasley, 2012, p. 759) and creates the destabilising of understanding gender(s) as homogenous groups (Beasley, 2012; Petersen, 2003).

Early sociological concerns with gender focused on broad societal formation and processes. The family was seen as an economic unit in itself, although pre-war

sociology focused on the extended family, that at minimum, included both parents and children as productive workers (Giddens, 1986). The family was an important social unit. It was studied as a marker of social cohesion and progress in the modernising industrial state compared to other non-western societies (particularly those being colonised) and for the role it played during economic transformations (Connell, 2014b).

The transformative impact of WWII caused substantive social upheavals in the economy and households: the introduction of women into a previously male dominated workforce, the dislocation of many families, including the death of fathers/husbands, and the introduction of new refugee populations. The nuclear family became the sociological focus for reinscribing social norms to help stabilise society in flux (Giddens, 1986; Lamb, 2000). Father absence, “the category of ‘war separated child’ was constructed as a major problem in expert discourses” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 43). Children were seen as being at risk of damage from excessive mothering (Medved, 2016). The stabilising role of fathers in children’s psychological development became an issue of interest (Pleck, 1987), reversing the interest in the dominant role of mothers as the locus of control over children (Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

Functionalist role theory came to dominant gender analysis in the post-WWII Cold War period (Carrigan et al., 1985; Gutmann, 1997; Segal, 1993). Based primarily on studies starting in the 1930’s on USA middle-class families, Talcott Parsons, a leading role theorist, argued men and women had ‘differentiated’ roles in the modern isolated nuclear family which ensure its effective functioning as a structure—and that these roles, based in biological difference, required a sexual division of labour (Parsons, 1955; Segal, 1993, p. 23).

In this functionalist view of the family, women, because of their reproductive role, spend more time with children and in this sphere have the ‘expressive’ role of providing warmth, nurturing, and emotional support. Whereas men, free of child birth and rearing, are described as having, and modelling, an ‘instrumental leader’ role in providing sustenance by engaging outside the ‘family society boundary’ in the

external workforce and world (Parsons, 1955). Because of the stress of engaging in the competitive work environment, the woman's expressive role in supporting the man emotionally further contributes to the stability of the (socially isolated) nuclear family unit (Parsons, 1955).

Gendered role theory places emphasis on the social actions (socialisation) that attune men and women, and girls and boys, to represent and express gendered roles. It is this social differentiation of importance of family function, as distinguished from a purely reproductive difference in sex roles, that defines it (Parsons, 1955).

Parsons saw a successfully differentiated role between males and females, as manifest through the division labour, denoting a male's need to work and to be the provider. This concept is reflected in popular versions of role theory. For example from an Australian health writer, "doubtless our evolutionary history has played a part. ... men appear 'hardwired' to work" (Ashfield, 2007, p. 145). Here however, we see bald referencing to underlying biological determinism. Sociobiological theories extrapolate evolutionary biology theories of reproductive strategies to explain social structures: such as family structure, the sexual division of labour, and behaviours such as sexual promiscuity or parenting roles, as well as aggression, nurturing, and passivity in human gender(ed) behaviour. Across a range of disciplines, there are many studies refuting these claims to biological essentialism (Assari, Caldwell, & Zimmerman, 2014; Booth, Granger, Mazur, & Kivlighan, 2006; Fine, 2010, 2018; Gould, 1991; Gutmann, 2021). Sociobiological theories reflect back to society a structure which is familiar (Connell, 1987). It is this familiarity in reflecting our (western) social power relationships, the sense of safety of a natural causality and an authoritative scientific veneer that makes sociobiological theories of social organisations and gender relations highly accepted in western academic and popular discourse (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Gould, 1991).

Role theory champions masculine values of toughness, resilience, and able-bodied strength, whilst positioning illness or signs of weakness as antithetical to being a fulfilled man. "That at the bottom of the scale the 'hobo' and the sick and disabled are deviants scarcely needs mentioning" (Parsons, 1955, p. 12). Such men, not able to be

strong father figures, are excluded from successful masculinity, as they deviate from being a good male provider.

In learning to differentiate themselves from the expressive behaviours of women, men have to learn the opposite values. Competitiveness, aggression towards other men, risk taking as a means of proving strength and gaining position in the social order are hallmarks of masculine behaviour in a role theory framework. “Manliness is undoubtedly vital to the basic biological agenda of getting humans together and mating successfully” (Ashfield, 2007, p. 158). Role theory is based on a heteronormative view of sexuality reflecting western nuclear family biases, where each gender is standardised into either feminine or masculine expected behaviour (Petersen, 2003; Segal, 1993). For Parsons, “*every adult* is a member of a nuclear family and every child begins” to learn their socialisation in a nuclear family (Parsons, 1955, p. 17).

Based on heteronormative assumptions, a psychological study in 1962 by Bieber, carried forward over the next 30 years by Socarides, pathologised homosexuality. It identified poor parenting, notably the overbearing influence of a domineering mother who ‘emasculated’ boys and whose fathers did not provide strong male role models, as the ‘at fault’ causes of homosexuality (for critique of these studies see Scasta, 1998). In this, the Freudian oedipal complex provides a psychoanalytic explanation for father and mother roles in a nuclear family. Hence, for many years, women were problematised by Freudian psychoanalysis (Segal, 1993), and male behaviour—strong, stoic and emotionally controlled—was seen as the stable norm (Lamb, 2000). Freud’s theory ultimately relies on biological sex difference to explain what triggers the process of socially constructed gender identity (Whitehead, 2002). This form of social structure assumes a western European family structure with the ability to exercise a socialising environment that is built upon by gender role theory, “the family adult sexual partnership is a playing out of the pre-oedipal mother child relationship” (Parsons, 1955, p. 21).

The proposition that men and women are different and complementary in their roles is based on biological sex difference and extrapolated as sociobiological gender roles.

Put very schematically, a mature woman can love, sexually, only a man who takes his full place in the masculine world, above all its occupational aspect, and who takes responsibility for a family; conversely, the mature man can only love a woman who is really an adult, a full wife to him and mother to his children, and an adequate “person” in her extrafamilial role. (Parsons, 1955, p. 22)

Gender roles become the ‘superstructure’ through which these biological differences are expressed. This reinforces the natural different roles of the sexes. It is why Connell labelled role theory when applied to gender as ‘sex role theory’ (Connell, 1987).

In role theory, a male needs to have a family⁵⁷ within which to perform their social roles. Fatherhood then becomes a definition and, a demonstration, of successful masculinity. It takes away choice from men about when, or if, they become a parent. This has implications for parenting style and on the preparedness or real desire of a man to become a father and may lead to problems for them as individuals and for their families.

In this analysis, how fathers telegraph appropriate behaviour to their children is via being good providers, not showing expressive behaviours, and playing with their children to let out their childish emotions. These emotions live in their lives as strata laid down when they were children (Parsons, 1955). However, the rest of the time they should find their need for emotional support in dealing with a hard competitive world being met by their wife. This codified manner in which emotional stability is to be achieved has many health and behavioural impacts. Firstly, men should not share their emotional story with other men, not just because as has been identified earlier this may be a sign of weakness, but also because it represents a failure in having a successful marital relationship. If you cannot share emotions with anybody other than your wife, then men certainly cannot share them with their children. Thus, in Parsons’ model, a father should maintain an emotional distance from their children. However, at the time Parsons was writing, there was a social expectation that fathers spend time

⁵⁷ Parsons noted that in America at the time he was writing, while there was an increase in divorce, divorced adults then looked to remarry, and this underlined the argument that seeking a good partner in a nuclear family structure was a natural urge in adults (Parsons, 1955).

with their children, so that they were not raised in an over feminised manner (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Secondly, if a man cannot get emotional sustenance from his wife, what happens? Parsons describes this as a potential reason for marital breakdown. How affected fathers internalise or project onto their partner this failure to perform their functions may have implications for behaviours during breakups and shared childrearing responsibilities, as discussed later in this section.

The publication of *Toward A New Sociology Of Masculinity* by Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) was a defining moment for sociological theory on masculinity, outlining an avowedly pro-feminist theory that addressed the issue of agency and patriarchal power from a gender relations theoretical framework. As they attended, their aim was to overcome the theoretical incoherence and blindness about power, which they found in role theory. Connell's continued expansion and exploration of hegemonic masculinity and inter- and intra-gendered relations of power (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1987, 1995, 2014b; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) has had far reaching, although contested, cross discipline influence on the study of masculinity, male relationships and fatherhood (Beasley, 2012; Hearn, 2004; Johansson & Ottemo, 2013; Whitehead, 2002; R. Williams, 2009a).

Gender Relations Theory (GRT) describes how different performative enactments or idealised versions of masculinity are structured within a hierarchical framework of masculinity. Privileging, after Gramsci's (1971/1999) theory of hegemonic power, as the hegemonic form of masculinity, exercising power over other configurations of masculinity and women (Connell, 1995, 2014a).

A hegemonic position is not a fully attained version of dominance. There is always negotiating and dealing with other positions. Nor does a hegemonic position have to be an internally stable position, within this formation there are tensions and instabilities. Hegemonic masculinity as a pattern of practice can be conceptualised as an idealised construction of masculinity and one that does not need to be able to be attained by any men in its entirety (Connell, 1987, 2000). Hegemonic masculinity is therefore not a normal (as in commonest) form of masculinity, but it is normative. It is the ideal men seek to honour, at least in part, or at times place themselves in relation.

In holding up this ideal, men may well be alienated from their own desires. GRT posits there are great complexities and tensions for men in constructing masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Gender is understood as socially constructed, within the framework of gender hierarchies, rather than being a single model, as it understood in role theory (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Courtenay, 2000).

Within this structural approach, other than the dominant *hegemonic masculinity*, a number of other types are described. There is *subordinated masculinity*, those constructions of male gender that clearly undermine the precepts of hegemonic masculinity— for example gay men, whose behaviours and identity openly challenge heterosexuality and the sexual objectifying of women and non-sexual objectifying of men—which are central practices of hegemonic masculinity in the gender relations construction of patriarchy. There is *complicit masculinity*, probably the majority of men who may struggle to practise normative standards of hegemonic males, but who gain at least some benefit from the subordination of women and the marginalisation of some men. Lastly, *marginalised masculinities*, those that are not excluded from the masculine project, but whose power or influence are left outside of participation in the material benefits of the patriarchal order (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Aboriginal men would be considered marginalised in this scheme. Individuals may, at times, seek to uphold (and legitimate) some of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. For example, think of the athlete, who shows strength through adversity, toughness and highly competitive characteristics making them part of the masculine project while they compete. However, because of other circumstances, such as, their economic marginalisation or cultural exclusion, they are left out of the masculine project when not being active in the masculine athlete role (Prehn, 2023).

Patriarchal masculinity, coupled with economic, white, enabled, and heterosexual social relations, allows some males to enjoy considerable advantage in our society and exercise power, even if they do not individually embody the strong masculine

physical traits associated with hegemonic masculinity (Beasley, 2012; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 2004).

It is noteworthy that gender role theorists had little to say about fatherhood in their earliest writings (Connell, 1987, 1995). Fatherhood has been suggested as a hierarchy reinforcing practice through the biological/gender linkage, seen as confirming masculine identity. However, fatherhood also has the potential to destabilise dominating masculine traits if fathers show a greater level of compassion and involvement in the rearing and care of children and when traditional divisions of labour are challenged (Aboim, 2016; Donaldson, 1993; Johansson & Ottemo, 2013; Medved, 2016; R. Williams, 2009a).

While exhibiting a more complex model of hierarchical relationships than role theory, one that allows for recognition of the culturally bounded nature of masculine power relationships and intersections with other forms of power, GRT is however viewed as limited because of its modernist and structuralist approach by both post-structuralists (Beasley, 2012; Berggren, 2014; Petersen, 2003) and post-Marxists⁵⁸ (Johansson & Ottemo, 2013).

Within structuralist GRT masculinity, more categories are added in an attempt to encapsulate the diversity of hierarchical positions which may exist within the hierarchy, and these pluralities of complicit masculinity (Aboim, 2016) start to evoke an endless array of types (Petersen, 2003). As well, individuals within this structure are assigned fixed or unified subject identity positions, complicit, subjugated and marginalised (Beasley, 2012; Johansson & Ottemo, 2013; Petersen, 2003; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Whitehead, 2002).

Where Connell and other GRT theorists have criticised functionalist gender role theory for not identifying agency in how roles were perpetuated (or resisted), post-structuralists critique GRT for not being able to explain what motivates agency from

⁵⁸ Post Marxists see attaining a hegemonic position as desirable as a means to progressive change (Johansson & Ottemo, 2013), whereas post-structuralist anarchists eschew such a position because of its inherent position of being dominating power (Day, 2005).

within hierarchical formed subjects (Beasley, 2012; Berggren, 2014; Petersen, 2003; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Whitehead, 2002).

Connell's stress upon pluralising groups of subjects gives way in postmodern thinking to a qualitatively different attention to fluidity across and within subjects. Identities/subjects in postmodern thinking are not to be approached in terms of 'being' – as whole, unified stable entities which provide a platform for action and social change – but instead as constantly remade (Edley, 2001), as shifting assemblages of practices. (Beasley, 2012, p. 757)

The post-structuralist view bypasses the structure/agency debate and instead imagines individuals as assemblages of practices, which may be in conflict and affect the formation of stable identity. The conflict felt by the subjective identity creating the grounds for the questioning of particular dominant discourses. Instability then becomes the place of questioning, re-imagination, and the line of flight or deterritorialization, rather than people being understood as unified subjects (acting as agents) resisting oppressive power structures.

What seems worth keeping from this account⁵⁹ is the notion of hegemonic forms of intelligibility – the notion that men's conduct is regulated by shared forms of sense making which are consensual although contested, which maintain male privilege, which are largely taken for granted, and which are highly invested. (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 351)

Discourses of masculinity, the knowledge or 'truths' of masculinity—what masculinity is thought to be—are maintained and expressed through the various discursive practices of gendered behaviour and imagination. Thus in post-structuralist approaches masculinity is understood not as a thing, or as siloed types of masculinities, rather as the variety of ways that exist to express or imagine shifting masculine assemblages of practices (Beasley, 2012; Petersen, 2003). Masculinity is not understood to be a monolithic practice; there is no single form of masculinity. However, some valorised discursive practices may dominate in representations and the masculine imagination, dominantly shaping gender relations and subjective gender identity.

⁵⁹ Gender Relations Theory.

A variety of discursive practices are educed in different cultural, spatial, or emotional settings. An individual may adopt/adapt/reconstitute conflicting assemblages of practice depending upon these settings and how they hope to self-(re)present.

Therefore individual male (or any other gendered) subjectivity is not understood to be a stable unified agent, instead their unstable subjective self, deals with a range of potentially conflicting discourses and discursive practices (Petersen, 2003).

5.3.2 Discursive practices of gendered fatherhood

As previously noted studies of fatherhood are a fairly recent (but growing) research field (Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014; Astone & Peters, 2014; Doucet & Lee, 2014; C. Lewis & Lamb, 2007). Most studies have taken place in western industrial societies during periods of rapid social change. Economic restructuring: combining neoliberal economic theory, the change from manufacturing to service dominated industries, and the silicon technology revolution, have dramatically transformed the labour market and how people communicate. In addition, there have been far reaching changes in social attitudes towards family structures and gender relations (and identities) (Astone & Peters, 2014; Doucet & Lee, 2014; Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000).

During this time, a growing expectation from their partners, and to some degree supported by policy⁶⁰ for fathers to be more “hands-on” with child raising has occurred (Brehson & Robbins, 2016; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Levto, van der Gaag, Greene, Kaufman, & Berker, 2015; Richardson & Carroll, 2008; Vuori, 2009; Wells, Mitra, & Flanagan, nd). This meta narrative of more involved fathering involves fathers having a higher level of participation in the domestic sphere, including sharing housework, being more engaged and spending more time caring for children (Pini & Conway, 2016). This can be shared with partners when at home or involve being the stay-at-home parent⁶¹ (Medved, 2016; Nentwich, 2008; R. Williams, 2009a). This pattern of fatherhood is commonly described as being the “new” or “involved” father (Gregory & Milner, 2011; Lamb, 2000; Nentwich, 2008; S. Williams, 2008).

⁶⁰ 67 of 167 countries studied by the International Labour Office provide some sort of paternity leave, only 16 have more than 16 days (Brehson & Robbins, 2016).

⁶¹ Around 4% of Australian two parent households in 2017 (Baxter, 2017).

Many authors note this engaged or involved father is not actually a new role, but has echoes in pre-industrial western families, especially the moral guardian role as well as ensuring children were brought up safely and ready for adulthood (Lamb, 2000; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Medved, 2016; S. Williams, 2008). The notion of the father as sole provider is a relatively recent, but highly psychologically and politically invested one (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Pleck, 1987).

Both structuralist and poststructuralist approaches identify two discourses, which dominate how fatherhood is constructed in contemporary western industrial societies. One is the importance of paid work (the provider) discourse—still predominantly male, which carries over from traditional role model theory. The other is the importance of the care of the child discourse—still predominantly female, but one the “new father” is expected to embrace (C. Lewis & Lamb, 2007; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2004; Nentwich, 2008; R. Williams, 2009a; S. Williams, 2008).

In both the provider and new father discourses of parenthood, a heterosexual pole of male/father and woman/mother dominates. The nuclear family is the normative family structure (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2004; Nentwich, 2008). This heteronormative discourse, with a biological essentialist view of gender roles, is apparent in fathering (and parenting) popular texts (see high selling Australian author Biddulph, 1998, 2013). Rather than relaying parenting strategies around raising boys and being fathers, these texts are engaged in constructing discourses of what it is to be a ‘normal’ son/father, boy/male (Hunter & Riggs, 2015; Riggs, 2008).

Gregory and Milner (2011) add a third, although related discourse, which articulates a “crisis” in families resulting from changing family law and gender relationships. The discourse can be articulated as either a concern over the responsibilities of ‘absent fathers’ and how this has a negative impact on children’s psychological development (and to a lesser extent the economic security of mothers and children) or for fathers’ rights as a result of divorce or separation (Hawthorne, 2002; Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

There are now a number of conflicting discourses around fatherhood arising from these social, economic and relationship changes that create tensions for fathers (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002; S. Williams, 2008). “Social constructions of fatherhood—broadly, public discourses about what constitutes “good” fathering and legal frameworks that define fathers’ relationships with children—create powerful pressures to which individuals respond” (Gregory & Milner, 2011, p. 589).

5.3.2.1 Provider Discourse

The discourse of fathers as providers is grounded in a *Parsonian* version of an atomised nuclear (US) family, whereby the male provider dealing with the external world provides for his immediate family. The provider role “has been eroded by economic and social change” (Gregory & Milner, 2011, p. 600), but persists as a culturally dominant discourse with a high level of personal identification by fathers (Locke & Yarwood, 2017; Medved, 2016; Pini & Conway, 2016; S. Williams, 2008).

The 1950-1970’s notion of the separation of men being in the public sphere and women in the private sphere, no longer holds true as *the* dominant discourse (Gregory & Milner, 2011), whether or not it was ever the reality across all social classes or cultural groups (Allen & Daly, 2002). However, it is still upheld in many popular media presentations of parenting (Stevens, 2015).

Sarah Allen and Kerry Daly (2002) noted the work provider role underpinned many men’s sense of responsibility as fathers, and that this acted as a motivational process for them. For men who had to work long hours or were in lower income brackets (often both) work stress was a negative experience because it removed them from time with family. The concept of work stress describes the conflict fathers can feel in balancing their work provider role with the expectation (both external and internalised) to spend time with their partners and children (Daly, Ashbourne, & Brown, 2009; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000), especially when they may have to increase work hours to compensate for a partner staying at home (Cooklin et al., 2015). Fathers in better paid or professional positions with greater work flexibility report less work related fathering stress (Ranson, 2001).

For low income fathers their inability to adequately provide for their families is the cause of work stress, where access to jobs and resources “set the stage for ways men judge themselves or find themselves judged by others” (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000, p. 79). Alternatively, the precarious nature of employment opportunities may be a non-choice cause for why a father becomes either a stay-at-home parent or has part-time work and invests more time in caring for children (Astone & Peters, 2014; Medved, 2016). These rationalisations for fathers to stay-at-home are often portrayed in popular media, highlighting the role of the stay-at-home father not as a positive choice, but as a forced economic decision (Stevens, 2015).

In dual parent households where there is an expectation of shared parenting duties, the choice to be a stay-at-home father may be enabled by having the financial capability to do so because their partner (who may be on an equal or higher wage) can support the family (Astone & Peters, 2014; Daly et al., 2009; Medved, 2016). Conversely, if the mother is on a lower wage this may be barrier to the father in staying at home (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000).

The decision for couples to ‘choose’ the father to be the stay-at-home parent reflect the complex and shifting subjectivities that incorporate decisions around financial, personal, emotional, and gendered values and imperatives (Brehson & Robbins, 2016; Doucet, 2016; Johansson & Ottemo, 2013; Medved, 2016; Stevens, 2015; S. Williams, 2008).

5.3.2.2 Discourses of Care

The changing nature of fathering, from being the sole provider to a shared worker role or a stay-at-home dad that does some part time work (Doucet, 2016; Medved, 2016), creates a transition space in the discourses of provider and carer. Here some men may attempt to keep an attachment to being a provider as a form of care (Pini & Conway, 2016), or combine their status as the primary care giver with outside part-time work to stay in touch with the work market place and ‘outside world’ (Medved, 2016). In studies of stay-at-home fathers it has been noted many will feel a need to justify how their role fits with normative ideals of masculinity—the provider, public sphere, competitive, ‘normal bloke’ (Locke & Yarwood, 2017; Medved, 2016). This image of

the involved working father is reinforced in the media via depictions of the new ‘super dad’ (Stevens, 2015).

The conflict in trying to combine roles can impact upon the level of shared work performed when fathers are the stay-at-home parent. A study of Australian families found when fathers were identified as being the parent at home; they did a higher percentage of childcare than working fathers; however, they did less as a percentage than stay-at-home mothers. Also mothers in dual working households did more than fathers in those households (Baxter, 2017). This disparity in shared care is a common finding (Lamb, 2000; Parker & Wang, 2013; R. Williams, 2009a), often referred to as a mother’s second shift (Craig, 2007; Locke & Yarwood, 2017).

There is debate about how to quantify fathers’ care of children; issues of how much time is spent and what is the nature of those engagements, making it hard to create universal measures (Craig, 2007; Lamb, 2000). Fathers are often portrayed in academic literature and popular media as spending considerable playtime with children as a form of care—the baby entertainer (Sunderland, 2000). This is rarely or less likely to be reported when studying mothering practices of care, even though mothers also play with children (Lamb, 2000; Stevens, 2015). The differences between mothering and fathering practices are often highlighted in the mass media and parenting texts (Fletcher, 2011; Sunderland, 2000) whilst downplaying the similarities (Stevens, 2015). Fage, Day, Lamb and Cabrera (2014) argued there is less need to measure the difference, as mother and father parenting is converging. There is some evidence of this. One study showed, for example, the equal ability of fathers and mothers to recognise the cries of their own babies—when correlated to the amount of time they spend with them (Gustafsson, Levre’ro, Reby, & Mathevon, 2013).

Imbalances in parenting roles or interactions with children develop over time in families as mothers and fathers take on different roles (Brehson & Robbins, 2016; Norman, Elliot, & Fagan, 2018). Due to strong social attitudes favouring mothers as the stay-at-home parent, those in that role do more and become more expert in those roles than working fathers (Lamb, 2000; Norman et al., 2018). The evidence presented on how fathers spend and identify their carer time would suggest there are many differences between fathers and mothers. However, these are not biologically

based, per Palkovitz and Trask (2014), but are driven by internalised gendered discourses, as the evidence they present would more clearly seem to support. It is confirmed by the observation that when fathers have access to adequate leave they “embrace the attitudes and behaviours that come with being equal partner(s) in parenting” (Brehson & Robbins, 2016, p. 4).

5.3.2.3 Care as ethics

Understanding caring for children as an ethical and moral responsibility is an established basis from which father child interactions have become framed in academic discourse on fathering practices (Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005; Doucet, 2017; Pleck, 2010). Developed from Lamb et al.’s threefold description of father practices to meet children’s needs—direct engagement, psychological and physical accessibility, and responsibility for planned indirect child care issues (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985), Joseph Pleck (2010) reconfigured these as more intense positive engagement activities to promote development, warmth and responsiveness, and control of direct monitoring and decision-making. He added that this involves indirect care responsibilities, such as making sure things happen, arranging for resources to be available and that community interactions supporting growth occur. As well, there is a process element whereby the father monitors these components being in place to meet their child’s needs. Andrea Doucet (2017) formulated these processes and practices as being emotional, community and moral responsibilities. A similar approach is articulated in the generative fathering framework where it is proposed fathers take up a moral reason for giving of themselves to their children, as caring for the next generation; whilst at the same time gaining emotional satisfaction in the development of their relationship with their child(ren) (Brotherson et al., 2005; Palkovitz, Copes, & Woolfolk, 2010).

Therefore, a broad range of practices can be figured in operationalising these responsibilities. These may be consistent with, or challenge, traditional fathering practices and masculinity (Doucet, 2016). There are a wide variety of practices which could, depending how they are enacted, be consistent with holding traditional hegemonic versions of masculinity, such as the desire to protect the child, being the economic provider, encouragement of physical sporting activity (for boys). Drawing upon masculine theories of identity, having children is posited as being an ultimate

role of becoming an adult or full man (Palkovitz et al., 2010; Vuori, 2009), “a man can be a warm father and a real man at the same time” (Spock, B. 1978 in Sunderland, 2000, p. 250). The sense of responsibility being described in the protector role, linked to strong physical attributes of masculinity and as sense of distrust of the outside world as a threat, enables a ‘heroic’ masculine position to be attained (Medved, 2016).

Conversely, depending upon how they are enacted, all of the previous roles could be undertaken in a manner challenging the dominant role of the male (father) in the upbringing of a child if the mother is the equal or even dominant partner in the giving of these forms of care (Medved, 2016). In addition, how a father gives emotional support, provides direct childcare, supports involvement in schooling—including homework, joins in physical activity, and imparts knowledge of local society or culture(s), may challenge conservative views of masculinity and fatherhood and sit well within the new fatherhood discourse.

That fathers are effective providers of emotional support is now widely recognised in the professional literature (Daly et al., 2009; Palkovitz et al., 2010; Stevens, 2015). This is a recognised role for involved and stay-at-home fathers, with many men reporting on the satisfaction they get from giving emotional support to their children (Medved, 2016). The role of fathers as providers of emotional support to their children; stands in contrast to the portrayal of the stoic and remote *Parsonian* father. Despite males spending more time as the stay-at-home caregiver, many professionals and public sentiment still overwhelmingly see mothers as the more important carer for the wellbeing of children (Vuori, 2009). In a USA study when asked if mothers working or being at home had a positive impact on children, 51% of respondents said children were better off if the mother stayed at home and 34% thought they would be just as well off if the mother worked. When asked about fathers, only 8% of respondents felt the child would be better off if the father stayed at home and 76% thought they would be just as well off if the father worked (Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013).⁶²

⁶² The remainder were either undecided or had caveats and answered: “depends”.

One way fathers provide generative care is in supporting their children's schooling. This is important as it is increasingly recognised that fathers' general involvement with their children increases their academic achievement (Allen & Daly, 2002; Fletcher & Silberberg, 2006; Hossain & Anziano, 2008; Hossain & Shipman, 2009).

The importance of children having a 'good' education in order for them to get stable and well-paid employment, to gain the necessary skills to negotiate social institutions or interpersonal situations and for their personal development is an established discourse in the academic and popular literature. It is a position also articulated by parents (Chenhall, Holmes, Lea, Senior, & Wegner, 2011; Hoogendoorn, 2010; Mapp, 2003; Yang & Shin, 2008). This view holds true whether the parents' parents supported them in their education or were disinterested (Mapp, 2003).

Schools place a great deal of emphasis on the roles of parents, as carers, in the education of children. However, there is a variety of discourses on what that role is. Parents are variously seen as a problem — for example, they may be perceived as indifferent; alternatively, if they do care, they are seen as potential partners in the educational agenda and as first educators from birth to pre-school (Meighan, 1989).

However, parents from non-settler cultures may interpret their relationship to the classroom and teacher differently to those of the schools. Their non-interference may not fit with the schools expectations of parental involvement (Cardona, Jain, & Canfield-Davis, 2012; Lea, Wegner, McRae-Williams, Chenhall, & Holmes, 2011) or possibly the parents may have expectations the school should be more aware of the issues that affect their lives outside of school (Lea, Thompson, McRae-Williams, & Wegner, 2011). As has been shown in a study of Aboriginal parents in the NT, parents (including fathers) may not engage with schools if they think the school is doing a good job or because the school is seen as the expert for directing learning (Chenhall et al., 2011). Conversely, a reason for parental involvement in school may be because they feel the school is failing to address behavioural issues, a form of negative involvement (Chenhall et al., 2011). Therefore, good quality teaching (imparting skills, being culturally aware and providing a safe learning environment) is an element

that will drive how Aboriginal people interact with the school (Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Milgate & Giles-Browne, 2013).

The invisible father discourse dominates in many studies and reports on parental involvement in children's schooling (Fletcher & Silberberg, 2006). This is often evident in discussions concerning Aboriginal fathers (parents and other minority groups) and schools (Hammill, 2001; Lea, Wegner, et al., 2011; Mapp, 2003; Mueller & Buckley, 2014).

Fathers (and parents generally) often identify barriers from schools limiting their involvement in the educational care of their children. There are particular barriers felt by Aboriginal fathers. Messaging is often poorly targeted (Malatest, 2002). There are many external barriers to their greater involvement at the school, including employment obligations, childcare, and eldercare. This may be especially hard when school events are held during business or work hours (Mapp, 2003; Mueller & Buckley, 2014). As has been noted in studies of new involved fathers, these men can also feel out of place, as the 'weird' person, in predominately female dominated spaces (Fletcher & Silberberg, 2006).

Fathers' engagement within schools can include a range of activities; including contact with teachers, classroom attendance, involvement with school council, attendance to school special events, and attendance at school regular events such as parent teacher nights and school assemblies (Mapp, 2003). Within the school setting the accessibility and supports available are important factors noted in the academic literature as supporting fathers' involvement. Having AIEWs, who provide a cultural brokerage role (Peacock & Prehn, 2019; A. Price, Jackson-Barrett, Gower, & Herrington, 2017), welcoming inclusive attitudes, and friendly approachable staff (Fletcher & Silberberg, 2006; Mapp, 2003; Milgate & Giles-Browne, 2013; Walton, 1995) are the mechanisms by which this is achievable.

Worimi sociologist, Jacob Prehn and Palawa PhD candidate Huw Peacock, found there were no significant differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and settler fathers in their involvement with their children's schooling (Prehn &

Peacock, 2019). Interestingly, it would seem from research undertaken in the NT, that what keeps Aboriginal parents away from schools is when parents feel the school is doing its job, their children are learning and happy (Lea, Wegner, et al., 2011).

However, often educational care and support occurs outside of the school's view (Mapp, 2003). It is now recognised this out of school support is one of the most critical aspects of parental influence of a child's school performance (Hoogendoorn, 2010; O'Keefe, Olney, & Angus, 2012).

Prehn and Peacocks' (2019) study also showed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers were actively involved in their children's education at home, with reading, discussing school day events, and completing homework. Studies, with Navajo families (Hossain & Anziano, 2008) and with Costa Rican fathers (Hoogendoorn, 2010) provide valuable additional information, particularly given the paucity of research on non-western fathering and fathers' involvement in out-of-school educational care. Simone Hoogendoorn (2010) categorised fathers' involvement with their children's academic participation in the home setting under four headings: support, control, motivation, and practical help. Other studies have found similar positive father involvements. Support includes, for example, fathers getting children ready for school. In Hoogendoorn's study she noted, fathers who did not undertake other forms of care did not do this school care either. Control includes getting children to school and to do homework (Hossain & Anziano, 2008; Mapp, 2003). This could also include directing their behaviour at school. Motivation describes how to promote the importance of education with their children and to encourage them (Mapp, 2003). Practical help describes how fathers engage directly with helping with homework (Hossain & Anziano, 2008; Mapp, 2003) and seeking external assistance for their child's academic achievement (Hossain & Anziano, 2008).

This narrative of fathers' support in the home runs counter to narratives of disinterested, absent 'invisible' fathers that populate discourse on fathers' parental involvement. These studies do reinforce earlier observations that whilst they participate in these activities, fathers are often spending less time on them than mothers. Ziarat Hossain and Michael Anziano (2008) note however that parental role

differentiation amongst the Navajo was “significantly smaller than with Anglo families” and Navajo fathers “appear to be very involved with their school aged children” (p. 114).

5.3.2.4 Carer role models

Fatherhood studies are showing that while a father’s father has an influence, it is not always as someone to emulate; nor are fathers the only source of parenting role modelling. Fathers may choose to emulate their own childhood experience if they have happy recollections of their father. One strong permeating role is still that of provider. However, some men recollect the direct care and warmth they felt in their relationship with their father. For others what is described as a compensatory approach will be taken, when they felt their father was not present (such as being away at work too much) or was emotionally distant or violent (Lamb, 2000; Masciadrelli, Pleck, & Stueve, 2006; Palkovitz, 2009; Silverstein et al., 2002; S. Williams, 2008) or missing due to separation (Ball, Candice, Joe, & George, nd). For these fathers, there is a ‘desire to be better fathers’ (Lamb, 2000).

William Marsiglio and Mark Cohan (2000) argued for a model of co-constructed fatherhood, which recognises that men draw upon a range of sources and influences (affected by discourses of gender and race) as well as their economic conditions and the influence of their partners in developing their fathering role. Daly et al. (2009) posited that, where fathers do not feel well served by other sources, it is their children who influence their fathering style. Fathers can be understood to draw upon a number of sources using fragmented role models, taking those memories or practices to reinscribe an identity of their own (Masciadrelli et al., 2006).

5.3.2.5 Discourses of Absence

There are multiple discourses of absence. There are those propagated by fathers and allies that focus upon fathers’ exclusion from families, with an emphasis on access to children (Hawthorne, 2002). The dominant protagonists of this discourse often draw upon conservative imagery and discourses related to family heteronormative masculine gendered roles of fathers and the importance of this for the stable socialisations of children. These discourses may draw upon sociobiological and anti-feminist positions.

The sociobiological basis to this discourse permeates explanations to why men would care for children, the masculine nature of fathers' parenting and the developmental benefits this brings to children, all premised upon how this works best in heterosexual marriages (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2004; Richardson & Carroll, 2008). For proponents of this position in Australia see John Ashfield (2007), from the USA the *Dept. Health and Human Services: The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy development of Children* (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006) and from the men's rights movement, Warren Farrell (1994). Another conservative argument concerns the nature of father "absence". This is seen a result of the breakdown of the nuclear family and can be articulated in terms of an anti-feminist stance (see Ashfield, 2007; Farrell, 1994), for a critique of this stance see Flood (2012).⁶³

While ideally men can play a very important role in children's development (Ball, 2012; Ball, Moselle, & Pederson, 2007; Brehson & Robbins, 2016; Dudgeon, Milroy, & Walker, 2014; Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000), aggressive or violent fathers can be a cause of negative socialisation and emotional experiences for children (Levtov et al., 2015). Where family breakdown occurs due to Family Violence (FV) this needs to be an important consideration in fathers' access issues. Even without FV being a factor, if the parents have separated acrimoniously then this can have implications for how children are placed between conflicted parents and can make parenting decisions for the children's best interests difficult to achieve or negotiate (Hawthorne, 2002).

A different absent father discourse produces perceptions of a lack of interest and participation by fathers in their children's upbringing (Zanoni, Warburton, Bussey, & McMaugh, 2014). This discourse can be politically and racially charged, particularly when reflecting upon Aboriginal fathers or other men of colour (Ball, 2009; R. Williams, 2009a). For a recent example concerning Aboriginal fathers see Leak (2016) and Langton (in J. Price, Langton, Cashman, King, & Hudson, 2016) discussed in section 5.4.4.

⁶³ For an analysis of this movement in North America see (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Goldwag, 2012).

Some studies have examined how men separated from their families negotiate continued contact and provide support for their children (Ball & George, 2006; Hawthorne, 2002). Regarding these fathers, there is a growing awareness that for some, invisibility is caused when they cannot attend public events related to child caring, schooling, sporting events etc. due to other commitments, e.g. work. Incarceration can be another distressing reason for fathers' absence (Ball, 2009; Bartlett, 2004; S. Howard, 2000), noting there is an over representation of Aboriginal men in the prison system (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991; S. Howard, 2000) frequently for misdemeanours that would not have a carceral outcome for non-Indigenous people (Carcach, Grant, & Conroy, 1999).

It is also apparent social institutions can generate paternal invisibility. The creation of ghost fathers occurs where institutional workers fail to 'see' fathers' presence and focus upon mothers (Ball, 2009; L. Brown et al., 2009; Zanoni et al., 2014). Fathers may feel excluded due to an unwelcoming sense of place created around some child related activities—where practitioners assume a lack of attendance equals lack of interest. In addition, there may be certain economic incentives not to record fathers as present, especially where a woman is claiming social security benefits as a single parent,⁶⁴ thus maximising her income and relative economic independence within a relationship, a key issue of concern in unstable relationships (National Social Security Rights Network, 2018).

Contra conservative discourses—the issue of father absence, perceived absence or roles in non-nuclear families—can be understood, without essentialising or vilifying fathers who are not resident, if it is recognised that there are a variety of factors such as changes in economic circumstance, household structure and partner relationships as being the cause (Astone & Peters, 2014; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Fagan et al., 2014; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2004).

Fathers who, for whatever reason, cannot be present in a child's everyday school or social/public life may feel negatively judged by others, and this may be internalised

⁶⁴ Single parenting payment in Australia was at the time of writing (05-2024) AUD987.70 per fortnight, Partnered parent payment AUD698.30, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/how-much-parenting-payment-you-can-get?context=22196>.

(Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). How fathers are judged may depend on how their parenting is measured. Whether this is against ideas of father involvement or father support and whether this is being compared to conceptions of what mothering entails (Fagan et al., 2014). It may entail how they feel judged by others such as their workmates (Locke & Yarwood, 2017), or if they feel judgement is based on racialised deficit attitudes (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000).

5.3.3 Fathers' Emotional Wellbeing

In a world where *Parsonian* family structures and conservative hegemonic ideals of masculinity are socially embedded, fathers' emotional needs have not been recognised as important or possibly even sanguine to the role. This has started to change since fatherhood research has addressed fathering practices and as fathers' experiences of being 'new involved' fathers are discussed. There is now a growing recognition that "fathering alters the course of adult male development" (Palkovitz et al., 2010).

Until recently most fatherhood research has primarily focused on the impacts of fathering practice on child development, maternal wellbeing or family support (Brehson & Robbins, 2016; Fletcher, May, St George, Stoker, & Oshan, 2014; Instituto Promundo, 2010; Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000). There has been less focus on fathers' subjectivities and emotional experiences and wellbeing (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Giallo, Cooklin, Wade, D'Esposito, & Nicholson, 2014; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Robb, 2004). This led Garfield, Kauffman and Davis to note "physical and mental health effects of being a father are understudied and largely unknown" (2006, p. 2365). When the emotional impacts of fatherhood are addressed, the literature usually highlights fathers' experiences during pregnancy and early childhood (Chalmers & Meyer, 1996; Durette, Marrs, & Gray, 2011; Fletcher, Matthey, & Marley, 2006; Leach, Olesen, Butterworth, & Poyser, 2014). The attitudes and experiences of fathers later in their paternal lifecycle have also been under reported (Bartlett, 2004).

Fathers' voices, when captured in research and popular publications, revolve around three discourses, outlined here and discussed in detail later. One is of self, how having children has (usually positively) affected their lives. Another is of relationality, how becoming a father has impacted upon their relationships with others—most often

partners, but can also include other family members. Lastly, and less often, how being a father has depressive or stressful emotional impacts. Noting Edward Bartlett's (2004) observation that while there is a "positive association between fatherhood and health status ... certain variables may potentiate, attenuate, or even reverse this association" (p. 167). How realisations of these emotional impacts come about varies; some fathers talk about getting a jolt, making them suddenly aware of their new responsibilities, and there can also be a slower realisation of new, previously unknown desires (Palkovitz et al., 2010).

In the positive discourses of self, fathers often talk about how their children bring happiness to their lives, an improved sense of contentment and wellbeing (Ball et al., nd; Daly et al., 2009; Donaldson, 1993; Garfield et al., 2006; Levtoev et al., 2015). They report strong emotional attachment (Allen & Daly, 2002; Medved, 2016) and greater self-awareness of their own personalities, capabilities and desires (Daly et al., 2009; Palkovitz et al., 2010). This in turn can enhance their self-confidence (Allen & Daly, 2002). For some, becoming a father defines their masculinity, making them feel a full man, although not necessarily in their old sense of dominant hegemonic masculinity (Daly, Ashbourne, & Brown, 2012).

The desire to spend time with their children can lead some men to change their work life practices, with parenting being a more decisive element in life choice than work (Daly et al., 2009; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Medved, 2016; Palkovitz et al., 2010).

Another key theme raised is a new sense of responsibility fathers feel when they become fathers (Daly et al., 2009, 2012; Garfield et al., 2006). This can include a desire to 'settle down' (Palkovitz et al., 2010). These feelings can lead to positive action to look after their health: including undertaking greater physical activity (Garfield et al., 2006), avoiding getting into trouble with the law and drug taking (Allen & Daly, 2002), it can also include avoiding other risky physical activity. All of these changes can lead to concurrent reductions in accidental and premature death (Allen & Daly, 2002; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Palkovitz et al., 2010) and general

improvements in wellbeing (Allen & Daly, 2002; Bartlett, 2004; Brehson & Robbins, 2016).

Fatherhood is seen to have a determining effect upon fathers' relationships with others, for example, the sense of responsibility to their children can open up a realisation that they should be less self-centred (Daly et al., 2012). Fathers may feel the need to give to someone else (Palkovitz et al., 2010). Fathers also report having children changes their outside interests from individual self-satisfying activities, including spending time with friends, to more community oriented external connections (Allen & Daly, 2002; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001).

Craig Garfield et al. (2006) noted the child's presence may have an impact on the relationship between the father and child's mother. This could be positive (Allen & Daly, 2002; Daly et al., 2009), bringing couples closer together through shared experience (Limb, White, & Holgate, 2014), letting them appreciate different aspects of each other's personalities as expressed through parenting, and providing mutual support (R. C. Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). It can also be negative, reducing the time they spend together as partners, or leading to disagreements over parenting choices or styles—especially in separated parenting situations (Daly et al., 2012; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Norman et al., 2018). Partners of fathers who mainly undertake the fun aspects of child caring, rather than the full range of childcare and domestic labours, may become dissatisfied with the father's levels of involvement (Levtov et al., 2015; Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, & Robinson, 2002; Norman et al., 2018).

There are a range of factors which can cause fathers' anxiety over their roles which can also lead to depression (Dudgeon et al., 2014). These anxiety inducing factors include: fathers feeling judged about their fathering (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000), the quality of their relationship with their partners (Allen & Daly, 2002; Cooklin et al., 2015; Millward, Matthews, Wade, Forbes, & Seward, 2018), and mourning the loss of their previously felt free time (Daly et al., 2009). In addition, worry over the wellbeing of their child (Daly et al., 2009), especially for chronically ill children (Garfield et al., 2006; Millward et al., 2018), or having the ability to provide for the

child (Cooklin et al., 2015; Garfield et al., 2006) can also induce anxiety. Guilt about the level or nature of their involvement is a commonly reported concern (Cooklin et al., 2015; Garfield et al., 2006; Milkie et al., 2002; Millward et al., 2018). These pressures may also influence parenting style, which may in turn negatively impact upon the child's behaviour and have follow-on looping effect to the father's mental health (Dudgeon et al., 2014; Garfield et al., 2006).

Separated fathers are confronted with specific issues. These include, custody issues for men with low incomes (if income thresholds are a requirement for custody) (Brehson & Robbins, 2016), conflicts arising when negotiating parenting decisions across acrimonious relationships, or having the time together to have discussions when the relationship remains amiable (Bartlett, 2004; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Giallo et al., 2014; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Millward et al., 2018). When incarceration is the cause of separation, there is clear evidence of negative mental health impacts on fathers (Bartlett, 2004).

Despite the positive benefits the majority of fathers experience, some fathers experience high levels of anxiety and depression about fatherhood (Cooklin et al., 2015). It is estimated that 17-19% experience anxiety and 10-18% report experiencing depression (Giallo et al., 2014; Millward et al., 2018). As well, fathers with pre-existing mental health issues are at risk of having these issues exacerbated due to parenting stresses (LeFrancois, 2010). Stress factors associated with relationship status, income, incarceration and other poor socio-economic indicators are correlated with these outcomes (Giallo et al., 2014; Leach et al., 2014; LeFrancois, 2010).

The individualistic manner (S. Williams, 2008) in which many fathers attempt to deal with conflicting discourses of fatherhood and their emotional and wellbeing issues is of concern. Strategies such as: keeping issues to themselves (to avoid vulnerability issues or to protect their partners from their feelings), containing their emotions, keeping themselves busy to avoid negative emotions or excessive drinking is of concern (R. Williams, 2009b). This problem is compounded by the lack of access by fathers (and men generally) to counselling and support services (Isacco, Hofschler, & Molloy, 2015; R. Williams, 2009b). This closed manner of dealing with issues can

have a negative impact upon relationships with their partners, even when fathers ‘open up’ to a degree with them (R. Williams, 2009b). Closed public emotionality is closely linked to heteronormative dominant discourses of masculinity (Parsons, 1955; Real, 1997; R. Williams, 2009b).

5.4 Genealogies of Aboriginal male and fatherhood discourses

In 5.4.1 *Aboriginal males: Settler deficit discourses of the savage*, I discuss settler, especially central Australian, colonial discourses towards Aboriginal males. I believe an understanding of these historically derived discourses is necessary to contextualise the ongoing influence these have on contemporary subjectivity formation (Foucault, 1982; Petersen, 2003). How these form contemporary discourse are discussed in 5.4.2 *Contemporary negative discourse, ‘the violence of Aboriginal men’*. This is important to discuss as the ongoing echoes of these discourses within contemporary social policy further impact Aboriginal males’ abilities to shape their own fatherhood.

Following Lupton and Barclay (1997), I recognise discourses relating to masculinity and fatherhood are strengthened and articulated in both the academic and popular literature. The media, through this labelling representation, has a considerable impact upon an individual’s shifting sense of self, or the construction of their subjectivity (Stevens, 2015). I have chosen two case studies—the Intervention and the publication of the offensive *Leak Cartoon* regarding Aboriginal fatherhood in *The Australian* newspaper (2016), to examine how negative male Aboriginality discourses frame these events and the responses they have elicited.

5.4.1 Aboriginal males: Settler deficit discourses of the savage

Historical discourses pertaining to Australian Aboriginal males were predominantly negative. Some exceptions exist, Spencer and Gillen (1899/1969) depicted Aboriginal fathers as loving protectors and carers. Predominantly however, Aboriginal males were represented as exotic ‘primitive, backward, others’ (Said, 2001) when compared to normative western/settler discursive practices of masculinity (Conor, 2013; Konishi, 2011; Prehn, 2023; Stanovsky, 2007). Most frontier reports highlighted settler views of Aboriginal male primitiveness, savagery, childlike irrationality, treacherousness and violence towards women (Fforde et al., 2013; Konishi, 2011;

Prehn, 2023; for primary sources see Willshire, 1896/2015 and Basedow 2004 (1935); and for a contemporary negative reworking Windschuttle, 2002).

Under white mens' civilising guidance some Aboriginal males were considered capable of being faithful companions (Basedow, 1935/2004; Willshire, 1896/2015) and given recognition as wily defenders of their lands and clans from white intrusion (Kimber, 1990). This later attribute, coupled with more negative views of savagery however, was used to justify settler acts of violence in undertaking colonial land theft (Stanovsky, 2007).

Frontier physical and social isolation often led to male settlers seeking Aboriginal female sexual 'partners' and domestics (Behrendt, 2000; Conor, 2013; Grimshaw et al., 1996). In an era of highly charged racial intolerance and negative views of miscegenation, European male and Aboriginal female interactions were justified on two grounds. Firstly, the settler view of Aboriginal women as sexually licentious (Conor, 2012; Motta, 2016). Secondly, based upon the characterisations of the social conditions and treatment of Aboriginal women by their men folk as either a) promiscuous—as wife lending was characterised as being acceptable to Aboriginal men, or b) violent—the taking of women from their communities was portrayed as a saviour act (Behrendt, 2000; Conor, 2013, 2016; Konishi, 2011; I. Watson, 2009; Willshire, 1896/2015). Violence by settler males towards Aboriginal women and children was under-reported then as now (Conor, 2013; Konishi, 2011; McGlade, 2012).

The establishment of the state ward system legally entrenched the paternal control of white male protectors over the infantilised Aboriginal population (Conor, 2012; Grimshaw et al., 1996; Konishi, 2011; Martinez & Lowrie, 2009). In addition, Aboriginal men were often 'put in their place' by white male settlers upholding pastoral and settler communities' social and economic hierarchies (Anthony, 2004; Bradley, 1991). The fear of Aboriginal masculinity caused 'race hysteria' in Darwin during the 1930's over 'rape fear' and reinforced the savage native narrative; this was coupled to patriarchal views of settler men as protectors of their women (Jacobs, 2009; Paisley, 2001).

Negative portrayals of Aboriginal masculinity contrasted against mythologising narratives of male European settlers, which valorised hetero-patriarchal masculinity.⁶⁵ In this sense positive labelling of settler males lead to the latter being characterised as: the tough, resourceful male, taming the land, the protector of women bringing modernising European culture to the outback in masculine myths of discovery, and tales of sacrifice and fortitude (R. Davis, 2005; Grimshaw et al., 1996; Jacobs, 2009; Moore, 1998; Salter, 2016; Ward, 1958).

Reflecting the power relationships circulating in colonialism and patriarchal gender discourses, Aboriginal masculinity was posited as inferior to settler masculinity and, at the same time, less civilised (primitive and childlike) than settler women (Jacobs, 2009). Aboriginal women were viewed as being equally as primitive as Aboriginal males; but were also described variously as licentious and dominated by their Aboriginal male partners. This led to them becoming objects for settler abuse, pity and control (Behrendt, 2000; Conor, 2016), with settler women often being the agents of control (Jacobs, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

The discursive practices of coloniality and patriarchal gendered relations validate settler claims to superiority, portraying them as bringers of civilisation, rationality and productive order to the land—particularly through land ownership (R. Davis, 2005; McGlade, 2012; Motta, 2016; Walter et al., 2023; I. Watson, 2017). The superior nature of settler society over Aboriginal societies is affirmed to justify a ‘civilised’ society destroying ‘an uncivilised’ one (Cohn & Jun, 2015; McGlade, 2012; Nathan, 2013; Webb & Enstice, 1998); and becomes the cultural complex inherited as the settler state’s foundational belief (Dowd, 2011). Here Aboriginal claims to difference (cultural diversity) flounder upon settler modernist notions of difference as inferiority (Beasley, 2012; Dodson, 1994; Grimshaw et al., 1996; I. Watson, 2017), whereby Aboriginal difference to normative settler society equals Aboriginal pathology of social dysfunction (Nathan, 2013; Neale, 2013; Sarra, 2007).

⁶⁵ Inherent in colonial settler discourses of positive masculinity is a bias of only recognising heterosexuality and binary notions of gender and an implicit degradation of other sexual and gender identity (Lugones, 2016).

5.4.2 Contemporary negative discourse, 'the violence of Aboriginal men'

The discursive formation of colonialism creates the basis for national identity, validating the attempted erasure either through violence or assimilation of Aboriginal people into a mono-cultural modern white nation state (Dodson, 1994; I. Watson, 2009). Here a double process of representation is undertaken. Aboriginal people are made invisible through erasure or assimilation, but public discourse can also make Aboriginality hyper-visible, for not fitting the norms of behaviour of the settler culture (Motta, 2016).

Hyper-visibility was created by media and politicians over the claims of sexual abuse in remote Aboriginal communities. Analysis of media reporting from 2000-06 has shown mainstream Australian news media narrowed their reporting frame of reference:

[from] Indigenous reconciliation, of Indigenous *disadvantage*, *social justice* or non-Indigenous *racism* ... [to] ... sensationalist reporting, drawing on the news value of conflict, framing ongoing issues of social dislocation and dysfunction as 'crises' and narrating Indigenous people and issues as *problematic*. Indigenous men are framed as *dangerous others*, reinforcing conceptions of them as a societal risk and *a threat to the existing order*. (McCallum, 2007, p. 12)

This heralded Prime Minister John Howard's "national emergency", whereby an intervention was necessary to address "the abuse of children in indigenous [*sic*] communities in the Northern Territory" (J. W. Howard, 2007). At the same press conference, Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough explicitly referenced the 'dangerous male' discourse, "The fear that people may have today (where) the strong men prevail, won't be there" (Brough in J. W. Howard, 2007).

The discourse of violence and dysfunctionality has been described by Aboriginal men and women as shaming Aboriginal males (A. Brown & Brown, 2007; Sunrise Male Health Summit, 2009), both leading up to and following the Intervention.

To suggest, as some people have, that Aboriginal people, particularly Aboriginal men, do not care about the protection of women and children is

deeply hurtful and blatantly false. (Daphne Naden in Stanley, Kovacs, Tomison, & Cripps, 2002, p. 29)

The almost 'witch-hunt' of Aboriginal males and the demonising of our males by the mainstream media and politicians both State and Federal, caused much angst not only at the Summit, but at all community levels as well. (Aboriginal Male Health Summit, 2008, p. 26)

And the men have been made to feel the lowest form of life. (Marion Scrymgour in "Scrymgour flexes political muscle," 2009 para 9)

It is therefore important to interrogate further how discourses surrounding the Intervention: namely violence, Aboriginal masculinity and Aboriginality, may impact upon the formation of Aboriginal male subjectivities.

5.4.2.1 Violence

Violence towards women is enacted by men from all walks of life, but it is noticeably more prevalent from males who struggle with performative ideals of normative masculine discourses (Egger, 1993).

For decades, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal male/men and women from a broad range of political and geographic perspectives have highlighted the social, psychological and physical damage caused by disproportionately high levels of family violence and child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities.⁶⁶ This has included the unacceptability of predominantly male violence towards Aboriginal women and children (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Gooda, 2006; Cripps, 2008; Langton, 2007, 2018; C. Liddle, 2016; Lloyd & Rogers, 1992; Pocock, 2003; Robertson, 2000).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Statistics most likely under represent Aboriginal family violence. This can be for a variety of reasons: many Aboriginal women do not report as they don't think they will be believed, they fear reprisals or do not wish to deal with the shame associated with incidents (Robertson, 2000) or because of a lack of support from police (Ting & Roberts, 2020). In addition to these factors, lack of capacity in social services, a perception that government agencies do not take reports seriously has led to under reporting of child sexual abuse (Pocock, 2003).

⁶⁷ McCallum noted in 2007 "Since the release of the report by the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence in 1999 there have been as many as 40 official inquiries into domestic violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities" (p. 14). Cobble Cobble academic Megan Davis

The dominant view in the professional literature recognises a complex array of contributing factors underpin Aboriginal family violence and child sexual assault (S. Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002; McGlade, 2012; Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, 2007; Robertson, 2000; Stanley et al., 2002). A meta-analysis undertaken by Blagg, Murray, Ray, and Macarthy (2000) as cited by Sue Gordon et al. provides an extensive list of factors.

Marginalisation and dispossession; loss of land and traditional culture; breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law; entrenched poverty; racism; alcohol and drug abuse; the effects of institutionalisation and removal policies; and the ‘redundancy’ of the traditional Aboriginal male role and status, compensated for by an aggressive assertion of male rights over women [and] children. (Blagg et al p. 5-6 in S. Gordon et al., 2002, pp. 56-57)

The validity of this framework is reinforced when examining the conditions leading to violence in other communities where, “A near identical chronology would fit countless other indigenous [*sic*] zones...Peru, Chiapas Mexico, or rural Nepal” (Dombrowski, 2010, p. 134). This highlights the experiences of Aboriginal people, and how these may be internalised as the focus (Langton, 2008), not Aboriginality *per se* as the most appropriate analytic framework for understanding these events.

Aboriginal family violence is higher than national averages, particularly in remote NT Aboriginal communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). This is a problem of marginalised masculinity and internalised responses to poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and racism—all products of colonialism, where males feel they cannot perform expected ‘masculine’ roles of providers and protectors in contemporary society (M. Adams, 2006c; Egger, 1993), coupled with discourses that condone violence towards women (Dodson, 2002).

Aboriginal males’ anger at their circumstances is internalised as pain (Nathan, 2013), or self-hatred (Alfred, 2009). “Men are less likely to talk to anybody, and more likely

noted over 60 articles published over 26 years related to violence and government inaction in her comment on the NTER (2007).

to externalise their pain in aggressive actions against others” (Robertson, 2000, p. 192), rather than find ways to productively address their pain and avoid violence (M. Adams, 2006a). It is also important to remember many Aboriginal males experience violence and abuse as children (M. Adams, 2006c; Frost, 2014; McGlade, 2012) and violence as adults, being both “offenders and victims (both labels can often be attached to one person)” (Frost, 2014, p. 97).

This analysis does not seek to excuse violence (Robertson, 2000), as is argued by Yiman and Bidjara anthropologist Marcia Langton (Langton in Morton, 2018), but rather,

The multiple and interacting contributions made by poverty, the dispossession of land, marginality and gender must be considered. To recognise these factors is not to create excuses, it is central to the construction of an adequate explanation of the levels of violence. (Egger, 1993, p. 3)

It is an attempt to contextualise causation in order to inform better ways to address the problem (M. Adams, 2006a; Frost, 2014; Robertson, 2000).

However in contemporary discourse — prominent before and after the Intervention — there is a deficit view that male violence towards women is immanent in Aboriginal society (Kimm, 2004; Nowra, 2007; Sutton, 2001, 2009). The evidential bases for these claims have been refuted as a misrepresentation of traditional Aboriginal culture (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Gooda, 2006; Aboriginal Male Health Summit, 2008; M. Adams, 2006c; Dodson, 2002; McGlade, 2012). These misrepresentations are based upon naïve readings of historical accounts of early settlers and a willing acceptance of tainted testament based upon culturally bound Eurocentric notions of Aboriginal savagery extrapolated to justify settler conquest and violence towards Aboriginal people. These historical reports are rarely verified by original ‘witnesses’ and often disregard other contradictory historical testament (Behrendt & Watson, 2008; Conor, 2013; Cripps, 2005; Konishi, 2008, 2011). As Langton (Langton in J. Price et al., 2016) wryly noted, if the levels of interpersonal violence that exist today had been the norm in pre-contact Aboriginal society, there would have been no society.

Where distorted views of traditional law are used as defence for Aboriginal males in sexual assault cases (Kimm, 2004; Nowra, 2007), close examination of the court system highlights the enabling role of contemporary settler police, lawyers (including from Aboriginal Legal Services) and judges' deficit views of Aboriginal society in general and women in particular. This can often lead to lenient sentencing in cases of assault against Aboriginal women by either Aboriginal or settler males (J. Atkinson, 2006; Behrendt & Watson, 2008; Langton, 2007; Lloyd & Rogers, 1992; McGlade, 2012).

The misuse of traditional law as a defence strengthen negative cultural complexes of a brutish Aboriginal male dominated traditional society (McGlade, 2012; Sutton, 2009) and undermine instances where an accommodation of traditional law, with its sanctions against such brutality, may be invoked (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Gooda, 2006; Lechleitner, 2013).

5.4.3 The Northern Territory Emergency Response (the Intervention)

Tanganekald, Meintang, Bunganditj and Potaruwutj legal academic Irene Watson described how the state demonises Aboriginal males for acts of violence towards Aboriginal women and children and engages in "entrapment: Aboriginal men are hunted into confined space, or removed from collectively to prison or the isolation of individualised spaces" (I. Watson, 2009, p. 44).⁶⁸ This 'demonising' of Aboriginal males forms part of a broader discourse of Aboriginal community dysfunction that pathologises Aboriginal community problems as immanent within Aboriginality (Austin-Broos, 2011; Motta, 2016). Shino Konishi (2011) described Australian Prime Minister John Howard's most instrumental factor in his campaign against Aboriginal

⁶⁸In this thesis I use the terms 'family violence' and 'child sexual assault' after McGlade, who noted 'family violence' as the preferred term to describe violence between Aboriginal family members as it captures the reality that such violence occurs within broader kinship relationships than the more narrow term 'domestic violence' which focuses upon immediate partner violence in settler communities. The term 'child sexual assault' is separated from family violence as it resolves the "problem that child sexual assault may not even fall within the definition of family violence because offenders can often be people who are unrelated (McGlade, 2012, p. 69). It is also important to not allow the term family violence obscure the reality that "men's use of violence against women is generally most serious (resulting in very high homicide rates for Aboriginal women), and men are also overwhelmingly responsible for child sexual assault" (McGlade, 2012, p. 69).

self-determination as being, “an unwavering campaign to undermine and demonise Aboriginal masculinity” (p. 22).

Conflating the violence perpetrated by some Aboriginal males with Aboriginality, apart from being a distortion of fact, works against addressing problems in Aboriginal communities. This approach has allowed violent Aboriginal males in leadership positions to argue that any criticisms of them are an attack on Aboriginal people, not on negative gendered behaviours, thus elevating race above gender as a site for analysis of understanding Aboriginal masculinity, in effect silencing Aboriginal women’s voices (M. Davis, 2011; McGlade, 2012). This discourse creates simplistic binaries of Aboriginal males as perpetrators and Aboriginal women and children as victims of violence (Frost, 2014; McGlade, 2012). It also animates the narrative of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1988, p. 296) inherent in the settler colonial discourse and cultural complex both in Australia, (I. Watson, 2009) and elsewhere (Stanovsky, 2007). Gayatri Spivak explained that her phrase represents “imperialist subject-production” (1988, p. 296); representations of female victims and male perpetrators as defined by the coloniser. Associate Professor Sara Motta (Mestiza Salvaje/Colombia Chibcha) (2016) described this hierarchically imbued discourse as creating conditions for the de-subjectivity of Aboriginal women and Hanna McGlade (2012) recognised it as adults talking on behalf of children. This, in Cohn’s (2006) model of representation, provides a clear and present example of patronising representation.

A focus upon Aboriginality, as subordinated, essentialized, labelled and patronised Aboriginal subjects, rather than examining gender relations, colonialism and whiteness/racism, relieves settler society of culpability for creating Aboriginal community social problems (Walter et al., 2023).

No serious commentator on the Intervention argued Aboriginal women and children should not be safe. However, there is a legitimate question whether the Intervention would have been necessary if the Commonwealth and State Governments had acted upon the plethora of reports into family violence and child assault that preceded it in

previous decades (P. Anderson, 2009; A. Brown & Brown, 2007; M. Davis, 2007; I. Watson, 2009).

Some commentators gave contingent acceptance of the necessity of the Intervention, recognising the rights of women and children were not being adequately addressed and therefore the policy provided the only means of achieving important action (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Calma, 2008; McGlade, 2012). Some later questioned its efficacy (Calma, 2009), noting for example, “there is no evidence that sexual assault of women has declined in the Northern Territory” (McGlade, 2018), or withdrew their support (A. Anderson in Bagall, 2011).

There were commentators who hardened their rhetoric and support as debate polarised around collective vs individual responsibility discourses (Langton, 2007). A discursive turn had been nurtured in the media, “Over the course of [the] decade, framing of Indigenous issues through a prism of individual responsibility became more dominant” (McCallum, 2007, p. 12), which for some was “the righteous media campaign for action” (Langton, 2007, p. 2). The argument for the necessity of moving to an individual responsibility discourse had been led by ‘radical centrists’, Langton and Bagaarmugu and Guggu Yalanji lawyer Noel Pearson (Langton, 2007). Their model involves a decoupling of capitalism from historical (Anthony, 2004) and ongoing colonialism (N. Pearson, 2011), while problematising policies of the equal rights movement. They often pilloried the ‘political left’, as a cultural class working against the interests of Aboriginal people, as being causal to Aboriginal social circumstances (Frankel, 2013; Langton, 2002, 2012; N. Pearson, 2006, 2007a, 2011). They argue dysfunctionality in remote Aboriginal societies is perpetuated from paternalistic policies that disempower Aboriginal people due to reliance upon welfare and political isolation in bounded communities (Langton, 2008). They posit a need for individuals to exercise their ‘right to take responsibility’ to address social malaise, through engagement with the market capitalist economy and waged employment, as modernity.

Cultural relativism should be rejected in favour of embracing modernity when it comes to the fundamental economic and social organisation of societies. It is

natural for peoples to advance from hunting and gathering to agriculture to industrialism. What peoples retain from earlier stages is a matter of cultural and spiritual choice. (N. Pearson, 2006 para 9)

This approach led both Langton and Pearson to support the Intervention (Langton, 2007; N. Pearson, 2007b) joining with more conservative Aboriginal voices (Bess Price in Langton, 2011; "NT intervention no land grab: Mundine," 2007), regarding it as a practical means to address child sexual abuse and violence experienced by women in remote communities.

Those who questioned the Intervention faced criticism from its supporters (Langton, 2007, 2008) as not caring about Aboriginal children. This they found this "offensive and insidious ... to equate scrutiny of legislative reform with wanting children to suffer" and "Being vigilant in a democracy of one's rights and freedoms is not inimical to the best interests of the Aboriginal child" (M. Davis, 2007 para 2). These criticisms were considered to have set up a false dichotomy between wanting to defend and extend Aboriginal rights to self-determination with wanting to protect the rights of children.

The Intervention was considered by many as counterproductive, contradicting the necessary preconditions of creating partnerships with Aboriginal people for successful program and policy outcomes (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Gooda, 2006; P. Anderson, 2009; A. Brown & Brown, 2007; Conor, 2012; Cripps, 2008; M. Davis, 2007; L. Thompson & Hil, 2009; Michael Wright, Dudgeon, D'Antoine, & Wilkes, 2007). All Aboriginal people, other than those given special privileged exposure by media and conservative politicians, were seen to be labelled under this approach as dysfunctional. The effect of this was to stigmatise the majority of males—especially in remote communities, as perpetrators and women and children as victims of family and child sexual assault (P. Anderson, 2009; Conor, 2012; Nathan, 2013). Both the exclusionary nature of the implementation of the Intervention and the stigmatising effect of the discourse surrounding this had a negative effect upon many Aboriginal males. As noted in the Introduction, Mutitjulu community member Vincent Forrester passionately described this using highly masculinised imagery, "Every Aboriginal man is now tainted with a brush, they have

emasculated us, they have said we are all woman bashers, we are all alcoholics, we are all child abusers” (“Aboriginals threaten to ban tourists from Uluru,” 2008 para 10).

5.4.4 The Leak cartoon and responses

The issue of Aboriginal males feeling ‘targeted’ was reanimated, during the time of this study, with the provocative publication by *The Australian* newspaper of a cartoon by Bill Leak (2016) on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (Figure 5.1). The cartoon depicted an Aboriginal father (holding a can of beer) being told by an Aboriginal police officer to take responsibility for his child. In the father's response, he reveals he does not know his son's name. This was not the cartoonist's only foray into negative depictions of Aboriginal males (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.1

Bill Leak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day Cartoon



Figure 5.2

Bill Leak Cartoons Depicting Aboriginal Male Violence



Source. News Ltd / Newspix

The publication of the cartoon followed upon an already painful public commentary, both preceding and during the Intervention, that focused upon Aboriginal males as perpetrators of child sexual abuse (N. Watson, 2011). In addition, there had been a recent exposé by the ABC of punishment of children in the NT Government Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre (which would later lead to a Royal Commission), that had raised issues around institutional child safety. The cartoon reignited passions around socially conservative discourses of Aboriginal fathers as deadbeat dads and other generally negative tropes regarding Aboriginal males considered seminal to Australia's settler history (Bond, 2016).

The cartoon was praised by conservatives (Bolt, 2016; Breheny & Bolt, 2016) as a form of 'truth telling' (Meade, 2016; Sammut, 2017). At the same time, a storm of protest and condemnation erupted over the cartoon (Bond, 2016; Meade, 2016; L. Pearson, 2016b; Sweet & others, 2016). A tweet started, by Joel Bayliss, Gudanji Wambaya man and Youth Justice Coordinator for the South Australian courts (Bayliss, 2016), depicting himself with a positive fathering image, led to many hundreds of tweets by Aboriginal fathers and their children promoting positive fathering stories. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull praised the cartoon and declared that it was not racist (Hutchens, 2016). This placed him at odds with his Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who condemned the publication of the cartoon as racist and stated he was:

Heartened that various voices from across the political spectrum ... [came] out and strongly condemned the cartoon. I would urge the Australian to be more aware of the impact cartoons like the one published today can have on Indigenous communities. (Scullion in Meade, 2016 para 9 & 10)

Paul Whittaker editor-in-chief of *The Australian* newspaper, and the cartoonist Bill Leak, defended the cartoon claiming it merely talked about the real underlying issues that led to juvenile incarceration, namely; parents not taking responsibility for their children. In a further defence of its publication, Whittaker cited recent statements in *The Australian* from Noel Pearson and Marcia Langton about the need for Aboriginal parents to take responsibility (Meade, 2016). Langton had recently tweeted a link to

the article in which she had been quoted, “Deadbeat Parents failed the Don Dale Detention Centre boys” by conservative journalist Janet Albrechtson (2016). The deadbeat dad discourse was central to the conversation both before and after the publication of the cartoon.

In response to Whittaker, although not Albrechtson, Langton stated, she “wasn’t comfortable” her comments were used to support the deadbeat dad discourse present in the cartoon. “He has crossed a line by stereotyping all Aboriginal dads as losers. This is wrong. So glad that I have had the opportunity to contribute to another useless gotcha moment instead of concentrating on the serious issues” (Langton in Meade, 2016 paras 4-6). Pearson did not publicly comment on the cartoon or the use of his name by Whittaker. Many other Aboriginal people directly supported Bayliss’s statement that it was important positive stories about Aboriginal dads were told to counteract negative stereotyping (Karvelas, 2016).

On the 17th November 2016 Langton, in a short lived coalition at the National Press Club made common cause with conservatives, Warrimay business women and lawyer Josephine Cashman and Warlpiri and then Alice Springs Town Councillor (now CLP Senator), Jacinta Price,⁶⁹ to push for more government action on Aboriginal family violence. There she reprised her arguments that Aboriginal fathers, as perpetrators, caused family suffering. Adding that urban Aboriginal people and members of the left also contributed by providing ideological cover (Langton, 2002, 2011; Langton in J. Price et al., 2016).

While distancing herself from both Leak and his opponents, Langton proceeded to make broad claims of Aboriginal father dysfunctionality. Stating, “statistics have a way of lying”, she dismissed those “social media activists who took to Twitter ... about 70 living fathers. Many other happy snaps showed adult children with their deceased fathers” (Langton in J. Price et al., 2016, p. 9). Aside from the patronising language used, The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation counted 100 tweets on just the first day (4th August). My own count from 6th of

⁶⁹ In a political twist NT Senator (CLP) Price would later lead the ‘No’ vote in the national Voice referendum, while Langton was a prominent ‘Yes’ advocate.

August to the 24th August (which did not include the first 2 days of tweets that were no longer available) was that there were 131 different fathers (pers. obs.).

During the Press Conference Langton went further, citing ABS data she asked, “So where are the other 200,000 or so Indigenous fathers and what are they like? Just under 10,000 of them are serving time in prisons for acts intended to cause injury, sexual assault and other crimes” (Langton in J. Price et al., 2016, p. 99).

However, a closer analysis of ABS data for that year showed there were around 200,000 *Indigenous males* aged 15-100. From the data, it was not possible to identify whether they were *fathers of Aboriginal children*. The just under 10,000 figure did not refer to *fathers*, it referred to serious *offences* being served by Aboriginal males. It is germane to note around half of those offences were not for interpersonal matters.

The data set that Langton refers to (Table 5.1) does not identify how many of the 4,960 interpersonal crime offences were perpetrated by fathers or against whom the offences occurred, (e.g. male to female, male to male, Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal).

Table 5.1

Number of serious offences being served by Aboriginal males.

Category of Offence	Number of offenders
01 Homicide and related offences	475
02 Acts intended to cause injury	3,203
03 Sexual assault and related offences	824
04 Dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons	340
05 Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	118
Subtotal of violent interpersonal crimes	4960
All other predominantly property, firearms, traffic, and offenses against justice procedures etc.,—not interpersonal offences	4528
total	9488

Source. ABS Census Cube doc 45170DO001_2016 Prisoners in Australia, 2016.

Langton described those who had taken to twitter with the hashtag #IndigenousDads as, having failed to take offence at the real issues of child abuse and family violence.

She went further and stated, “These lucky children of decent Aboriginal men missed the point” in feeling aggrieved by the Bill Leak cartoon (Langton in J. Price et al., 2016, p. 9), without recognising how her own analyses of ABS statistics potentially added to that feeling. Both Leak and Langton drew heavily upon, and perpetuated the same dysfunctional Aboriginal father discourse.

Gamilaraay journalist Luke Pearson writing in *IndigenousX* (2016a), presaging Langton’s criticism of the #IndigenousDads movement and her National Press Club presentation, noted:

Putting face to the many loving and intact Aboriginal families and engaged and active #IndigenousDads is necessary to reject Leak’s caricature of us, equally we need to find a way to talk about some sad realities beyond the reach of the Bill Leaks of the world and beyond the reach of those who fight with or against him over the top of us. (para 5)

The point of the #IndigenousDads tweets was to re-humanise those who a consistent discourse of failed Aboriginal masculinity and dysfunctional fathers had dehumanised for centuries in Australia (Bond, 2016; L. Pearson, 2016a). It was a socially driven movement to reclaim the narrative and gain a voice.

5.5 Contemporary Aboriginal fathers’ voices

Aboriginal males are constantly negotiating two dynamic worlds; one of Aboriginal law, with its social/cultural relationships and simultaneously the dominant settler constructed social and attendant power relationships (McCoy, 2009).

Having outlined the historically framed discourses related to Aboriginal males, in 5.4.1, I now consider how NT and other Aboriginal males conceptualise their subjectivity as a state of dissonance, when seeking to enact idealisations of masculinity and fatherhood. I then discuss how these males seek to re-harmonise their lives (Dissonance and recovery 5.5.1).

Finally, in 5.5.2 *Contemporary Aboriginal fathers’ views on fatherhood*, I discuss published work describing Aboriginal fathers and how they relate to key fatherhood discourses regarding roles and emotions.

5.5.1 Dissonance and recovery

The colonial discourse, as I have outlined, has created profoundly negative social conditions for Aboriginal males, as it encapsulates deficit views of parenting, perceptions of disengaged welfare dependency, and their dysfunctional roles in their local communities. These discursive practices are reinscribed in modern public policy, such as the NT Intervention, and are further perpetuated and reinforced in popular media cultural imagery, such as the Bill Leak racist cartoon. It is important to recognise the considerable pain these discourses caused for many Aboriginal males (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Gooda, 2006). In turn, these negative discourses influence the creation of subjectivities by Aboriginal fathers—as individuals reinscribe discourses in their performative actions (Foucault, 1995). Michael Dodson (1994) captured how this dynamic creates racialised meanings for both Aboriginal people and settlers.

These constructions, however much we may wish to reject them, are the context in which we live. They inform not only the way others think about and react to us, but also the lived experience that we have of ourselves and of each other. They have also become the enemy within. (p. 6)

Lowe and Spry (2002) described this problematic state as dissonance.

There can also be conflict and experiences of *dissonance* in the construction process. These are the ways individuals experience the conflicts of feelings and beliefs when they are shifting their values and identities in a changing world: when they can no longer conform to the norms of the past, and the expectations of their communities, families and peers. (p. 28)

For many males this results in loss of self-esteem, self-respect and alienation from the society around them (J. Liddle, 2008; Spry, 1999). “This alienation is at the core of the struggle for male health and wellbeing, as it acts to debase men, stripping away their dignity and the meaning in their lives” (J. Liddle, 2008, p. 3).

In their extensive ethnography with Aboriginal males from central Australia around depression, Brown et al. talked about connectedness. “For Aboriginal men, the close connections to family, country and all things within the sphere of their existence are incorporated within the concept of *walytja* [family]” (p. 10). These connections form one of the most important foundations of Aboriginal life. This concept of

interconnectedness, responsibility and duty to care for all things, was understood as *kanyini* ('To have, to hold, to care') (p. 10). Concern for others was identified as an important part of how people ruminated or worried, and was located as part of traditional views of responsibilities for family and society (A. Brown et al., 2012). For incarcerated fathers, or fathers with children who are at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviours, this would be particularly relevant.

A strict adherence to successful masculinity as the father provider (and other conservative dominant hegemonic masculinities) may also act as negative constraint, recreating dissonance.

They experience the promotion of some ways of becoming or being a man as 'successful'; and of others as 'failures'. The value of boys', youths' and men's lives is constantly represented in terms of status: wealth, a narrow range of physical appearance ('good looks', 'good body') and prowess related to sexual excitement; power and possessions; both personal and material. For most boys and men, whether Indigenous or other, much of this is not realistically attainable. Many then question the value of their own lives against the standards and stereotypes set by such images. (Lowe & Spry, 2002, p. 32)

Reconnection with traditional law and what is then seen as their 'rightful' place in society is an important avenue identified by Aboriginal males across the country as a means of maintaining or regaining a positive sense of self (M. Adams, 2006b; J. Liddle, 2008; M. Nakata et al., 2008; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al., 2008; Tsey, Patterson, Whiteside, Baird, & Baird, 2002). Rightful place is often spoken of in relation to a male's loss of place in the family and status in contemporary society. However, when stated as regaining their spirit or essence of being male—as to be found in the *Altyerre*, then this is an empowering positioning of men (J. Liddle, 2008). The dissonance created by colonisation and the current neo-colonial state can, in part be harmonised by males taking their rightful place.

The importance of relationships with partners and family members is broadly emphasised in discussions of both traditional kinship values and in contemporary settings. The health and wellbeing of women and children is linked to the ability of

males to enjoy their own wellbeing (Aboriginal Male Health Summit, 2008; M. Adams, 1999; Dodson, 1994; J. Liddle, 2008; Lowe & Spry, 2002; Rosewarne et al., 2017; Sunrise Male Health Summit, 2009; Wenitong, 2002). In this context, the apology in the Inteyerrkwe Statement⁷⁰ by Aboriginal men to women has been seen as an important gendered response to the hurt experienced by women, from men, even if all men do not commit these acts (Dodson, 2002; J. Liddle, 2008). For to be silent implicates all males (Dodson, 2002).

Challenging negative versions of hegemonic masculinity, for example where being a carer is posited as an achievable outcome, enacting respectful behaviour and love of family, and taking personal and collective responsibility, are positive actions being pursued as a means of creating harmony in men's relationships and self-image construction. This stands in contrast to Hammill's negative characterisation of the Aboriginal fathers in the community where she worked.

It appears that these men, as a collective, *choose* [emphasis added] to continue as largely dysfunctional, rather than summon their brothers to rein in their aggression, stop their violence towards women, protect their offspring and to claim the father role. (Hammill, 2001, p. 24)

However, Lowe and Spry (2002) argued that it is not a simple matter of individual choice.

There is a complex interaction here of history, traditions, forms of social organisation and their rules and norms (e.g. families and communities), resources and opportunities; and the wider historical, physical, social, cultural, political and economic environment, in the construction processes. ...

Many Indigenous males are constructing a variety of new identities in these personal journeys: while keeping themselves deeply rooted in their ancient sources of Indigenous identity; in country, Indigenous law, relationships, language, history and culture (p. 28).

⁷⁰ In June 2008 over 400 Aboriginal males participated in an Aboriginal Male Health Summit at Ross River NT. From this forum the Inteyerrkwe Statement was produced (Aboriginal Male Health Summit, 2008). This document has importance as it provided Aboriginal males with the opportunity to create their own representation, a voice after the stigmatising discourse that had surrounded the Intervention. Its importance as a representation of Aboriginal males' voices on family violence has meant that it has been broadly cited in academic and other media (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Calma, 2009; Cripps & Adams, 2014; M. Davis, 2011; Langton, 2008; Nathan, 2013).

Torres Strait Islander academics, Nakata et al. (2008) highlighted the need to conceptualise how to deal with dissonance that Aboriginal males are often living with, in a way that is positive for their wellbeing rather than negative. Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee Nation) and Mick Scrow (Kwakwaka'wakw and Snuneymuxw) (2017) in discussing fatherhood in the everyday, called for a re-thinking of views of power as coming from centralised government policy to fathers enacting relational acts of resurgence at the community and family levels.

5.5.2 Contemporary Aboriginal fathers' views on fatherhood

In general the research literature on fatherhood is drawn from studies of predominantly white middle-class urbanised communities (L. Brown et al., 2009; Doyle et al., 2015; Reilly & Rees, 2017; R. Williams, 2009a). Yet fatherhood is understood to be enacted in particular social and cultural circumstances (Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014; Gettler, 2016; C. Lewis & Lamb, 2007), and hence, is influenced by particular discourses related to those communities (Gregory & Milner, 2011; Miller & Maiter, 2008; Pini & Conway, 2016). Therefore, generalisations from the mainstream literature to central Australian Aboriginal situations can be problematic when seeking to understand local culturally shaped experiences (Heath et al., 2011).

The experiences and views of Aboriginal fathers are not often reported (Canuto, Harfield, Canuto, & Brown, 2019; Reilly & Rees, 2017). There is considerable attention in contemporary discourse on the potentially negative role of Aboriginal fathers in child protection and family violence. Conversely, Aboriginal males argue having a sense of 'rightful place' within family and community can have a positive impact upon the wellbeing of Aboriginal males (M. Adams, 2006b; Janya McCalman et al., 2006). It is therefore concerning that there is little published material describing how Aboriginal fathers perceive their experience of fatherhood (including what roles and responsibilities they ascribe to themselves) and their emotional experiences of fathering (Canuto, Harfield, et al., 2019; Reilly & Rees, 2017).

Papers identified in scoping this research were predominantly found in either the peer reviewed or grey literature. These were mainly descriptive or evaluation reports on programs targeting Aboriginal fathers.⁷¹

A small number of these provided directly attributable views of Aboriginal fathers' experience(s) of fatherhood (Collard et al., 2016; Hammond, 2011; Newell et al., 2006; Rossiter et al., 2017). A further minority were concerned directly with reporting on Aboriginal fathers' experiences (Carlin et al., 2021; Fowler, Rossiter, Dawson, Jackson, & Power, 2017; Prehn, Guerzoni, & Peacock, 2020).

However, this material primarily focused on participants' stated fathering goals or how behaviour was modified as a consequence of fatherhood programs—as observed by program staff (Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010; Hammond et al., 2004; Jia, 2000). While these observed and aspirational behavioural changes give an insight into the types of behaviours participants desired or exhibited, actual reporting on fathers' ideas of what it is to experience being a father was usually absent, or very limited.

Much of the available literature is under theorised or the theoretical frameworks applied to the thematic analysis are poorly articulated or unstated. As a result, competing discourses, not plainly stated, may be drawn upon in the same analysis. For example: gender role theory used to describe provider/protector family roles; non-hegemonic masculinity roles expressed in nurturing and shared parenting behaviours; Aboriginal holding or teaching roles in cultural value transmission; and Indigenist analysis regarding intergenerational and ongoing effects of colonialism. As well, it may be ambiguous as to whether these analyses were invoked by the participants or were applied by the authors.

⁷¹ (Beatty & Doran, 2007; Canuto, Harfield, et al., 2019; Collard, Adams, Palmer, & McMullan, 2016; Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010; Hammill, 2001; Hammond, 2011; Hammond, Lester, Fletcher, & Pascoe, 2004; Jia, 2000; Kurti, Holloway, & Hudson, 2013; Janya McCalman et al., 2010; Newell, Franks, Lloyd, Telford, & Binge, 2006; Reilly & Rees, 2017; Rossiter et al., 2017; Urbis Consulting, 2013).

A broad, albeit necessarily partial and limited picture of Aboriginal male views of fatherhood and their experiences, can be made based upon available Australian literature on Aboriginal fatherhood research. There is also the more extensive range of literature on regionally specific contemporary Aboriginal views of masculinity and gender roles.

5.5.2.1 Fathers' Roles

Aboriginal fathers have often been found to identify with the provider role discourse, citing this role as part of their new sense of responsibility upon becoming fathers (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019; Collard et al., 2016; Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010; Hammond, 2011).

Teaching of Aboriginal culture to children is a unique generative carer role commonly discussed. Aboriginal fathers have identified this as an important role for them, as well as having connection to Country being important for their own wellbeing (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019; McCoy, 2008; Prehn et al., 2020; Reilly & Rees, 2017; Rossiter et al., 2017). Being a positive role model for their children has also been noted as important (Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010; McCabe, Mellor, Ricciardelli, Mussap, & Hallford, 2015; Rossiter et al., 2017).

For some males, traditional settler roles are considered the defining version of fatherhood, where peer pressure could cause 'a real man' to be reluctant to engage in parenting (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019; Reilly & Rees, 2017). However, another definition of being a real man was that 'males raise a child, not just create one' (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019). There have also been differing reports of the role of men at attending birth, with childbirth being seen by some fathers as 'women's business' (Jia, 2000), however for some men engaged in parenting programs, being at the birth was seen as important (Hammond et al., 2004; Jia, 2000).

Supporting children in school is recognised as an important role for fathers (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019; Newell et al., 2006; Prehn et al., 2020; Urbis Consulting, 2013), as well as 'just being there for them' providing emotional support (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019).

5.5.2.2 Absence and parenting role models

In many studies, Aboriginal fathers have reported a desire to be present for their children (Carlin et al., 2021; Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010). This often contrasts with their own experience growing up (Hammond et al., 2004; Jia, 2000; Newell et al., 2006), with many fathers not having father role models to draw upon (Carlin et al., 2021; Fowler et al., 2017; McCoy, 2008), including as a result of Stolen Generation practices (Beatty & Doran, 2007; Jia, 2000; McCoy, 2008; Reilly & Rees, 2017). Studies report some fathers embracing the authoritarian approach of their fathers, seeing this as a legitimate role for themselves as fathers (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019; Hammond, 2011), whereas other fathers repudiated this approach (Hammond et al., 2004; Jia, 2000; Newell et al., 2006). Given contemporary father absence, fathers often bring up or care for other people's children (Fowler et al., 2017; McCoy, 2008).

5.5.2.3 Emotional Wellbeing

Aboriginal fathers report positive emotional connection with their children and enjoying being fathers (Hammond, 2010; Hammond et al., 2004), including when fathering other people's children (Fowler et al., 2017). Positive impacts on wellbeing are talked about by fathers (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019; Hammond et al., 2004), along with recognition of stressful times as well (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019). Some fathers reported healthy lifestyle changes after becoming fathers (Carlin et al., 2021; Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010; Newell et al., 2006; Urbis Consulting, 2013).

Fathers have commonly noted gaining a sense of responsibility once they had children to look after (Carlin et al., 2021; Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2010; Hammond et al., 2004; McCoy, 2008; Newell et al., 2006) and sometimes a sense of worry about the child's wellbeing attached to that care (Hammond, 2011; McCoy, 2008).

Fathers reported their partners (and other family) were a source of support (Carlin et al., 2021; Hammond et al., 2004; McCabe et al., 2015) and that they experienced closer spousal relationships after having children (Carlin et al., 2021; Newell et al., 2006), although there was also concern over potential negative impacts with partners,

due to disagreements over parenting (Hammond et al., 2004). Because some males had previous partners with whom they had children, relationship conflicts with these partners could cause considerable stress; particularly when it came to having access to their children (Fowler et al., 2017).

Stress can be caused by lack of work, preventing fathers from realising their provider role and fulfilling their newfound sense of responsibility (Canuto, Towers, et al., 2019; Hammond et al., 2004; Jia, 2000). Being away for work can also cause fathers stress (Carlin et al., 2021). Fighting or demands made by extended family can also be a source of stress (Burbank, 2011; Hagan, 2009; McCabe et al., 2015), as are experiences of racism (Jia, 2000; McCabe et al., 2015) and homelessness (Carlin et al., 2021). Incarceration causes considerable issues of concern for Aboriginal fathers (M. Wright, Davison, & Petch, 2017). This can include anxiety and worry for their child's wellbeing, as well as their own mental health when experiencing loneliness and separation anxiety (Collard et al., 2016; Fowler et al., 2017; Hammond, 2011; Rossiter et al., 2017). Knowing they have children outside of prison can conversely also be a motivation to endure their prison time (Hammond, 2011).

Pre-existing mental health issues can be exacerbated upon becoming a parent (Carlin et al., 2021). Aboriginal fathers (and other males) have been identified as embracing a stoic western approach to bottling up their emotional feelings (Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Ltd., 2019; Carlin et al., 2021). The negative effects of this can be compounded by Aboriginal males' limited access to health services, which they may perceive as culturally inappropriate (McCoy, 2006; Rosewarne et al., 2017).

In examining these various experiences and beliefs documented in studies from across Australia it is important to note that these cannot necessarily be extrapolated to central Australia, considering that even within a single geographic setting, there can be many differently held views and lived experiences (Miller & Maiter, 2008; G. Morgan, 2012). In addition, the various aspects of fatherhood illustrate how multiple ideals of masculinity—masculine discourses, are held by an individual at a given time, including, for example, nurturing masculinity and protector masculinity. Discourses, whilst seemingly at odds, can be enacted by the same individual who may hold

multiple forms of constructed explanations for their experiences (Beasley, 2012; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004; Petersen, 2003).

5.6 Summary

In this chapter I have used a Foucauldian Genealogical approach (Foucault, 1982, 1995) to review historical and grey literature, contemporary media and academic writings that create modern discursive formations. I have highlighted how these formations are replicated in and constitute present policies impacting upon Aboriginal fathers and how these may constitute Aboriginal male subjectivities.

I began by privileging traditional Aboriginal views of fatherhood in order to presage the discussion and establish why and how within Aboriginal culture, fathers held honoured and important protector, provider and teacher roles—in concert with Aboriginal women.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, fatherhood is both a signifier (Whitehead, 2002) and resource (Pini & Conway, 2016) through which masculinity is enacted, and it is concurrently shaped by ideals of masculinity (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Pini & Conway, 2016).

I then outlined gender discourses informed by gender role theory (Parsons, 1955, 1961) and structuralist gender relations theory (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and post-structuralist (Lupton & Barclay, 1997) approaches. I identified the strong influence of the provider role (especially in a nuclear family) as described in gender role theory, persisting today in shaping fathers parenting roles. I also discussed how the more recent emergence of the new involved father discourse has opened up carer and emotive roles for fathers in contemporary parenting. As discourses of fatherhood are shaped by the interplay of discourses and discursive practices of masculinity, they are also shaped by discourses and discursive practices of motherhood (and femininity). Apparent in both the providers and carer fatherhood discourses are the changing relationships between mothers and fathers and, as noted previously, the heteronormative nature of these discourses. It is apparent from this review that the provider and carer roles are the dominant and at times conflicting discourses influencing fathers.

Germane to the negative discourse often associated with Aboriginal fathering, I also considered the various contributing factors to the 'absent' father discourse. Three common discourses present in studies of father emotional wellbeing were discussed: how being or becoming a father impacted or changed fathers' sense of self, how this changed their relationships with others and, lastly, where being or becoming a father created emotional issues.

I then presented the predominantly negative discourses related to Aboriginal males' subjectivity, the 'imagined' Aboriginal males created through the dispositif of gendered colonialism, reinscribed in the Intervention. A contextualising of Aboriginal fathers' social position must include recognition that both before and after the Intervention, Aboriginal males felt deeply, both as a group and individually, they had been targeted and publicly shamed as perpetrators of domestic violence and child sexual assault. Aboriginal males felt demonised and stigmatised by the debate even before the Intervention and Leak cartoon (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Gooda, 2006).

Arising from these negative discourses, Aboriginal males have described a sense of dissonance and alienation that has in turn negatively impacted upon their emotional wellbeing and connectedness with the broader society. I have also discussed those elements of practice that Aboriginal males identify in their constructive discourses, in particular the regaining of a rightful place in society based on traditional culture and the close care and support of family.

Lastly, I drew upon the limited literature on Aboriginal fatherhood, to discuss how Aboriginal males have positively framed their experiences of fatherhood. In particular, I highlighted the teaching of and connection to culture and satisfaction with becoming fathers as practices that strengthen positive subjectivities which, in turn, may enable fathers to re-harmonise themselves in contemporary society.

The paucity of evidence in the literature regarding Aboriginal fathers' experiences of fatherhood, validates the need for further research to provide an opportunity for

Aboriginal fathers' voices and representations to become more available (Reilly & Rees, 2017). This is my primary aim in the remainder of this thesis.

In the next two chapters I present the findings of my research, I apply a discourse analysis approach to represent these various, and possibly at times internally conflicted (Petersen, 2003) accounts constructed by the fathers who participated in the project.

Chapter 6. Aboriginal fathers' interviews: Fatherhood discourse analysis

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented an analysis of key discursive turns relating to Aboriginal fatherhood. Here I present the analytic findings of how the group of Aboriginal fathers⁷² interviewed for this study framed fatherhood roles. This included generative care, and in particular, how they related their encounters with schooling as a form of generative care. Their narratives and self-representations are contextualised within the discursive frameworks of masculinity and fatherhood outlined in the previous chapter.

In analysing their experiences, I consider how, in enacting fatherhood, these males create space for themselves in a world which incorporates Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social systems, cultural mores and power relations. This approach recognises subjectivity as being informed by individual internalisation and replication of power relationships and self-representation within these relationships (Newman, 2016).

In section 6.2 *Being Fathers, Enacting Fatherhood and dominant fathering discourses*, I present the participants' narratives of fathering roles. This includes how they talked about: provider/protector roles, where their fathering intersects with the involved father discourse, as well as extensive discussions of issues that correlate with carer discourses—including emotional support and teaching values. Of particular importance is how they discuss their role as generative fathers in teaching Aboriginal culture to their children, and their generative fathering role with their children's mainstream education.

⁷² To avoid the overuse of the term father or fathers when discussing those interviewed, I will also use the term 'participants', 'their' or 'they'. Having previously noted the term 'men' is not appropriate in an Aboriginal context when describing people who may, or may not, have been through Aboriginal law and the term 'Aboriginal males' can seem long-winded or jarring to read.

In identifying *Role models for fathers*, section 6.3, the fathers indicate there are many diverse sources upon which they draw; their own fathers not always being a chosen or possible option.

While their upbringings and current social relationships become apparent when discussing their fathering experiences, the range of current living conditions may not be as apparent, although this may have quite marked impacts upon how they enact fatherhood. A brief consideration of some observed settings of the fathers' homes⁷³ serves to highlight the diversity of this experience.

One father, Lachie, lived in a concrete blockhouse; hidden under a suburban neutral painted render, various extensions, and a recent renovation and, like most of its neighbours, his house bore little resemblance to its original N.T. Housing Commission design, now privatised, typical in many sub-divisions in Alice Springs. With five children, the extension to what was probably a three-bedroom house was an understandable outcome, if affordable. A pool in the front yard, pets in the back, small dogs, and the tortoises in their big tank, welcoming someone who comes through the door between the house and the built-in double garage, attest to a well-maintained and orderly home environment. Both parents were professionals and, while Lachie was not working fulltime at the time of the first interview, they had previously benefitted from having two incomes.

By contrast, Tom, who like Lachie, highlighted the stability of his parents in his upbringing, was raising his granddaughter on a Town Camp on the fringe of Alice Springs. Here around twenty, originally brightly painted, now faded in the central Australian sun, rendered concrete blockhouses were spread around a large excision (Town Camp special purpose lease), in the middle stood a dilapidated playground and an old ablution bloc/laundry. Tom's family slept outside on mattresses laid directly on the ground behind a house occupied by other relatives. Here outside the house yard, beyond the low pipe and wire-mesh fence, their bedding, clothes, and immediately accessible possessions were stored in the open. The three-bedroom house they

⁷³ As noted in the Discourse Methodology and Methods Chapter, five of the fathers' interviews occurred in their homes.

accessed was probably home to between 6-10 people. Due to overcrowding and poor maintenance, the chance of its shower functioning was around 30% and the toilet being functional about 60% (Pholeros & Phibbs, 2012; Ware, 2013). These concrete block houses, unlike Lachie's transformed house had small windows, were often very dark inside, had bare concrete floors and, due to the large number of people using the houses, could often be very noisy and chaotic.

Despite their efforts (evidenced by rakes and brooms leaned against the low yard fence) the day I went to interview Tom, the ground glittered with small shards of broken glass. Cigarette butts and other detritus from other long gone previous camps and activity were obvious.

The beauty of sleeping under the stars in these circumstances is vastly diminished by the winter cold or summer heat, noise and disruption from other households and their not always welcome visitors. Privacy can be difficult to obtain and security obtained only through mutual support where there are no locks on doors or safe places to store personal belongings. How does one keep track of a child's schoolwork and clothes in these circumstances? Tom's wife Mary was on dialysis at the time of his interview. Social security payments do not go far. However, they looked after their granddaughter because her mother could not due to her own issues dealing with alcoholism. Their ability to provide the sort of stability and support to their child's schooling was understandably compromised by these living conditions.

In another Town Camp, Matthew highlighted overcrowding, transience of the population, and particularly pressures around alcohol consumption, as issues that negatively affected his ability to provide the sort of home he wanted for his children.

Matthew: The ones who are drinking, you know, they joke around a lot and make fun and ...sometimes they probably go a bit too far and—and end up getting violent. Yeah, you know, like, um, oh, like, if someone does the wrong thing and they, I guess would have a—two person might have an argument and, yeah, it gets nasty from there.

Q: So things are a bit quieter?

Matthew: Yeah, a bit quieter so far, until they all come back again.

Q: 'Til they all come back again. And when the other family members come back though, there'll be a lot of people in the house?

Matthew: Yep, and a lot of crying, a lot of fighting. (Matthew)

I did not interview Matthew at his home; he preferred to come to the school for an interview. I did however, visit him a couple of times when arranging the interview, and can attest to similar conditions that were noticeable at Tom's Town Camp. Rubbish was left around the grounds of the Town Camps, many glass shards and tin cans scattered on the ground, although not within Matthew's yard. His house, the same concrete block, dark, like 'Tom's, was surrounded by bare dusty earth around it with a small patch of grass watered with a hand hose, presumably for kids to sit and play. There were a couple of plastic clam sandpits and various toys, balls and tip trucks scattered about the yard, around the side a few cars, not functional—other than as climbing equipment. Even in the relatively short time of my visits, there was the noticeable continual coming and going of vehicles, people looking for relatives, people walking into town and the cavalcade of modern AWD's adorned with government or NGO logos.

It would be hard to picture a greater difference between Tom's and Mathew's living conditions and those of Lachie. Yet, as the crow flies, these families only live a few kilometres apart.

While all participants are Aboriginal males, their freedom to realise, shape, and enjoy their ideals of fatherhood is very closely linked to their class status, as it is intricately linked to race relations and performative masculinity.

6.2 Being Fathers, Enacting Fatherhood and dominant fathering discourses

In this section, I present the fathers' narratives of their fathering roles framed around dominant discourses of fatherhood identified in the Aboriginal Fatherhood Discourse Genealogy (previous chapter).

I show that the fathers in this study identified with the roles of protectors and providers, but also how there are complex interplays between these classic gendered

roles with enacting more involved fatherhood practices. In this space fathers take on many roles found in carer discourses including emotional support and the teaching of values. Of particular importance is how they discuss their role as generative fathers in teaching Aboriginal culture to their children.

It will become abundantly clear the fathers in this study placed a high value on education as a vehicle for the social and economic advancement of their children. Regardless of their own experience of education, ranging from no experience, through disinterest when at school, to having enjoyed school, every father identified the importance of a good education for their children. They wished to provide their children with the chance to engage with the broader community, gain employment and be able to ‘get ahead’. I present extensive findings of the generative care that these fathers undertake to support their children’s education both at home and in their direct involvement with schools.

These various roles involved enacting fathering practices that drew upon a range of gender-based views of fatherhood, including gender role theory, gender relations theory and Aboriginal gender roles.

6.2.1 The provider/protector, involved father roles

“We are here to provide for the family.” (Lachie 1)

“The bread winner, the protector.” (Luke 1)

It could be imagined that if this group of fathers had been given a survey tool about fatherhood, all would have ticked either the ‘provider’ or the ‘protector’ boxes, with most ticking both. These fathers strongly ascribed to the provider role, which was expressed as providing financially for their immediate family, sometimes as giving their children an advantage in the world they themselves had not experienced when they were a child (Marcus, Jack 1). Protector roles included positively providing a safe space for their children (Liam), but also from negative outsiders, sometimes characterised as being strangers (Mitch, Caleb), disruptive family members (Liam, Matthew), negative social influences and issues (Jack) or fighting adults—sometimes themselves (Shane). The provider/protector account sits easily in the classic western gender role theory (Parsons, 1955) and as enacted heteronormative hegemonic

masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985) and many fathers in this discussion took on what is termed a heroic position (Medved, 2016).

Jack highlighted the provider/protector role in his account of traditional Aboriginal fathering.

I consider myself to be a contemporary man but I know a little of our traditions and there's longstanding traditions that teach about the relevance of the father with the children. And, these are belief systems that have been passed on for thousands of years. And, every strong warrior would work to protect his children. Because men who declare themselves strong warriors would protect their group and that means protecting and fighting to the death to look after their kids. (Jack 1)

Jack invoked the warrior image to represent the instrumental role when dealing with the outside world. This is an interesting representation, as his characterisation of a warrior in an Aboriginal (pre or de-colonialised) society, parallels the instrumental male role as it is understood in gender role theory. Where males deal with the public sphere, while women stay in the private home sphere (Parsons, 1955), rather than customary Aboriginal society where both genders have public roles (Merlan, 1988). The use of the term 'warrior' is particularly evocative of the heroic protector position. In this, the evoked warrior may reinforce a hierarchical western gender role and therefore actually reproduce colonial power binaries, while reshaping Aboriginal customary gender relations into a contemporary Aboriginal two-world experience.

Some of the roles that participants described, such as fixing things around the house and maintaining the yard (Matthew, Shane, Mitch, Lachie 1), teaching children how to make things (Caleb), fix cars, change tyres (Jack 1, Shane, Mitch) and taking kids to sport (Luke 1, Jack 1, Dale, Matthew), fit well with traditional gender role theory (Doucet, 2017; Nentwich, 2008; Parsons, 1955). Wanting to spend time playing with their children was often mentioned (Lachie 1, Luke 1, Matthew, Jack 1, Tom, Liam, Shane, Toby, Caleb, Mitch and Dale). The fathers often used terms like "*having fun*", "*just the enjoyment of mucking around with them*", "*spend time with them*", "*teaching them things*", when talking about this playtime. To what degree this desire

would be described through a gender role lens as an outlet for their childish urges (Parsons, 1955), or whether it was about the father having expressive emotional enjoyment with their child while building strong emotional ties with them (Fletcher et al., 2014), would be hard to differentiate. Both behaviours could be occurring at the same time and are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Fathers also described many roles potentially at odds with traditional fathering roles, reflecting modern family functioning, house cleaning, and childcare, where gender role provider and nurturing roles are reversed or shared (Lachie 1, Caleb, Luke 1, Liam).

Most fathers were active in getting their children to school, which involved dressing them, making breakfast, or lunches and driving them to or from school (Lachie 1, Luke 1, Matthew, Liam, Caleb, Marcus and Tom). Cooking was another activity they undertook (Caleb, Matthew).

There were various ways fathers were able to spend time with their children and as Tom stated, *“just look after them”* (Tom). The concept of *‘just looking after’* was illustrated by Caleb, when talking about taking his children to the cinema. Caleb described being surprised with himself at how he was able to get used to washing nappies, *“I’m a dad! I couldn’t believe it. It was—but then, within a year or so, it grew into me. Doing the cleaning and rinsing the nappies, washing them, doing stuff like that.”* (Caleb). Caleb was working at the time and was cooking for the family at night.

Noting the hybrid nature of changing gender roles in his household, Lachie commented, *“we basically share the household duties and all that sort of stuff... I probably get to do a bit more because I have to do outside work...hahaha but it all evens out in the wash I must say”* (Lachie 1), indicating that maybe some traditional mainstream male roles, such as gardening had not been taken up by his partner. However, his comment that even though he was doing more outside, the *‘evens out in the wash’* could be read as indicating that he did less of some other ‘traditionally female-gendered’ roles.

Many of the fathers' narratives changed during their interviews, shifting from abstract descriptions of what fathers do to personal accounts of their own experiences.

In this latter narrative, they often described sharing with their partners/wives the roles of providers and protectors whilst having an emotionally supportive role for their children. In this representation, they run counter to the non-expressive masculinity embedded in gender role theory and in performative hegemonic masculinity (hooks, 1984).

6.2.2 Discourses of care: emotional support and teaching values

Providing emotional support to their children was raised by a number of fathers as an important role. Parents, *"[should] actually listen to the children's needs...let them know that you're there for them and encourage them"* (Jack 1). Dale was concerned about his son's behaviour and noted he thought he should be there *"helping him"* and feeling better when he was able to *"[be] there for him"* (Dale). By being with his children Matthew was able to *"look after them, comfort them [pause] if another kid [pause] bullying [pause] them[pause] you're there to stop that [pause] and they feel more comfortable[pause] because they know they are protected"* (Matthew). Liam spoke of the close relationship he enjoyed with this daughter who always wanted to be around him *"where we – especially, we talk about things [pause] we always have our times with one-on-one with them, [pause] ask them what's wrong"* (Liam). He also looked to their future relationship where he hoped, *"when they get older we have the same relationship"* (Liam).

Providing their child with a supportive environment was stated as important, *"Knowing we are there to support them, it might just be a good foundation for the children"* (Toby). *"Because I think, it does give you a good kick start, and you just feel that support and that caring from an early age"* (Lachie 1). Marcus noted that, although he had broken up with his partner and even if they had issues between each other, they were able to work together in supporting their children's upbringing because *"I mean that's something we've always put emphasis on, is just two kids, despite whatever paths we take."* (Marcus).

Teaching values was also raised as important by these fathers (Liam, Toby, Luke, Lachie 2 & Jack). *“So I really want to impart ... my values onto my children so that they, in turn, can be more successful in their personal lives and they'll go on to have children”* (Jack 1). Toby linked practical knowledge of self-care in the home with mental health and strength outside.

If you're strong in the house, you'll be strong outside, so washing the dishes, cleaning the floor, mopping, folding your own clothes, keeping your beds tidy, what you learn here, it will make you stronger later on in life and nobody told me that, I just—when I was young you got told what to do and you done it.

(Toby)

Luke talked about teaching *“them right from wrong”* when confronting his children over discipline issues (Luke 1). Toby said he felt responsible when his daughter stayed out one night and also gave an example of teaching his sons to show responsibility, after they went through puberty. *“...you're not the little boy you used to be now, you're now a young man and if you want me to treat you like a young man you've got to show responsibility as a young man”* (Toby). Liam said he was teaching his nephews the values implied in being a good father, as his nephews looked up to him. *“They call me dad ... Like a role model to ... just be like a dad figure as well”* (Liam).

In these are clear expressions of teaching values as generative care.

So going through a separation, I think that stereotype [absent father] may have been applied to me by other people in the community. Whereas I've always had an active interest in the wellbeing of my kids and concern about their future. (Jack 1)

Their children's futures were explicitly being considered in these fathers' accounts.

6.2.3 Generative fathering—teaching Aboriginal culture

Teaching and ensuring their children had the opportunity to be exposed to their Aboriginal culture was raised as an important role.

I took her back there for the first time and that was this year, show her where her grandmother was born and just her country, she's never seen it and the boys haven't seen it, so that was a—that was pretty fulfilling for me to take her back. (Toby)

The importance of “*knowing where I come from*” (Toby) was an essential element in Aboriginal culture discussed by many, but not all participants. Taking their children ‘out bush’,⁷⁴ to learn traditional practices, how to prepare bush tucker, respect for the land and knowledge of sacred sites, are foundational cultural activities fathers (and families) engage in to help strengthen Aboriginal identity and connectedness to land, family and culture (A. Brown et al., 2012).

Teaching culture was important to most fathers. Those who had lost a parent, had an absent parent or where one parent was not Aboriginal expressed a particular desire to ensure their children were exposed to this knowledge.

Toby grew up in the Kimberly region of Western Australia (WA). His mother passed away when he was about 18 years old. The knowledge she gave him regarding his grandmother’s birthplace was very important for his identity and his place in his family. He was able to pass that knowledge on to his children and his brother on a visit home.

that was important to me to know where my grandmother was born and yet I think today it's myself, my eldest brother and my daughter now, only us three know exactly where grandma's born and my mother was second eldest in her family, her eldest brother's never—her eldest brother never taught—never told her children cause they all don't know where grandmother was born and it's something we hold as sort of we've got something there. (Toby)

Neither Liam’s nor Jack’s fathers were present when they were growing up. They both felt it was very important to teach culture, to develop identity and moral values.

I'm there with them every day and we're doing—either going bush, I'm teaching them something. ... just that I've never had that father figure so I'm always there for my kids and teaching right from wrong, ...—I've got young men in my family and I've got to try and learn—teach those guys and just to transfer them into young men. (Liam)

⁷⁴ Colloquial term for anywhere away from a main town. It may be used to delineate a place; or be used to express going away and travelling around for an activity, e.g. ‘just going out bush to get away’.

Liam's family responsibilities extended beyond his immediate nuclear family, similar to Tom, who had the daily care of his granddaughter and took on the responsibility to teach culture, "*show them around the bush tucker*"; Liam had an older nephew living with his family. In both cases, the children could not be looked after by their immediate family members due to alcohol or family dysfunction issues. Jack, at the time of the first interview, had just got full-time care of his five children from his non-Aboriginal ex-partner and wanted his children to get "*connection to Country*" and with "*the assistance of my mum and some of my extended family. So the kids are getting that extended family, tribal time that they didn't have access to before*" (Jack 1).

Dale, whose father was non-Aboriginal relied upon his uncles to teach him men's side of culture and to take his son to visit family 'out bush' in order to expose his son to his Aboriginal culture. With a different perspective, Lachie, while also pointing to his mother, uncles and aunties as being a potential source of cultural knowledge for his children did not promote cultural learning. "*I'm not real, let's say, big on that, but I don't deny that from them either*" (Lachie 2). He identified that this was how he had been brought up, and while he would not "*say yay or nay or anything. It's just, I've just gone down a different path and yeah*" (Lachie 2). For Lachie, his Aboriginal identity was not predicated (in his interview) on active cultural practice, rather on his social and family connections.

In teaching their children their place in Aboriginal culture these fathers can be seen as seeking to enact their 'rightful place' (J. Liddle, 2008) in their society, as Aboriginal males. These cultural activities are particularly Aboriginal enactments of fatherhood, where relationships with their fathers, mothers, aunties, uncles, and grandparents, have complementary and structured roles in culture (Merlan, 1988). Their cultural knowledge is not something overtly displayed in their everyday activities on the streets of Alice Springs. This identity exists within a non-spatial framework of family, connectedness to land and spirit of which non-Aboriginal people may be unaware.

6.2.4 Generative fathering: Education

In this section, following a modified schema of Hossain & Shipman (2009), on parenting involvement with school(ing), I present the findings on the fathers' involvement with their children's schooling, both through participation at home and their engagement with school.

Showing how fathers support their children's schooling in the home setting illuminates the level of emotional and time commitments that these fathers expend in the private domain. This narrative, that fathers provide support in the home, runs counter to narratives of disinterested or absent fathers that populate discourses on Aboriginal fathers (Hammill, 2001) and the Aboriginal parent engagement literature (Chenhall et al., 2011).

I now describe how their perceptions of school and their engagement with school and schooling relate to gender roles, colonialism, personal educational experiences, and other contextual social issues.

6.2.4.1 Fathers' involvement with their children's academic participation when they are at home

The analysis of the fathers' at home involvement with their children is presented under three categories on an amended model after Hoogendoorn (2010): support, motivation, and control/practical help. Hoogendoorn's model originally separated control and practical domains. However, fathers in this study raised issues related to both control and practical help often at the same time. For example, issues related to getting their children to do homework and how they assist them in practical ways and also behaviour issues that they address and how they use external agencies. I have combined these two categories, to avoid artificially separating how the participants define these processes. Support includes getting children ready for school. Motivation considers how fathers encourage the importance of education with their children. Control includes getting their children to school, do their homework, and behave appropriately in school. Practical help describes how they engage directly with helping with homework and seeking external assistance for their child's academic achievement. I also outline the practical role fathers play in providing emotional support to their child's school experiences.

6.2.4.2 Support in the home

Seven of the fathers volunteered information about getting their children ready for school. Although their degree of involvement varied, Caleb, Dale, Liam, and Marcus described highly involved roles in getting their children up, getting dressed and organising lunches. *“So, she [his wife] pretty much looks after the baby girl, you know, like in the morning I get his [son’s] lunch, and shower and clothes and all ready, you know”* (Dale), describing his primary role in getting his son organised for school since they had a new baby in the family. Whereas Tom described general issues, *“like, I get them to have shower or maybe tell them to clean up”* (Tom), when asked about who got his daughter up for school in the morning. Matthew, *“Mmm, I sometimes help my partner get the kids ready for school”*, reflected a limited involvement in getting his sons ready for school. Luke, when considering his role in comparative terms with others felt, *“in terms of getting them ready for school, I would be a little bit more hands-on”* (Luke 1). These levels of involvement in getting children ready for school were consistent with the types of activities and roles articulated in broader fathering roles as discussed previously, where non-gender specific carer roles were undertaken by these fathers (C. Lewis & Lamb, 2007).

Liam, Marcus and Toby considered that providing emotional support to their child’s school experiences was important. Liam’s description, addressing his children’s spiritual needs in the school context, captures the richness of the support for school settings similar to general roles in supporting children discussed previously.⁷⁵

We make sure that their spiritual—especially their spirits are all right and just the side of what bothers them, especially what they’ve got especially at school and that. Me and the missus will set out and—you got any problems at school, whatever? Well, tell us what? So we’ll actually sit down and go through what they need to be especially—what’s their problem. (Liam)

Although Marcus spent time away working on the mines he also directly provided emotional support with school concerns, *“and if they didn’t have a good day at school, they’d tell me why and then we’d look at reasons of how we’re going to fix it”* (Marcus).

⁷⁵ Section 6.2.2.

Addressing specific issues where fathers provided support, Marcus and Luke talked about how they gave advice to their children when negotiating friendships. Lachie, Matthew and Marcus all identified bullying (by other children, but not identified as being racially based) at school as an area where they had supported their children with counselling at home. Lachie recalled how he had become frustrated with the lack of support from the school. He advised his son to take action for himself.

He was basically getting bullied, and he got bullied for a long time ... I did the stuff ... 'you've got to go to the teacher' ... 'you've got to go to the Principal'. ... when I was younger, my mum said basically 'you have to hit them first, and worry about it later'. ... you know ... and that's what I got to with him ... I said 'ahh well one day you might have to do something' ... you get sick of being scared ... and that's last resort option ... but that changed a lot of stuff for him too....so....

He came home that day and said 'I didn't win the fight ... but you know ... I give him what he thought he deserved' ... and it probably changed a lot from there...

I got called in to see the principal...rah rah rah.... . (Lachie 1)

The fathers' direct dealings with the school regarding bullying and other emotional issues of their children are discussed in more detail later in the section on emotions and wellbeing (Section 7.3.6). Here, it is noteworthy that these fathers see that it is appropriate role for them to provide emotional advice and support for their children, representing a softer version of masculinity than that of classic gender role theory (Parsons, 1955), incorporating a caring fatherhood version of masculinity. This form of care may indicate practical enactment of taking up their rightful place as fathers (Tsey et al., 2002). In Lachie's narrative, suggesting physicality to resolve conflict would indicate more traditional notions of masculinity were sometimes drawn upon. The outcome of this approach is discussed later when considering Lachie's engagement with the school.

6.2.4.3 Motivation: Education a way to 'get ahead in life'

The fathers' desire to motivate their children's participation in school was driven by their sincere belief in the value of education as a transformative social process. This

belief was articulated regardless of how positively they reflected upon their own education experience.

There was consistency of the responses, with repeated key words, reminiscent of a modern T.V. community service announcement, when discussing the value placed upon their children's access to education: "*very important*" (Lachie 1), "*really important*" (Toby), "*important*" (Luke 1), "*very important, 100 percent*" (Shane), "*it's important*" (Matthew), "*so going to school is really important.*"(Jack 1), leading to the question: Why was it 'really important'? A commonly held expectation was that education would lead to a good life (often expressed in economic terms), depending upon their perception of their circumstances, possibly a better life than they had experienced. Education would improve their child's life choices, especially employment opportunities because:

School is there to teach you things that you could use when you come out of school to whatever job. (Toby)

I think my kids especially that they've got more of a chance of getting the best education. That's why—and also better future for themselves, what we want for them. I'd want for my kids a better future. (Liam)

I think that, basically, anything they desire because that's what I try and tell them. I said, "That's why youse go to school." So I actually, say probably about once every couple of weeks, I sit down and, "What do youse want to become when youse are older?" And K, my youngest boy, he actually wants to be a ranger or veterinarian. (Caleb)

I just want my kids to have like a good life, good education. I tell the kids every day go to school, and do Year 12. Jobs, you know it's hard; it's hard now, like if you have got no training, you know. I tell my kids, I tell my nieces and nephews, my friends you know my mate's kids. I just don't tell my kids, I tell everyone's kids. Finish off school, you know be good for you. (Mitch)

That's what society these days looks at kids with more education. They're more likely to get a job easier than without education. (Matthew)

Education is really important because then that gives you the opportunities to be better equipped to support a family, to provide a home for that family and, basically, get ahead in life. Yeah. (Jack 1)

Caleb's reference to his son's aspiration of becoming a veterinarian indicates school was also important for university aspirations. This pathway was also mentioned by Marcus, *"If they want to go onto further education at universities, then that (being at school) assists in all of that"*. Mitch referenced moving away to attend school as a way for his children to be exposed to the idea of going on to university. Going away to school is further discussed later in this section.

Attending school was also valued for building communication and cross-cultural skills important for successfully negotiating the dominant cultural context. Tom observed, *"You know, they (the child will) speak with someone with English"* (Tom). This statement poignantly reflects this cross-cultural issue, as Tom expected his daughter would otherwise try and speak in her first language. Jack stated:

Going to school, learning to read and write properly, how to integrate into modern society as well as balance that with traditional obligations. That, sort of, foot in both worlds, sort of, thing ... So going to school is really important because you have to learn to read and write, you have to learn your maths, you have to (have) social decorum, right? This is what will help you to live and thrive in a modern world. (Jack 1)

Having an education would help their child to learn *"how to behave"* (Shane) and *"to cope with society"* (Luke 1). Toby expressed hope that:

They get the ground skills to know how to socialise with different cultural—different cultures, not just the Aboriginal culture but a lot of kids these days go through school and if they only do it through their community and through certain schools who focus just on Indigenous education, I think they miss it because they don't interact enough with non-Indigenous kids. (Toby)

School was described as the site to gain the practical skills and social skills to negotiate the non-Aboriginal world. Racism and ongoing coloniality is obvious to these fathers (see section 7.3.4 on stresses related to racism) and is something they all, depending on the setting, negotiate to different degrees. Being exposed to how a non-Aboriginal institution works may be seen as one of the valuable inherent aspects of going to school. It also brings with it the issue of being exposed to and having to negotiate the cultural complexes that school communities enact and that, as outsiders, Aboriginal people who have not attended school may not always understand, depending on their degree to exposure to this system (ACER Indigenous Education Team, 2016; Lea, Thompson, et al., 2011). Given the highly segregated social nature of Alice Springs,⁷⁶ schools provide Aboriginal children with an opportunity to mingle with non-Aboriginal children with the potential for both groups to become familiarised with each other before the entrenched nature of segregation takes effect. When Jack spoke of getting ahead, this could be understood to be getting ahead of the social positioning to which you are born. *“And then my grandchildren will have as much opportunity as the rest of the world has to offer rather than growing up in Alice Springs Town Camp being the most disadvantaged socio-economic group in our society today”* (Jack 1). A better future may include challenging colonial race relations even if this means using a colonial construct—the school. In these ways this group of fathers differ from findings of previous studies that characterise Aboriginal parents as seeing education as a pathway but as wary of the actual interactions with school (Krakour, 2015).

Fathers drew upon their own school experiences to inform their motivating patterns for encouraging their children’s participation in school. Again, a range of experiences (positive, ambivalent and negative) as well as no experience informed these positions.

Toby, Liam and Luke (1) had all retrospectively come to appreciate the value of school more than they did at the time they attended school. Toby expressed neutral attitudes towards his own schooling (in the far north of WA) with no major positives or negative views. He had gone to Year 11 and undertaken apprenticeships after

⁷⁶ Discussed in Chapter 2 Context.

leaving school. At that time school was just something that happened, but without too much thought for where it may lead.

You could go to school, nobody told you like I tell my children now, 'school is there to teach you things that you could use when you come out of school to whatever job you want' and like I tell them 'nobody ever taught me that'. All I had to do was go to school and pick my subjects and whatever, so without any thought; I'd just pick subjects that my friends have got, like woodwork, metalwork and whatever else. (Toby)

Having reflected upon his own school years, Toby hoped his children would have a more focused education, incorporating an understanding it could lead to planned outcomes.

Luke's attitude to school followed a similar sequence when reflecting upon his own values when at school compared to now as a parent.

I think education is important...probably more so as I got older....probably younger it was something you had to do...but as you get older...and got kids...you realise them being able to read and write....is going to help them in the end...and you know....and give them a bit more knowledge. (Luke 1)

Liam did not really enjoy school (in Alice Springs) but had also gone to Year 11. His attitude to schooling had also changed.

It was hard. I felt like I was just another black kid in the school that never really had that attention from the teachers, or anything like that. So—we had only—and which is—which you sit back and you think about it now, that you did have those—the teacher's pets in the class and, ... you—it just opens your eyes even more now that—wish I could turn the tables around to actually think about my education a bit more, where I would have put my head down a bit more, or something like there. Hang around with my mates or cousins or something like there, where—changing all that around, so I'd actually make sure I teach that to my sons now. (Liam)

Caleb's schooling also lasted until Year 11, although he did not finish that year, he reflected upon how he had enjoyed being at school.

Because I always went to school. Even through high school, for me, I've only – well, I've only missed around about – days that I wagged school would have been probably no more than 10 days and that's through all the years I went to high school because – especially growing up in a small town like Tennant Creek,⁷⁷ that's where you – for me, that was where it was at....Because that's where all your friends are and it was good learning, especially when it came to science. I used to love doing that, working with the chemicals – it's good to see that my – that the kids are – that they enjoy it too because it's better than lying back at home. And the good thing about it, from a young age – and it was the way that I was brought up too. (Caleb)

Brothers Mitch and Shane's experiences of schooling were short, and there is a sense Shane rued the missed opportunity of schooling and intended to avoid this for his own children.

No just that, me and my brother have had a rough life, and things are different now. Just trying to make the best for our kids. But just with growing up, I did Year 9 and just about did Year 10, but we just had a really hard life at home, you know. I nearly went thru to Year 10, but I ended up going out bush working with my father. (Shane)

Marcus and Jack (1) completed Year 12, but both expressed the view they had learnt more outside of school than while they were there.

I don't know, I reckon I learnt more about life and education away from school. And I did Year 12 but I didn't – I wasn't academically the best at everything I did, I just did enough to get through school. I suppose I was more there for the sport, play sport and the bloody social aspects of it. Yeah, but I didn't mind it, I always liked school. (Marcus)

My aunties focused on me getting a good education. Going to school, learning to read and write properly, how to integrate into modern society as well as balance that with traditional obligations... Hated learning to read. It was like

⁷⁷ Small town approximately 450km north of Alice Springs on the Stuart HWY.

why can't I go and play outside with the other kids. It's like no, no, you're learning your letters and I was like this is boring. This is painful, this is hard. Everyone's out there throwing rocks at bottles and (laughs) chasing wildlife around. (Jack 1)

Of all the fathers, only Lachie had experienced tertiary education, commencing but not completing a degree in Adelaide, although he's now working in that professional area. He saw that his upbringing not only led to his scholastic achievement; but also how it influenced his attitude to his children's education, *"It's just how I was brought up. We've [him and his partner] both got a tertiary education, so I try and be there for as much as I can"* (Lachie 1).

When I asked Tom about his education, I was jolted out of my assumptions of educational familiarity. I had to consider how my interest in his experience could be perceived. *"Q: .. do you mind me asking where did you go to school, or what level of school you went to? Tom: Me? Q: Yeah. Tom: None. Q: None? Tom: No"* (Tom). "None", so stark, the gulf in experiences between my community neighbours and myself was dramatically driven home. Tom, who would be around my age, maybe a little older, never attended school.

Tom's experience raises questions (not just about our society), but also regarding his insider-outsider views on education. Unlike the others who had personal school memories from which to draw when considering the value of education and what they may have derived from it (whether they completed or left school early), Tom's perspectives are based on what he has seen education gave to other people, and possibly what he may have felt he missed. In addition, unlike the other fathers, his expectations of how schools function, and the cultural expectations of schools, is solely derived from the position of being a parent observer, rather than having views based upon personal experience as a student.

The fathers indicated a common description of what would constitute 'quality' education. This focused upon their child's school learning environment, with a focus upon the child being able to learn without disruptions. Lachie expected the school to

be responsive to the bullying of his son. He perceived the school had previously inconsistently dealt with bullying and contrasted this with the (then) current administration's approach through which a "*bit more authority and discipline has come through the school*" (Lachie 1). This in turn allowed his children to concentrate on their schooling.

Luke had moved his child from another school after being dissatisfied with the level of attention they received.

Luke: See, we had to move our kids from another school here because our kids wasn't getting that one-on-one and our kids were left on the side sort of thing, so we had to get them out of there and make sure that they—yeah, get treated and—getting taught the right things and stuff. My kids felt like—they weren't myall⁷⁸ enough—more or less wasn't black enough and—dumb enough, whatever, to be getting that attention from the kids—from the teachers to---

Q: So they weren't getting focused on 'cause they weren't out,.. they weren't out there enough to.....

Luke: Yeah. They wasn't—they were just middle—middle and that. (Luke)

Other children's obvious educational disadvantage was getting all the teacher's attention, while Luke's children, being academically in the middle of the class, were being ignored. Luke felt his children did not fit the stereotype (held by teachers) that an Aboriginal child needed more of the teacher's attention. In their interviews, Luke (1), Toby and Shane highlighted their children being taught reading and writing as important indicators of quality education. The quality of the school's infrastructure was also raised by Luke (1) and Caleb as being important.

I found it quite – it's quite a good school. Nice oval, nice good, big playground.... I find it pretty good and the kids, they love getting the – when they feel like it, they love their library books, so – which is good. (Caleb)

Some fathers thought sending their children away for schooling could provide the chance to experience a higher quality education. Sometimes, this was based on a vague perception that schooling might be 'better' elsewhere, "*I just thought if I took*

⁷⁸ Colloquialism for—'from the bush', 'not settled' or 'wild'.

them to Darwin and give them a better opportunity, there's more sporting, there's more bigger schools there" (Toby). The user pays principle was also raised, *"I can't really say, but I reckon it would be. That's what you're paying for. Surely it would be, you know, a bit better run"* (Mitch).

6.2.4.4 Control and practical help

Getting children to school was identified as an important role by many fathers in the study, Shane, Dale, Lachie and Luke drove their children to the school 'drop and go' parking area. Matthew and Caleb (neither having driving licences) sent their children on the school bus. Caleb recalled that when they lived in Tennant Creek he would walk his children to school.

Lachie, Toby, and Marcus all discussed helping with homework as an activity they undertook. Marcus and Liam both commented on reading to their younger children at night. When Marcus was away at work, he often provided practical help over the phone. Concerned his daughter did not seem to have set homework (Year 6), he asked her about it over the phone in order to get an understanding. He discovered that she had already completed it at school. He also gave direct practical help over the phone while giving emotional support for her schoolroom experience.

"I've got to get this assignment done, it's got to be done now and all that. "How much have you done on it?" "Oh, I've done a little bit, but I'm stuck here." And it's—I don't know, I probably explain it different to their teachers and I don't know, I make it sound simple. She'll look at me and shake her head and go, "Well how come my teacher didn't tell me that?" Well, it's not that hard, you know, it's probably the way he talks, 'cause he's trying to get it across to all the kids rather than just you, one on one." (Marcus)

Toby recognised, when helping his daughter with schoolwork, that she could benefit from additional help and encouraged her to use the school homework centre. Not only to get help with the schoolwork, but to appreciate that other people also cared about her.

(She) thought teachers were the low end of the food chain were, ...she just thought they were really, really picking on her and stuff like that and then I said well, where are you going wrong in started to help her with some work at

home, we always encouraged her from primary school (and all of them) to do the homework centres and that's the resources that people put their own time into basically and give students—we tell them take it, it's—somebody's trying to do good for people there, trying to help you. (Toby)

Both Dale and Mitch had accessed external agencies to help with their sons' behaviour issues. Mitch's son had anger management counselling and Dale had sought health checks to see what may have been affecting his son's "over exuberant" behaviour at school.

Tom reported when living in Utopia (remote Aboriginal community approximately 250km NE of Alice Springs),⁷⁹ they had approached the NT Family and Community Services for support in getting their child to school and to help other families that were not encouraging their children to attend school. They had talked directly with other families about the issue, which had led to those families getting the police to help get the children to school.

Yeah. Like, ah, talk to others (families) ... sometimes they get a police...police come around and get them kids to ... [pause] ... yeah, just take them to school. (Tom)

These fathers displayed a broad range of practical ways of supporting and directing their children's schooling from the home setting. This would not necessarily be obvious in the physical sense of the parent being seen. It could be assumed that the teaching staff might have been aware of the impact of these actions in the child's schoolwork and attendance. Whether or not this positive impact would be attributed to the father as parent is another matter if 'father absence' is a dominant labelling discourse within the school.

⁷⁹ Utopia is an Aboriginal homeland that covers an area of approximately 3,500kms with 16 dispersed community homeland centres; Tom didn't identify to which school he was referring. There is a main school at Arlparra and three smaller more dispersed outstation communities that had some form of primary school. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/feature/72-hours-utopia>.

6.2.4.5 Fathers' direct engagement with schools

Fathers' direct engagement with schools describes the range of activities undertaken in school: contact with teachers, classroom attendance, involvement with school council, attendance to school events including parent teacher nights and assemblies. I also present findings related to reasons for non-attendance by fathers: work commitments, family roles, and access to transport. This also includes their perceptions of their need for attendance and how the fathers believed this may be perceived by the school, in order to deepen understandings of barriers around direct engagement and invisibility. This information is augmented by limited observations gathered during the research, to shed some understanding on how the school interpreted levels of fathers' engagement.

6.2.4.6 How direct engagement was enacted

School assemblies were events participants attended (Marcus, Toby, Dale and Shane) or could attend (Matthew), usually when a child was getting an award or participating in a performance. Caleb had been to the pre-school's Father's Day supper, the school sports day and one of his son's movie nights held at the school hall. Liam was involved in one of his children's school camps. Marcus mentioned attending the school fete and Luke helped staff the school fete drinks stall during this study.

Half the fathers interviewed had attended the school to deal with perceived bullying of their child (Lachie 1, Matthew, Liam, Tom, Luke 1), or because of their own child's behaviour (Dale, Lachie 1, Caleb and Mitch).

Fathers also attended the school in proactive ways to meet with their child's teachers to establish a connection or to get an update on their child's progress. Matthew, Mitch, Toby, Marcus, and Lachie had all attended Parent/Teacher nights. Tom, Dale, Luke (1), Toby, and Mitch had all spoken with their child's teacher in some other setting. This approach by these fathers to the school runs counter to other research findings that characterised this sort of proactive approach as being foreign to Aboriginal ways of dealing with the school (Lea, Wegner, et al., 2011). It is therefore important that research findings do not become a representational labelling process applied broadly or outside of their specific context. Having fathers take these active roles is an opportunity for school to engage more deeply with these parents and to

assuming they aren't interested in their children's schooling. Gaining an understanding what does and does not support parent engagement is discussed below.

Liam (and his wife) had both spent time at their children's previous school over concerns about how they were being taught and were treated in the classroom.

Well, me and the missus—well, we both—we used to go to [names a primary school]—just do the parent side of it, playing basketball, lunchtimes, to just doing little things like that. Yeah. But go and sitting in their class. My missus goes to sit in their class just to make sure they're learning the right things and helping them and that, so, yeah. So it's either—if it's the boys, I'll go, if it's the girls, she'll go. (Liam)

Mitch also spent time in the classroom but at the request of the teacher, to help control his son's behaviour issues.

Lachie's initial attendance to deal with bullying ultimately led to him going on the school council. This in turn had given him greater access to teachers and a better understanding of school processes.

It has been good, because you get an insight into what's actually happening at the school and, before it is and what it is, or why it is happening....so...which maybe I wouldn't have known before....I actually enjoy that and I meet teachers on a personal level, so probably find out a bit more stuff, they actually talk on a different level...because I have more interaction. (Lachie 1)

Dale, despite attending the school for assemblies, parent teacher night and other reasons, such as dropping his child off, coming into class to see teachers about excursions, lunch orders or to discuss his child's behaviour, initially characterised his engagement as “*not much, nothing really at all*”. This suggests he had an image that either the school would expect more, or other parents did more. However, if the school requested meetings he was happy to go. Jack and Mitch both showed an awareness there were a number of things they could or might do, “*I have noticed that there are a lot more opportunities. There's a lot more family engagement with the schools and stuff like that now. So I understand it's all changing but I don't actually know the system well enough*” (Jack 1). Jack had only recently obtained custody and

“taking on primary care is a new thing”. Prior to this, he did not indicate having engaged directly with the school. Mitch, who was returning from time in jail, was starting to seek more engagement *“just starting to do this sort of thing”* (Mitch). Tom responded to being asked why he had been up to school, with a negative response initially, *“because she (his daughter) was a good girl”*, possibly because he thought the main reasons parents went to school was because of ‘bad’ school behaviour. Later he described positive engagements with school staff during home visits and explained his wife’s illness. Her attendance at dialysis three mornings a week kept them from attending to school events. However, in the past, when living at Utopia, he had been to school to address bullying.

6.2.4.5 What helped with engagement?

Two concepts were helpful with fathers’ engagement with the school: familiarity with the school and the father’s personal confidence. For some being familiar with the school made it easy to come to the school. Familiarity was gained in a number of ways; because they had gone to the school themselves (Liam, Mitch, Shane), had dealt with the school in a professional/work capacity (Luke 1) or they engaged at a management level (Lachie on school council). Having attended the school himself, Mitch fondly reflected, *“it’s just special – special old place for me this school”*. Having a professional relationship with both this school, and the one their children had attended in Adelaide, had been an advantage to Luke in dealing with both schools. In Adelaide, this helped him to address the bullying his daughter was experiencing.

Luke: My partner was working there part-time as well ... so we had a working relationship with the school as well,

Q: Do you think that was important?

Luke: Yeah, I think it helped ... just like getting on with staff, and some of the kids there as well ... the kids knew who [his daughter] was and they knew who her parents was ... they would sort of look out for her a bit more as well.

(Luke 1)

In addition, his work as a youth worker in the Alice Springs school had given him a better understanding of the school’s ethos, this helped open access, and communication with staff.

Luke: ... you go and checkout a kid ... and you have a brief chat with the teacher...and the concern they have with the kids, as well ... and get that sense of a caring environment.

Q: So you get a bit of an insight into that teacher's personality?

Luke: Yeah, and school personality, you talk to the principal every now and then ... and he is always a pretty friendly sort of a bloke...

Q: So does that give you a bit more confidence to interact with the school?

Luke: Yeah ... I guess from a parent role I come with work stuff ... you sort of get treated differently as a parent ...Yeah I think so. (Luke 1)

For other fathers, their life or work experiences made coming to deal with the school comparatively easy: *"I've worked in primary schools down south for seven years, you know, ah, as a community education officer"* (Dale). *"Well, look, I don't feel too fussed about going anywhere [laughs]. I've travelled a lot and I've been to a lot different places. And I don't find it intimidating at all"* (Jack 1).

Fathers noted staff, particularly Aboriginal & Islander Education Workers (AIEWs), as important in helping with their engagement. This is consistent with studies that show staff engagement with parents (in non-Aboriginal settings) as being a key ingredient in successfully promoting parent engagement with their child's schooling (Mapp, 2003). Both the male and female AIEWs at the school at the commencement of the study were locals, known and respected and were commented upon positively by participants who otherwise found it hard to have engagement with the school. Two fathers had been in the same class as the male AIEW. When talking about difficulties he experienced in going to the school because of the lack of male staff members, Shane positively mentioned, *"Yeah I see [the male AIEW] and stuff. I went to school with him"* (Shane). In addition, the female AIEW was described as, *'like she's a family member'* (Tom), being someone who could be trusted, *"That's why me and my partner, um, let [his son] go on this trip up to Townsville with Miss X"* (Matthew).

The approachability of front office staff was also noted as important.

Yeah, no, I don't mind. It's—you can come up here and talk to anyone.

Everyone's sort of—all the office staff have got a smile and most of them sort of know who all the parents are. (Marcus)

If I have any questions, I'll ring up the front office there, and there's always someone to talk to, which is good. (Caleb)

Luke said the friendly school environment was a factor in choosing the school for his children.

Given the importance fathers placed upon staff, it is worth noting AIEWs and other Aboriginal staff played an important identifiable and trusted engagement pathway between community members and the school. Their engagement with the community can be translated into school expectations of visible engagement (Chenhall et al., 2011; Peacock & Prehn, 2019). During this study, a new school principal was appointed; he questioned the value of these staff and the external community bridging work they did. Both staff left by the end of the year due to his questioning of their roles. Another was made supernumerary.⁸⁰ Having less Aboriginal support staff would mean the school's capacity to meet the specific needs of some of the fathers in this study would have been compromised after these changes.

6.2.4.6 School, as space and structure, issues that affected fathers' engagement

The fathers overwhelmingly saw the school space, and how to them it seemed to function, as welcoming and not at all a negative. Eight fathers (Lachie 1, Marcus, Dale, Caleb, Jack 1, Liam, Luke 1 and Toby) specifically related how the school was an easy place to attend. Luke noted several factors that made the school accessible, with community knowledge about the school (presumably positive) being one: *“sort of setting they're in, the environment, their equipment...community knowledge about the school.”* (Luke 1). Jack found it difficult to understand the idea of the school space as being a problem.

Well, welcoming place? It's a child friendly environment so everything's small and soft and made for kids. So really—well, to me, it's like walking around one giant kid's bedroom really. Little pictures on the walls and pencils everywhere

⁸⁰ This is discussed in more detail in Appendix B.

and especially schools in Australia are all brand new. You go to some of the older universities or some of the old boarding schools, other parts of Australia. You go to them overseas, they're like prisons. (Jack 1)

6.2.4.7 What issues constituted barriers to further engagement if desired

Personal issues, such as dealing with health needs, access to transport, incarceration, work commitments and the enactment or expectation of restrictive gender roles were factors that interfered with fathers' direct involvement with their child's school.

Because of his wife's illness where she spent three mornings a week on dialysis, Tom found it hard to get to school events. He also did not have transport and was reliant upon other people or services for lifts.

Matthew initially identified lack of transport as the reason for not going to school assemblies, even though he had been to parent teacher nights. He clearly understood the value to his child of parents going to assemblies. We spoke extensively in the interview about this, *"Yeah, we'd love to come and see that, I mean, it makes the kid feel good about herself"* (Matthew). Matthew was trying to avoid the drinking group that was very active in his Town Camp. He had recently lost his licence due to drink driving and was attending a 'Sober Bob' alcohol rehabilitation program. When he said he had not been able to get to school events, I asked would getting more advance notice of events make a difference or did other things get in the way? His response was that *"maybe other things get in the way and we've got to organise transport"* (Matthew). Later in the interview he was adamant if he had a car there were no other barriers to attending school events.

Q: If ... transport wasn't a problem – what things would make it, um, easy or hard about coming up to the school?

Matthew: Um, I don't see nothing.

Q: Like, if you had your own car do you reckon you'd come up to the school?

Matthew: Yeah, I'd come up to the school and...

Q: And what sort of things would you like to do if you were here, if you could get here easily?

Matthew: Get involved with, um – with the, um, kids, and just watch what they're doing and all that stuff, yeah.

Q: Right. So you might come into the classroom and do something, or you meet at assemblies?

Matthew: Meet at assembly or, um, I – um, maybe in sports –sports day carnival or something like that, you know [pause]. (Matthew)

When I mentioned the school carnival (fête), usually held around the middle of the year at night when it is cold (in Alice Springs), Matthew responded, “*Yeah. Un sometimes that – the coldness is, um, a bit of a problem as well, yeah. It’d be too cold to get out of the house and all that*” (Matthew). While lack of transport was a current problem, it was not insurmountable, as Matthew lived within walking distance of one of his children’s preschool. He had asked the AIEW to help with transport in the past (Matthew). He did not recount having had many direct visits to the school prior to losing his licence. The ‘other things getting in the way’, including the social disruptions of living in over-crowded Town Camp accommodation, where the presence of a large drinking circle had a major impact, undermining his best intentions of greater engagement. As Chenhall et al. (2011) noted in their study, “the labour of having children attend school should not be underestimated” (p. 53). The social disruptions that parents face, just getting their child up and to school, can be a major challenge. Matthew was facing and overcoming this challenge. However, further engagement with the school placed him under strain.

6.2.4.8 Creating invisibility

While at the school, I was able to observe how the school attempted to recruit fathers to their activities and, later in interviews, how the fathers understood the issue of engagement and their potential invisibility to the school community.

While the male AIEW was creating a list of potential participants from the school’s enrolment data for my research project, it became apparent many fathers’ names were absent from the enrolment data, as previously discussed in Section 4.4.5. This absence potentially indicated that fathers were absent from the lives of these children.

However, both AIEWs knew many of the fathers of these children and confirmed they were present in the child’s life and (usually) living with the mother. Alternative explanations to this omission were offered: either the father was not the biological father of the child and the parents may have thought this was being asked for on the enrolment form, or that there were other reasons parents may not want to ‘officially

let on' they were living together, such as for Centrelink payments (observation note 21/3/13). The understanding of language was important in the example of who qualified as 'father'. In an earlier discussion with the male AIEW (observation note 6/11/12), he stated he felt there was a difference in how children used the terms 'dad' as signifiers of the closeness of the relationship or type of role or activity that different males could have with the child. This was raised in the study interviews, where Caleb described his grandfather as 'dad' and Liam's nephews called him 'dad' (Caleb, Liam). So possibly, 'Fathers' on the enrolment form was being interpreted in a manner that excluded non-biological present fathers and this was being echoed in the enrolment data. Regardless of the reasons, father invisibility at school can commence right from the time a child is enrolled where the important role of the AIEW in connecting the school with both parents, due to their community knowledge, is again highlighted.

Mitch cited a lack of personal motivation as holding him back from greater involvement even though he expressed real enthusiasm in being more involved. His recent jail experience had left him unsure of how to make the connection:

Mitch: ... I think that I haven't done much, you know, no, ... so the school is fine.

Q: All right. So you think that's just how much time you have spent here?

Mitch: Yeah. It's the person themselves. If I had come in more often I would find out what things are on, fetes and stuff like that. So it's up to the individual. (Mitch)

Fathers who had limited direct contact with the school, recognised it was partly their responsibility to be around and to make contact. One noted how fathers were perceived by schools had changed over time.

When you state that you're the primary carer and communications go through you and you meet with teachers, they—there seems to be no differentiation anymore. I think, sometime ago, the single dads were singled out for being a bit odd but now either the schools are so busy they don't have time to care or they just don't care and all they care as long as the kids are at school, they're happy. I think it's not so much of a concern anymore. Whereas, a long time ago, I was picking my first kid up from school and I wasn't seen there very

often so teachers are looking twice at you and the other kids are asking, "Who's that?" I got a good example is when I had to pick my eldest daughter ... up from school, it was Grade 1 or something and she recognised the car then I got out and she turned to her friend and I heard her say, 'See, I told you he was real.' (Jack 1)

However, he also stated.

So even children and teachers have this—still have that stereotype that kids get left behind by the father and the mother's there to raise them and there's still—there's a lot of single mums in schools and—well, that's a fact. So they find it hard to believe when dad does turn up that he's actually still in the kid's life. (Jack 1)

Here again Jack draws upon a sense of being labelled as an absent father is a factor in how schools relate to him and fathers in general.

Work commitments were a common stress causing barriers to greater levels of engagement. It is discussed in detail when considering school and work stress factors [Section 7.3.2]. Liam described how work made things difficult.

I got flat out with work and sometimes got no time to get out. But, yeah, when we can—when my missus can't, sort of both at work at the same spot, same workplace, but when she can't I can try and get out so we're both—we both free up each other to try and get there. (Liam)

Similarly, for Marcus, working away from town and Dale's shift work, *"I do shift work the last few months I've been changing a lot of jobs, and, you know... [pause] It's just hard"* (Dale). These examples show how work commitments can act as a barrier to fathers' attendance and potential invisibility.

6.2.4.9 Gender as a determinant of engagement

Only Shane raised gender as an issue that limited his engagement with school. Three fathers (Lachie 1, Caleb, and Jack 1), while mentioning their role as males in school settings, did not see gender as stopping them from engaging, even when they were aware they were in a minority of predominantly female parents.

How cultural roles impact upon other household roles was not uniformly expressed. Only one father said his cultural understanding of gender roles meant he could not do certain things with his young children.

Shane: Yeah. And things are bit different for Aboriginal people because things are a bit more ceremonial, the ways. Like men are not allowed to mix up with woman's stuff, they feel a bit awkward you know.

Q: So would you say, in your eyes, that the kid's schooling is women's stuff? Or is it both?

Shane: In my eyes yeah and medical care and hospital stuff, and stuff like that. But I'll always be there when my kids are sick.

Q: Right, so who ..., you're saying that's there's a main person's responsibility is mums, but dads are there as well?

Shane: Different jobs, you know, like different departments. Whereas, I can't go and change my daughter's nappy because I'm a male, and we're not allowed to do that. And can't grab them when they're a certain age and pick them up and stuff. (Shane)

Shane's view was that his involvement in certain aspects of his children's upbringing was defined, even at some points restricted due to cultural issues. This was very different to other fathers, who also had expressed the importance of their culture. Caleb, who expressed the importance of culture in his life, also did a lot of the hands-on care of his pre-schoolers, including nappy changing.

Shane articulated clearly defined separate gender roles for mothers and fathers in relation to dealing with school. These roles were based on his view of traditional Aboriginal gender roles, but he felt they were also reinforced by mainstream attitudes. The following conversation is lengthy but reveals the flow and movement of Shane's thoughts as he articulated his feelings.

Shane: But I don't actually physically walk them into the class or anything like that. Feel a bit shame sometimes, most of the time.

Q: why is that?

Shane: Just don't feel like the father should be doing that sort of stuff. Probably as the Aboriginal way, or probably the white man's way too.

Q: You feel awkward? Or do you just feel it is not appropriate to do it?

Shane: Feel awkward, a bit of both yeah. And we feel that we don't have as much rights, as the mother does.

Q: Right, who makes that feeling? Where does that feeling come from?

Shane: From the government.

Q: So you would like to go in?

Shane: Yeah, feel part a bit more.

Q: What things have brought about that feeling? Your feeling not welcome, or excluded?

Shane: Excluded mainly.

Q: What makes that feeling?

Shane: But I have seen my father, my dad used to be like that as well, and there is a lot of other people, my mates and stuff, when we used to go to school. But never see dad mob at school and that. In the 80's and that.

Q: What things, like you said the government made it, what things at that level.

Shane: Well, straight up I think the mothers have got over 50% or probably even more 70 or 90% of the custody of the child anyway. When they are born, you know.

Q: And that carries on the whole way.

Shane: Yeah it feels, I feel a bit.

Q: Is there anything that has happened, or policies or statements, or even things the school does?

Shane: No, No, No

Q: What about now, are there other things going on, that reinforce that feeling, or is it just something that happens?

Shane: Just being brought up like that. (Shane)

Shane expressed a tension between how he was brought up to understand male roles in Aboriginal society, how mainstream processes positioned him, and what he might like to be doing. “*Q: So you would like to go in? Shane: Yeah, feel part a bit more*” (Shane).

In his observations of other fathers, he noted how engaged they were with their child's school and was trying to incorporate this difference in his thinking.

Where I see some other fathers are different. They are sort of the opposite of us you know. Do exactly what the mother does you know. I don't see what is wrong, it's good anyway. Just a different point of view (Shane).

Ultimately, he thought being more engaged would be a good thing, but that he was being held back by his own social conditioning.

Shane: Yeah, probably in our generation it wouldn't happen. Maybe the next one. I reckon anyway, in reality. Because we been brought up sort of different, different era. It would be good to try and change it.

Q: So you think it would be a good idea...

Shane: Yeah it would be (Shane).

6.2.4.10 Engagement attempts

The school, probably like all NT schools (B. Wilson, 2013), had an active program seeking Aboriginal parental engagement. Two examples of outreach efforts targeted at father engagement were recorded. In March 2013, in conjunction with the male AIEW, I helped organise a father's lunchtime BBQ during school time. This was the first such event that had been run by the school. This was held at the school and provided an opportunity for me to try and recruit new project participants, as well as for the school to help meet its parent engagement target. Ten males, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, attended and this was considered a good start. Some fathers raised the idea that possibly more men could attend if another BBQ was held after work hours. After the meeting, the recently appointed settler male principal suggested to the male AIEW and me that we should provide alcohol to make it more attractive (observation note 28/3/13). This raised two issues. Firstly, it seemed a lazy stereotype that males would be more attracted if they could drink. The second issue was that alcohol dependency and alcohol related violence, being major social concerns in Alice Springs, made this suggestion a potentially divisive and, for some fathers, a personally problematic proposal. Mitch, Shane, and Matthew had all raised their own issues with alcohol as destructive problems in their lives and others (Liam, Lachie 1, Caleb and Tom), did not drink around their kids or want people drinking around them. We felt the suggestion of alcohol could in fact turn off as many fathers as those it may attract and could be detrimental either for those who were struggling personally, or at a community level, with alcohol. In addition, we felt it questionable whether the school should be promoting alcohol at a social event at the school where parents would quite

possibly bring their children, rather than modelling a happy alcohol free social space. Given two participants (Caleb and Shane) had indicated an interest to attend this type of event, but had not come on this occasion, we (the Aboriginal staff and myself) thought more fathers could be recruited if personalised approaches, possibly arranging transport and an after-hours time slot were implemented (observation note 28/3/13). Due to the AIEW leaving the school a few months later this issue was not directly addressed and no other BBQs were organised to test which approach might have been more successful.

During the planning of a school event, a senior staff member approached me, requesting I review a letter to parents promoting the event as I was ‘the expert on fathers’ and that she would like me to check ‘that she was getting it right’. The letter started ‘Dear Mum’, then a couple of paragraphs down went on ‘even dad and grandma can come along’. I suggested that this did not really look like she expected dads to come. Firstly, it suggested men would not read the letter and secondly, not be really interested in coming. I suggested she could just address it to ‘Mum and Dad’, ‘Parents’ or ‘To the Care giver’ (observation note 7/8/13). Her genuine surprise was evident when she explained that she ‘thought mum would probably read it first’, and therefore ‘would tell the dad about it’ and by including dads with grandmother who often did come along”, it would be less confronting for the dads.

This made me realise how fathers were seen differently from mothers in the expectation of their involvement; and that this was probably true for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents (observation note 7/8/13). I wondered did this type of labelling representation of fathers have the potential to alienate them, especially those already feeling or having identified awkwardness in the school setting. The potential negative consequence of this communication approach was reinforced by Shane, who had limited direct contact with the school due to his conflicting perceptions around gender roles.

In the Newsletter, they could put ‘Dear Mum and Dad’. They put ‘Dear Mum’, that sort of stuff pisses me off, I get offended by it. Even though they wouldn’t intentionally do it, it’s probably just the way they’ve been set up to do it. Things like that, pisses the dads off too I suppose. (Shane)

While most of the fathers were actively involved in their child's schooling, there were many variations on how this was manifested. Often they had become directly in contact with the school either in attending school events or to deal with bullying or behavioural issues. Working hours was a limiting factor in being more involved for some fathers who were otherwise well engaged with the school.

A minority of fathers had limited direct involvement with the school. For this group lack of confidence, access to transport or severe social issues kept them away, even though they recognised the value of closer contact with the school. In Mathew's discussion of what stopped him from coming to the school (transport) there was unease about coming into the classroom compared with other events (assemblies). That could suggest a lack of confidence in the classroom cultural setting. Only one father articulated, he felt the school contributed to his sense of alienation from his child's school itself, even though he was passionate about his child getting an education and was supportive of them at home. However, his involvement was also self-restricted due to his perceptions around specific gender roles.

All these issues underline the need for schools to take a more nuanced or individually tailored view of how they can engage with fathers, as each of these fathers had different issues impacting on their ability to spend time at school events. Additionally, because someone is not attending an event may not be because of lack of interest. In fact, it could, as it was for a number of these fathers, be because they were fulfilling a basic caring and support function of creating a wage to support their child and family. In addition, for fathers working shifts or away from town, this meant they were not able to attend events whether they are held in or out of school hours. An approach that labels Aboriginal fathers as disinterested, due to their 'invisibility' to the school, may perpetuate an alienating process that negatively impacts upon their sense of worth and wellbeing. This will be taken up later when considering Aboriginal fathers emotional wellbeing.

6.3 Role models for fathers

The fathers primarily drew upon their own family upbringing in developing their mode of parenting, although their partner's parenting styles was also an influence.

When asked about where they got their ideas about being a dad, they reflected upon their upbringing. One father, when asked this question, answered, *“There's no book for it, is there?”*, but then highlighted his parents influence, *“everything my mother and father taught me from a young age is probably how I see things now today”* (Toby). Literature on fatherhood often cites the roles of parents, particularly their father's influence as being important in how fathers negotiate the development of their own parenting style (C. Lewis & Lamb, 2007; Masciadrelli et al., 2006).

Lachie, noted that while he drew heavily upon *“my parental background, ... with a blend of (his wife's) too ... we didn't have separated parents ... guess you would say the more classical model of the family ... we, I had a pretty good upbringing, there was a lot of good things ... minimal bad things”* (Lachie 1). There were bits of behaviour Lachie would change which he described as ‘remodelled’. This was about spending more time with his children than his father, *“didn't maybe early on, he probably worked hard, and then to the later stages, he developed more as a dad ... I looked at that, and that's why I've tried for the kids to be pretty hands-on, from the start”* (Lachie 1). Lachie's referencing of “the more classical model” may be understood as an attempt to fit in to mainstream sociality, highlighting that his and his partner's upbringings mirror the mainstream, distancing himself from stereotypical dysfunctional Aboriginal family discourses (Ah Kit, 2002; J. Price et al., 2016). It reinforced his earlier cited comments on how he saw bringing his children up in Aboriginal cultural milieu. In addition, at the time of his first interview, Lachie was separated from his first wife and lived with an established partner. He had children from both relationships living with him. At the time of Lachie's second interview, his second eldest child had moved interstate to live with his mother while attending school. It is possible this recognition of the difference between a classical nuclear family, and presumably his own situation in the context of describing ‘good things and minimal bad things’ in his own upbringing, may indicate what Lachie saw as a limitation of the classical model he experienced. These were ‘things’ he was currently attempting to overcome in his own experience of familial relationships, by spending more time with his children, especially in their early years.

Mitch and Shane (brothers interviewed at different times)⁸¹ both expressed conflicting emotions when they spoke of their father, describing a hard working but distant figure. He was a role model because he “*shows respect and morals. And just knowledge you know. Like life skills. Like things that money can’t buy*” (Mitch). However, as Shane noted there were other difficult issues in this relationship.

Q: where did you draw upon your ideas of how to be a father?

Shane: Off my father

Q: What sort of values and things do you think you emulate of his, or that you took from him?

Shane: Basically everything I know about generally in life

Q: Particularly about being a dad? What did he do that you have sort of taken on?

Shane: Well he’s always worked and provided and looked after his family and put his family first.

Q: and what sort of parenting style do you think he’s given you?

[pause] Q: Is it stern, is it what?

Shane: He was strict yeah. And but he was mainly working out bush you know. So me and my brother turned out spending most of the time with our mother. We’d only seen him a couple of times a year. Show time and stuff, at Christmas.

Q: Right so very much the model that’s he’s away but that he’s working for you.

Shane: He’s working yeah

Q: So where for the day to day stuff with kids in the morning around the house, stuff you are dealing with all the time, where did you get those ideas?

Shane: From my father

Q: even though he wasn’t around....

Shane: Yeah because he would have done it with us, when he was around,

Q: ok

Shane: Through experience,

Q: so he was pretty hands-on

⁸¹ The brothers’ participation was not mentioned during our interviews with either brother and whether they spoke about their involvement in the study to each other is unknown.

Shane: Yep. But he would never sweep and mop the house, he would keep it clean you know, but he would rather rake the yard up than sweep the house.
(Shane)

There was a sense of compensation in both narratives. Mitch highlighted there may not have been much money in their upbringing, even though their father worked, but that he had ‘*life skill knowledge*’ which possibly could not have a price put upon it. Shane compensated for their father’s absence with the knowledge that he had been away because he wanted to provide for them. The sorts of things Shane does with his kids his father “*would have done if he was around*”. In these narratives the brothers attempt to move past a deficit discourse, to highlight the provider role of their father in a positive light.

While Mitch and Shane admired their father’s upright moral hard working nature, they did not wish to emulate his mood, “*my dad is very short tempered, like a quick fuse*” (Mitch).

Shane: Yeah, but our dad was a bit different with us. He was a pretty angry man you know. Strict and...

Q: So where do you think you developed your style then, cause that’s....

Shane: I sort of made it up myself.....I balanced it out, what I’ve been through, I don’t want my kids going through that the same as what me and my brother did. (Shane)

Physically and emotionally distant working father figures populated the lives of many of the fathers in the study (Luke 1, Dale, Lachie 1, Shane, Mitch and Matthew). “*I have three older sisters, and see my dad worked a lot, so, our mother was out bush, and, yeah we lived with dad, so, so I had three older sisters looked after me, my younger brother*” (Dale). Often other family members were identified as immediate carers. For Luke, Shane, and Mitch it was their mothers or some other family member who cared for them.

“*My father was never a father*”, Liam’s comment is powerful—recognising, but at the same time disowning, his father. Liam described how his father, whilst present when he was young, was not a positive presence in his family.

My father, he was always coming and going, where I probably—I'm one of the kids that—I've had more time with my father than my brother and sisters, but we're—with alcohol, on the side of that, where I don't drink around my kids. If we're drinking it's only a quick—at a party or something like—a good—special occasions, where—I learnt off—'cause my father ended up killing himself drinking, so I look at that as—I learnt off my father never to be like—he taught me to be not like him. (Liam)

Liam's view of his father is similar to that expressed by Caleb, who was 13 years old the last time he had seen his father. After his parents separated, when he was three, Caleb lived with his father in Cairns, later moving back to Tennant Creek to live with his mother's family. His parents spilt up because of his father's violence towards his mother. When he talked about parenting influences there were negative issues around both parents, including his father's violence. When he felt he was following a similar path he undertook anger management counselling. When he talked about his mother, he wanted to say that she had a role in his upbringing, but then had to admit what he saw as her failings.

Because even though my mother and my grandmother brought me up, I was brought up without a father, even though I had my uncles and my mum has had boyfriends. That's a whole another story, that. ... my mum really didn't bring me up. My grandmother did and her partner, old (name removed). He was—well, I always used to call him, Dad [pause]. (Caleb)

Both Liam and Caleb describe how they dealt with a semi-present 'father' as negative presences in their lives. Caleb searched for a father figure, "*even watching movies when I was a kid, like you're having a father figure there*" (Caleb). He then transferred his identification of father to his grandfather to fulfil that role.

Jack and Marcus did not have any contact with their fathers as they grew up and looked negatively upon this absence, in a similar manner to those who had a negative experience of a present father.

Jack lived with his grandmother and aunt when he was little and when he was older, with his mother. He recognised his uncles and aunties were key influences on him

providing a strong work ethic, “*Well, a few of my uncles, they're really proud hardworking stockmen*” and a value of education “*My aunties focused on me getting a good education.*” (Jack 1). While these strong characters were a positive influence (expanded upon later), Jack recognised that ideally it would be better if, as their father, he was involved in his children’s upbringing.

In my view, not really having a dad when I was growing up, I think it's really important to be part of my children's life and to give them those opportunities that I view as having missed out on. (Jack 1)

Marcus also wanted to break new ground in his personal experience of the role of a father.

I've never met my father. I've only seen photos of him and I don't know, you know, and I've always had just my mum. My mum grew me up and I always said to myself, well I don't want to be like however my father was. (Marcus)

He uses this as a spur to framing an active participation for himself in his own children’s lives, “*I want to be [pause] different to what he was, to my kids.*” (Marcus).

Despite the broad range of parental influences, the fathers expressed a strong desire to be active agents in their children’s upbringing and, like Marcus, wanted to be more involved than their own fathers had been. Again, we can identify elements of traditional Western gender role theory: teaching responsibility and teaching respect were common roles mentioned. However, this is mixed with literally being ‘hands-on’ and recognising that being close to their children and giving them emotional support provides an important foundation for the child’s future.

Women—mothers, aunties, and grandmothers, were important role models in developing these fathers’ ideas of parenthood. This was true for those like Lachie, Toby, and Tom who held positive views of their fathers. However, this was more so for those with negative experiences of present or absent fathers like Luke, Caleb, Liam, Marcus, and Jack. Caleb, Dale, Marcus, Jack 1, Shane, and Matthew also referenced grandfathers as well as uncles as positive sources of fathering role models.

Whether the influence of women in these fathers' upbringings can be understood through traditional Aboriginal social structures, where women care for young children until boys and girls are separated to enter into adulthood and when grandfathers and uncles take up the role of 'holding' young males into male adulthood (McCoy, 2008) was not clear from their comments. The women's active involvement was often referenced where a father was absent in the child's life. Therefore, while these relationships of care by women of children are consistent with traditional social practices, they do not represent a static version of 'traditional culture'. With the changing nature of family structures, absent fathers (and mothers), where children are being brought up by one biological parent, a grandparent or aunts and uncles, or are in turn bringing up their own nephews or grandchildren, there are new variants of the extended Aboriginal family being enacted. Here fathers are possibly consciously or unconsciously expressing a "*more nurturing side from my mum*" (Luke 1) as part of this changing familial landscape, where gender roles are also changing.

It is possible to identify that, where the fathers undertook what would be deemed traditional male roles in the family, they broke down stereotypical displays of masculinity in two important ways. Firstly, the fathers actively pursued these activities with daughters as well as sons. Of the twelve who participated in the study, Dale was the only one who only had a son and Marcus and Luke only had daughters. The others had both sons and daughters and, other than Shane, when they talked about activities or roles they undertook with their children they spoke about doing these with all their children. Jack incorporated some of this range of activities he did with his son and four daughters, "*Things like how to kick a footy and how to fix a car and look someone in the eye when you shake hands and all these sort of things that I'm now passing on to my children.*" (Jack 1). It was Toby who took his daughter back to Country. Secondly, while being active in these behaviours the fathers, in the majority, wished to have close, hands-on emotional involvement in their children's upbringing.

These fathers were attempting to create a space where they could enjoy freedom to experience fatherhood as they wished to define it. Through this process, they were sometimes breaking emotional shackles they experienced as children, for example, that of the distant, busy, or absent father. Their different experiences growing up

formed their views of whether their own father had a positive or negative influence. These influences shaped, but were not necessarily replicated, in their own fathering style. Brothers, Shane and Mitch provided an exception and, to a degree, seemed to seek to emulate their father drawing upon a vision of traditional Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal masculinities. The other fathers were attempting a new paradigm of a softer masculinity which could be interpreted at odds with traditional Western gender role theory (Parsons, 1955; R. Williams, 2009a) and which was built in the unique two-world space they experienced (Lowe & Spry, 2002).

6.4 Summary of findings

Consistent with other fatherhood research findings (S. Williams, 2008) I identified a disconnection between the ability of some fathers to reconcile their idealised roles. Whether drawn from gender role theory family models, or their more expressive and emotionally attached view of fatherhood and masculinity, they experienced tensions with their social reality.

From the fathers' stories it is apparent that they all strongly identified with the roles of providing for and protecting their families. However, they varied greatly in how these roles were enacted and the degree to which they identified these as gendered roles. Examples of this variation are found in their discussions around active 'hands-on' fathering and what household tasks they reported undertaking. Providing emotional support and teaching about values were further identified as important roles. Many fathers talked about teaching Aboriginal culture to their children as important roles for them to develop their own and their children's cultural identities.

Fathers expressed quite defined views on the value of education for their children as a pathway to achieving a better life, and for education to provide cross-cultural understanding. To this end they provided support both in the home and directly with schools where and when they could.

Fathers in this study demonstrated providing support in the home mainly through helping get children ready for school and through emotional support. Where they exercised direct control over the child's scholastic effort it was mainly through monitoring that homework was done and getting their children to school. In addition,

some provided practical assistance with homework and in identifying additional external supports, such as homework centres, buying special items for school or seeking professional external agency supports around behaviour issues.

These fathers were actively engaged with their children's school in a range of ways, including attending school events or having face-to-face meetings with teachers and staff about academic or social issues at the school. Familiarity with the school, coupled with their own degree of confidence, was often a determining factor in how comfortable these fathers felt about attending the school. Friendly and helpful staff also eased this process. Working hours were the main limiting factor for fathers who were otherwise well engaged with the school. Other barriers to engagement included: personal health issues, access to transport, disruptive social issues and narrow gender role expectations, even where fathers recognised the value of closer contact with school. However, lack of attendance at school should not be confused with disinterest. Fathers expressed, and acted upon, a strong desire to support their children in school. Fathers may be 'invisible' to schools for a number of valid reasons, including being away or at work supporting their family.

The fathers identified family members who were involved in their upbringing as sources of role models for their own parenting styles. Immediate family, including fathers and mothers, were referenced, with other extended family members identified if either one or both immediate parents had not been present. Their own fathers featured strongly in most narratives. In a minority of cases, their fathers were represented as a positive influence, more commonly though, their own fathers were described as negative presences in their upbringing or as negative absentee fathers.

Regardless of whether their own fathers were present or absent in their upbringing, all the fathers expressed strong views regarding the importance of being involved in their children's lives. How this involvement was manifest varied. It was shaped by social circumstances, beliefs in gender role limitations, their ability to spend time with their children due to work commitments, family relationships, or strains that they felt due to external perceptions of Aboriginal fathers, or pressures related to normative forms of performative masculinity.

In the next chapter I present the findings regarding the self-reported emotional and wellbeing issues raised by the participants. In doing so, I am reminded of Lupton and Barclays' (1997) caution to ensure that, when I am presenting the views of the fathers who participated in my research study, that this variety of biological living 'fleshy humans' socially constructed enactments of fatherhood and the real 'passion' and emotion they express are kept in focus.

Chapter 7. Aboriginal fathers' interviews: Emotions and wellbeing

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the emotional experiences and wellbeing impacts of fatherhood upon the fathers in this study. The fathers' views on what having children brought to their lives, how they deal with their emotional issues, where they seek support or other opinions on raising families and how events associated with school intersect with these issues are now examined. The analysis focuses on the expression of wellbeing that was engendered or disrupted because of the experiences related by the fathers and how these experiences related to personal emotional wellbeing, or, their sense of social wellbeing (Carey, 2013). These experiences, and the emotional responses to these experiences, may not be easily 'compartmentalised'. Personal experience, through social interaction and social position, may be mutually reinforcing (Grieves, 2009).

The fathers' views on emotional issues related to fatherhood are presented following the three elements as identified in the discourse genealogy (Chapter 5); how having children impacts on self-identity, issues of stress (and their causes) and relationships with others.

I commence with a discussion of the sense of self, how having children and becoming a father changed their lives, bringing happiness and pride, lifestyle changes and promoted self-reflection.

I then discuss how fathers experience multiple stresses in trying to enact and realise their fatherhood ideals and roles, including those related to the carer and provider/protector roles. This is shown in their detailed descriptions of protector stress especially in relation to extended family and social impacts of racism. In their accounts of schooling as generative care, the many emotional stresses fathers experience in relation to their children's school are evident.

I then present a brief section on the fathers' self-perceptions of their fathering. Here, the participants' predominately self-effacing self-representations become apparent.

Finally, how these fathers deal with emotional issues at an individual level, or in their family context and how they seek support, if they do at all, is discussed.

7.2 Sense of self: Fathers' views on what children bring to their lives

All those participating in this study expressed happiness and pride in being fathers. In describing their enjoyment of being fathers, the personal joy their children brought to them was most commonly mentioned (Caleb, Dale, Matthew, Mitch, Shane, Marcus, Tom, Liam). *"Seeing their little faces happy. Yeah. Laughing, smile."* (Mitch). *"And what I get from being a dad is, for me, joyfulness, happiness, for me."* (Caleb).

Marcus described how when he returned to town after working at a remote mine for the previous fortnight, it was *"always good to see their smiling faces when I pull up to the kiss and go (at the school) and they jump in and give me a hug and a kiss."*

(Marcus). Seeing his children come home after just one day at home alone was very important to Shane's sense of personal wellbeing, *"I miss them when they are at school too. Just during the day... I can't wait for 3 o'clock to see them, get happy to see them"* (Shane). Another noted source of enjoyment and pride was watching the child's development, including physical growth and mental development (Lachie, Caleb, Dale, Matthew, Tom). Across varied social circumstances, fathering styles and relationship status, their school-aged children brought them personal happiness and joy.

All fathers identified that having children had modified their previous 'party' lifestyles. This included reduced drinking (Lachie 1, Caleb, Dale, Matthew, Shane, Liam) and going out to parties (Lachie 1, Shane, Dale, Luke 1, Liam). 'Slowed me down', was used by a number of the fathers in describing this change (Dale, Marcus, Luke 1, Matthew, Lachie 1). Sometimes their lifestyle change was referenced in nostalgic ways, as a sense of loss for a previously easier going, less responsible time.

Luke: Before kids you would just go out and have a good time... probably stay out later ... not really be too concerned what's at home ... you would sort it out the next day ... whereas now you have to worry about how the kids are ... and if they are going to be alright the next morning...

Q: So like having food in the house the next day ready and waiting?

Luke: Yeah, just having stuff prepared for them ... I guess sort of being there.
 (Luke 1)

Q: What impact do you think having kids has had?

Shane: It has changed my life also.

Q: How?

Shane: Well me and my partner were heavy drinkers before, and we would just jump in the car, say we are just going to Katherine or Darwin. Just jump in and go. With no commitments you know. So you'd just take off. We would just take off.

Q: So it has brought you stability?

Shane: Yeah.

Q: Why do you decide to do that?

Shane: We didn't plan to have kids, it just happened. I love still to be free now, just to jump on the road and keep going. Wherever I'm going bush, or wherever. You know. Sometimes I sit down and wish I could do that, but I can't because I got my kids here, and can't do that no more.

Q: Initially it sounded good. You said you've stopped drinking, so that's a positive.

Shane: Yeah, yeah

Q: But a bit frustrated there that the freedom has gone?

Shane: But, we still do things together, we go camping, so we still have our freedom, but not as much as we used too. We didn't have to worry about feeding two others. Not being nasty, but things like that. We didn't have to worry about nappies and nothing like that before. That has changed our lives, all that kind of stuff. (Shane)

Other fathers saw the changes to their lifestyle as having been positive compared to their previous life trajectories, *"It's just slowed me down on being a run amok person.... I used to do a lot of things, get, um—getting me into trouble"* (Matthew). Lachie thought that because he started having children when he was young (19 years old) he had set himself goals that maybe he would not, otherwise, have achieved.

I sort of took a lot of pride upon myself...about that [having children] ... I think it sort of made me achieve stuff, maybe that I wouldn't have ... I just had to think guess further down the road, rather than someone of my own age may have. (Lachie1)

Dale also saw the change from having a languorous, 'live in the moment lifestyle', to being a more responsible parent as positive.

Dale: You've got to be responsible, reliable, you know, you've got to be there all the time.

Q: And how's that different that from when you, before you had kids?

Dale: Oh, you know, you could sleep in. You could do what you want, you know.

Q: Yeah.

Dale: You don't have to worry, you know. You could spend all your money at the end of the week, but now, you know, you've got to—it's all changed.

Q: Are they, do you think those changes are good?

Dale: Yeah. Well, it's got, you know. Change is always good. Got to, you know... makes you better. Makes you work harder. And, you know, it makes you have things. (Dale)

Liam identified having children as motivation to stay out of trouble and even though he at one point in his interview he used the term "*sacrifices of self*", he also felt any sense of sacrifice of a previous lifestyle was well worth it.

Q: Do you think you would have reconnected with football if you hadn't have had kids to...

Liam: No. I probably wouldn't have. I probably would have—I'd probably be in jail right now, if anything. Yeah. If I didn't have my—especially my other kids, my three other ones, yeah. I probably would be—yeah. I don't know where I would be, yeah. Yeah. I—yeah, 'cause that's one thing that keeps me in a straight, narrow line, is my family and my kids and that. But you hang around with your boys [mates] and you forget—tend to forget what's going on and what's your purpose as a father, and that's where I—no, no, sacrifices then. So especially having fun to those things to going out to have a look at

pretty girls or whatever, like then—no, I got my pretty girl at home. So this is all those things, so, no, I make sure—I’ve made the right decisions, and like I said, the sacrifices that you have to do in order to especially keep your family strong. (Liam)

Marcus described a complex interaction regarding potential personal negative behaviour and its impact upon his children.

Marcus: ...changed a few things, slowed me down a little bit. Yeah, little. Little, but not too much.

Q: How would you think it has?

Marcus: Oh, just—I mean general—well with me, its general things with work, how I do things, make sure I do something safely and if I’m drinking, that I’ve got a sober driver to run me around. I’m not going to lose my licence. If I lose my licence I’m not able to pick them up from school. If I’m in trouble with the police, then it reflects—I don’t know, it somehow reflects on the kids as well.

(Marcus)

In this interaction, Marcus described changing previous practices. From risky drinking and driving and hence losing his licence, to being a responsible drinker and having a ‘sober bob’ to drive him if he was going to drink and hence possibly be over the driving alcohol levels. Not only would losing his licence mean he could not fulfil a role he wanted to do as a father, collecting his children from school, but he recognised his behaviour may influence other people’s opinion of his children.

Behind these public lifestyle changes, a number of personal wellbeing issues were raised. There was the recognition, especially with small children, that there were time and personal space limitations which sometimes made it difficult to deal with their own emotional needs (Luke 1), social needs/personal time (Jack 1, Luke 1) and physical activity (Jack 1, Luke 1).

As children went to school, some fathers noted it became a bit easier to get time to themselves and to do other things. “*So I have just started riding my bike and been able to get a bit of my time back actually*” (Lachie 1). Luke found he had more time to be by himself and have time to think.

When the kids were younger you sort of didn't have a lot of time for yourself...but as they get older they are a bit more independent, and they don't need you so much...so you can sort of squeeze it in...that time for yourself...I just go for a ride on the bike and get out on the dirt, and sort of clear my head a bit. (Luke 1)

For Matthew, it was better as he did not have to take his children with him to appointments.

Matthew: Like, when they were smaller they—they'd be, like, you know, wanting this and wanting that from you and telling you to do this and that. But now they're, like, coming to school and getting educated, like, it's more—more of, well, sort of, like, a freedom, sort of thing. Like, you can do other things than—than getting preoccupied with your kids..... Yeah, you can always, like, do other things that needs to be done.

Q: So you've got more time?

Matthew: Yeah, more time, like, you know, you might have a Centrelink appointment or a job appointment, you know.

Q: Yep.

Matthew: You don't have to drag your kids along with you and ...to all these things, you know? I'll have other appointments up and around town, you know, that I need to go and do. (Matthew)

Why the children being attendant was a problem previously he did not articulate.

All the participants talked about how becoming fathers had changed their perspective on who they were or their position and roles in life. Lachie summed up the feeling of fathers of newborn children now feeling responsible for others.

I don't think you realise that until they are born. People can tell you whatever, but, until they are actually out and they are there. ...makes you think, there's a bit more than just myself, which I think was probably the mode I was in.

(Lachie 1)

This is consistent with the literature regarding the emotional impacts for fathers on becoming parents (Daly et al., 2009).

Some fathers like Caleb and Jack (1) highlighted that they had come across negative attitudes towards fatherhood from people they knew when they became fathers. Both Caleb and Jack had absent fathers. Their strong emotional responses to wanting to be active parents reflected their previously discussed commitment to being part of their children's lives.

Some people say it's an obligation or that you have to do it but, for me, it's not that I have to do it, it's because I want to. I want to do it. I want to bring up—because I was—because even though my mother and my grandmother brought me up, I was brought up without a father, even though I had my uncles and my mum has had boyfriends....I always thought, I want to be there, be the dad for them. (Caleb)

I think after my first daughter was born, one of my white schoolmates commented to my brother 'I heard he had a kid, his life is over.' And I thought well, actually I've had a pretty good life. I've had my career, I've got beautiful kids and I consider myself to be successful and my children will be even more so. (Jack 1)

Toby felt having a daughter as his first child had made him a stronger father because then he came to understand more about women's experiences.

You don't usually see, on the women's side of things, you know and what women's needs are and stuff like that and what do they, how their body changes and things through life and all my children when they were babies I knew you treat them the same but as they grow up because she's a girl she needs, she needs different things throughout her life and she becomes a teenager or goes through puberty and stuff and it's a lot different. (Toby)

Fathers in the study were able to identify many positive self-reflections and attitudes to being fathers and how fatherhood had brought about personal development.

7.3 Stress related to Fatherhood roles

7.3.1 Carer Stress

7.3.1.1 Emotions, conflict and values teaching

Fathers expressed gaining a sense of pride and happiness from their children.

However, being a father also generated strong emotional responses when they dealt with conflict with their children, usually around boundary issues, and when they felt that the values they wished to impart were not being internalised. At times, they expressed deep frustration as well as a sense of loss of control.

Confrontation with children over discipline or boundary setting was a common frustration. *“There’s one part there, [his daughter] at home, she was really bad, just not listening, back-answering, I don’t know. Like a second kid’s always like that, but I don’t know”* (Marcus). The frustration Marcus was describing may have been compounded for him because he had limited time to spend with his children, either dealing with these confrontations over the phone or during his two-week rotation in town. Jack noted the stress these confrontations raised for him.

Well, it's frustrating because she [his eldest daughter] has a limited awareness of the world but just enough comprehension to question my standing as a parent. So questioning my place and then it's also difficult to explain that well, because I'm an adult and you're not so I have to set the rules.

But of course, someone who can have their own thoughts and their own ideas doesn't like to be controlled by another person and that's human nature. That's fair enough. No-one wants to be controlled by anybody but being old enough to know that you have ideas and that this other person has ideas and why should I take orders. Well, that's because you're still a kid. So it's—in previous times, that's affected me a lot. Just due to the amount of emotional stress that causes. (Jack 1)

Jack stated this frustration was a problem *“in previous times”*. Despite his thoughtful reflection on why his daughter wished to rebel against his control, his fall-back argument for being listened to, *“Well, that's because you're still a kid”* (Jack 1), may indicate stresses would continue to be experienced in this area of parenting. As previously noted, there was tension in Jack’s parenting which partly revolved around

absences and engagement in his children's upbringing. Jack had missed many years of direct contact with his children, due to family separation, but also a working life that required him to travel. Given his previous sense of loss of freedom, it is also possible that Jack was struggling with his children exercising control, now that he had to allow for their needs. Related to this are aspects of his two world's styles of parenting: when he is with his children he aspires to have an engaged modern fathering, and he also seeks to define his vision of a contemporary Aboriginal warrior as father figure. When he said his daughter questions his standing as a parent he struggled to define and explain this version of fathering. This may have been an underlying stress he was experiencing during those interactions.

Other fathers detailed different emotional responses from having conflict with their children. Luke identified that while it was stressful, he felt it was a positive parenting thing to provide moral direction.

Luke: As they are getting a bit more older, they think they know a bit more than you do (laughter) ... so sometimes a bit of a struggle ... like with the older one ... she is sort of finding her own little personality and her own little ways of doing things ... if she is getting a bit more stubborn, and likes to argue a bit more... stresses you out a bit more ... whereas when they are younger you can sort of tell them and that would be it.... Yeah ...you don't really want to argue with your kids to get your point across, you want to get it across as easy as possible ... you have to stand your ground be a bit firm...

Q: Does that surprise you in yourself having to do that with your kid?

Luke: No, it sort of doesn't make you feel good all the time ... but sometimes you have to hold your ground ... and dig in ... whereas try and teach them right from wrong ... sort of moral compass. (Luke 1)

Recalling an incident when his son got into trouble, Toby described the range of emotions this caused, and why.

Toby: At first it was like, I was really angry, confused, why would you do such things and thought at the time what am I doing wrong? A lot of things when our children make mistakes like that, the first thing I think what the hell are we doing wrong as parents?

Q: Right, you take responsibility?

Toby: Yeah, that's my initial thing, until I sit back and oh hang on, and that—I think in the end they reassure us, no, you—I'll never do it again. (Toby)

Feeling responsible and protective were for Caleb sources of worry in themselves.

I actually do worry about them sometimes, even though they are most likely safe, but it's that natural effect for me that I'm worried something bad is going to happen to them. I'm forever like that. I'm a very protective father. I don't—I couldn't see anything bad happening to them. I don't know how I'd live with myself. (Caleb)

When Caleb resorted to using physical punishment with his child “*one good whack right on the backside or on the back of the legs or something like that*”, this brought on ‘bad feelings’ because, “[*But*] *even then I start feeling—it makes me feel bad, because I was brought up like that.*” (Caleb). His experience of violence when he grew up led to self-censure in the use of violence against his own children. When Mitch’s youngest son did things that frustrated him and made him want to “*strangle him*”, he would use physical punishment as a threat but never hit his son, “*I have never hit my kids. I would never hit them. I have said, I will smack you, I will smack you, but I never done it. I can't. I will say it, but I won't.*” (Mitch)

These fathers, like those in the other studies (Heath et al., 2011), recognise setting boundaries and rules as an important parental role. However, unlike Heath et al.’s findings towards physical punishment, they did not express the view that not being able to punish their children stopped them from filling this role. In fact, those fathers who did raise the issue of physical punishment indicated an opposition to it from a personal emotional perspective.

A number of fathers used the expression ‘angry’ when describing their emotional responses to problems they encountered fathering their children. When discussing an issue with his daughter staying out Toby initially stated he was, “*At first it was like, I was really angry*”, but then clarified that as, “*confused, why would you do such things and thought at the time what am I doing wrong?*” (Toby). There was a strong sense of Toby’s frustration with the situation and an internalising of blame, “*what am I doing*

wrong?” (Toby). When other fathers used the term ‘angry’, it was also this sense of frustration and a feeling of powerlessness that was making them ‘angry’.

Matthew found it difficult to deal with his child having a tantrum.

Matthew: And that constant screaming in the ears and all the crying makes you angry and stuff like that.

Q: And how do you deal with that?

Matthew: Um, yeah, I try and calm them down and stop them or give them—give them something to munch out on, like, an Icy Pole or something like that.

Q: And when those sort of things happen how—how are you feeling when—when those, sort of—the crying or the things going on ...

Matthew: I feel angry and I feel annoyed and, um, I suppose, like, you know, um, that’s the kind of things you’ve got to deal with, with of being a father.

(Matthew)

Mitch’s anger happened on two levels. If he was drunk, he presumably behaved in ways that frightened his children. He also spoke directly of being angry with himself for causing his children to be sad or frightened.

Q: What are the things that are sort of hard about being a dad that affect you?

Mitch: Seeing them sad. Seeing them sad. Seeing them frightened too.

Q: How does that affect you? Like how does it—what feelings do you have?

Mitch: It kills me. It makes me angry.

Q: Who with, or what with?

Mitch: Myself.

Q: Why with yourself?

Mitch: Sometimes I feel like I’m the blame.

Q: Because of what you have done or what you haven’t done?

Mitch: Sort of both. It depends on the situation I suppose at the time. But I don’t see things on the grog you know. I reacted before I thought. Then—then think about it later, in the police cells you know.

Q: So regrets?

Mitch: Yeah. So regret it, but it’s too late then. (Mitch)

In this anger it is Mitch's lack of control over his situation and his sense of failure- "*blaming himself*", that he highlights, as something that "*kills him*" as a father. He is clearly frustrated with himself and his lack of self-control. If he gets into trouble with the police, again this will lead him to go beyond regret and be angry with himself. He will apportion blame on himself, not just for getting into trouble but also for making his children sad or frightened of his behaviour.

7.3.1.2 Difficulties in instituting lifestyle changes

It was difficult for those who identified alcohol and other drug issues, or if they had been in jail, to institute lifestyle changes to meet their expectations of fatherhood. Although fatherhood was a strong motivation to try and make the required changes, there was also a sense of fear of failure to meet their imagined model of fatherhood.

Matthew, as has previously been discussed, struggled to get away from alcohol and substance abuse.

And, you know, you tell yourself, I'm going to stop drinking, smoking and do all the bad stuff, tell yourself to do that but you get your close relatives and friends who, you know—who don't, ah—like, put pressure onto you to—to have a drink and all that. You tell them, "No, I don't want a drink," and all this, and they should—they should, like, support you and try and—like, in what you want to do but they—they don't want to see you going making that change. They want to see you as they've always, like, known you, as a drinker or...a smoker or something like that. (Matthew)

His motivation was because:

Now that I'm a father, like, I've got to stay sober and don't drink as much and—and try not to get myself into trouble with the law, end up in prison, you know ... and will be missing out on watching your kids grow up. And once you're—when you're away from the kids and the family you start to think a lot. You start to think, um, what are they doing, is my kids all right, I wonder if anyone—if any other kid is being a bully to them? (Matthew)

Mitch had recently initiated serious behavioural changes to take greater control over his life to enable spending more time with his family. Mitch had been out of prison for one year at the time of his interview, having been in jail for ten years. He had stopped

drinking in the last few months. He had recently been to his son's football on a Saturday morning⁸² and described what this had meant to him.

Taking [his son] to the footy, that's good. Because he hasn't been down for months and I didn't do it and I just felt bad, bad and thought you know, [pause] I have just had enough of the bloody shame [of having been in jail] and bloody stuff like that. So yeah. So I have finally done it. (Mitch)

He cited his family as the motivation to 'get off the grog', as it was "*Time for a change, not getting any younger now. See the taste the sober life, see what it feels like*" (Mitch).

Excessive alcohol consumption in his community was still an issue for Matthew, even though he was undertaking treatment at the time of the interview. Mitch had only recently stopped drinking. Shane admitted that he had stopped drinking two years previously (his oldest child was seven and his youngest in transition class) and that he "*used to be a heavy drug user, amphetamines and things, stuff like that. I used to do it when my kids were newborns, but I don't do it no more*" (Shane). These fathers were clearly struggling with issues of addiction, and recognised the detrimental impact it had on their desired models of fatherhood. Matthew alluded to spending time in jail, while Mitch detailed the detrimental impact of jail on his emotional health and ability to enjoy being a father, "*I am just spending time with the kids now actually, this – all this time so we just, this is just the first year we have actually bonded together, like we got closer*" (Mitch).

When we spoke about jail, Mitch said how, despite missing their children when they are inside, some fathers are caught in a cycle of misdemeanours and jail time, release and then re-incarceration.

Q: When you were away in jail and whether it's you or other dads, how did— did you talk about your kids?

Mitch: Yeah, like if I was with other fathers in there, yeah. They would talk, yeah, heaps. Other fathers talking about their kids and families, you know, they miss them. Sometimes you are thinking, but then there is fathers like in

⁸² Where I had met and talked with him about undertaking an interview.

there, just come outside, do the same thing and they are back in there again.

Then they're back in there talking the same thing, you know.

Q: So that is going around in a circle? (Mitch)

Mitch then spoke about his own struggles with the negativity of community gossip about the behaviours of the wives/partners outside the prison and how this became a toxic topic when fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption.

Q: Do you reckon that when they are talking about it they mean it, or they are just saying it because other people are saying it?

Mitch: They mean it when they are sober, but when they are drunk I think they just – I think everything, I don't know. Sometimes everything just— -[long pause]

Q: Goes away.

Mitch: Goes away and just things are negative and things silly, you know.

Q: So those negative thoughts when people are drinking, what are they fuelled from? Why are blokes feeling negative do you think?

Mitch: They think—they think, blokes think their wives played up when they was in jail and stuff like that, you know. So there is lot of blokes, their wives I don't know you know that muck around when the bloke is in jail and stuff like that. And the bloke comes out and accuses her, or stuff like that. Some aren't true, some are true you know.

Q: But it's sort of a paranoia?

Mitch: Paranoia thing, yeah. So I have asked (his wife) and (she) said no. So I left that as that, I will take her word for it.

Q: Yep.

Mitch: Don't know it was though.

Q: Yeah, so those negative things, where do they start though, what do you think or what contributes to it?

Mitch: Probably mates, being around the wrong people. Being around the wrong people, people who gossip, make rumours up. And you're sitting around the circle and then you hear it. Chinese whispers.

Q: And is that just out of boredom that there is nothing else to do?

Mitch: I think it is. There is a lot of people in this town that do it. Pretty sad actually, when you think about it. People out there just to make, just to make trouble just to see other people fall, you know. Very sad life. Bored. (Mitch)

The mixture of alcohol and jail, leading to being forcibly separated from family had an obviously toxic effect on Mitch's ability to trust his wife. Even though he asked her about fidelity issues after he left jail, and she had assured him, part of him could not fully believe. "*Don't know it was though*", shows this uncertainty dwells in his relationship, a relationship he often referenced throughout his interview as being a motivating factor in wanting to reform his lifestyle, to achieve his ideal of the roles of father and partner.

When I asked Matthew about what new things he was dealing with as a father, now his children were at school he expressed some surprise.

Q: Anything new that you have to feel that you've got to plan for or do or be on top of that wasn't an issue [before they were school aged]?

Matthew: No, I never, never thought of that ...- to that yet....Yeah, I might have to think about that one, mmm. And I—I've just been taking each day as it comes...

Q: Yep.

Matthew: ... and never really thought of, you know, the near future...or what I've got to do to make my kids happy or watch out for them, all this kind of stuff.....you know? (Matthew)

Struggling with the daily life on the Town Camp, the drinking circles and other problems discussed earlier were big issues for Matthew. His approach to just "*take each day as it comes*" was not limited to just how he planned for his children—but reflected his way of dealing with his own existence.

Seeing themselves as now having to be responsible people was a powerful motivator in lifestyle change for the fathers in this study. As just discussed, for some fathers, the ability to make lifestyle changes to meet this expectation was hampered by alcohol and other substance abuse, external social-cultural issues and forced separation due to incarceration.

7.3.2 Provider stress

All the fathers identified a good work ethic, modelled in their own upbringings, as valuable and something to emulate. However, work in its many guises, often impacted negatively upon their ability to fulfil their fathering roles, which were compromised variously by being at work, lack of work and poor job security, or through working away from town.

Being out of work, long-time unemployed or only getting limited casual work were factors that undermined fathers' opportunities to fulfil their desired provider roles. Matthew, who moved to Alice Springs from northern NT, had difficulty getting work.

I just worked as a CDP⁸³ worker and, um, yeah, just doing, like, jobs with them...[it's] a bit harder to get a job down here 'cause, ah, like, you need certificates, licence, all these type of stuff. And the people you don't—you know, don't even really know [you]. (Matthew)

Mitch stated, “sometimes they want things that I can't give it to them” expressing disappointment in not being able to meet his family's financial needs. Matthew's comment also reinforced Mitch's observations about needing local contacts to get work if you are a low wage earner with unrecognised skills. Whether because of a lack of local connections or because their skills are not easily transportable or recognised, these fathers felt excluded from the labour market, and therefore felt alienated from being able to fulfil their provider roles in the family.

Self-identified pressure to be a provider often caused working fathers stress as they dealt with tensions between time at work and time they wanted to spend with their children, “You know you'd like to do more ...but sometimes you know, I got to make money.” (Dale). Caleb described the effort involved to attend a Father's Day event at his child's pre-school.

Yeah, for the Father's Day that just passed. I was actually working at the Chifley (a large motel) then. That day I had to work until—because I had to

⁸³ At the time of the interview jobless people in remote Australia must work 25 hours a week to receive Commonwealth Government welfare payments under the Community Development Programme (CDP), which is up to three times longer than city-based unemployed people need to work. More than 30,000 people are covered by the CDP, most of whom are Aboriginal.

start at seven. I had to work until 10 and I think they [the pre-school] started shutting everything down for the Father's Day. I think everything started getting put away at 10:30 and I knocked off at 10:00. By the time I got there I think it was just after 10:30. I don't know—because that's a long way to ride. And I rode there and just as long as I rode there. Just seeing the kids, they was just happy to see me. (Caleb)

Stress was heightened when work drew fathers away from town. Marcus, Lachie, Caleb, and Dale all gave up better-paid positions working out bush in order to spend more time with their young families. *“Initially when the kids were young, I left the mining industry so I could come to town and watch them grow, just so I wouldn't miss that early childhood.”* (Marcus). Since then he had separated from his partner and gone back to the mines to provide for his children but again felt the strain of not being close to them. Dale's experience when his children were young was similar, *“that's why I stopped you know, I was getting paid really good money and I just didn't think it was worth it”* (Dale).

Caleb also described the emotional strain of working away from home when his children were young.

I had a family portrait with me. Because in our rooms where we stayed there was one bedroom, ...So I'd actually sit up at night—I'd have the TV right there and have their picture right there and I'd sit down sometimes—even without the TV on, I'd sit there and watch them—I'd think about them. ..., I actually did miss them and sometimes you do have your dreams about them, which is—sometimes I'd actually sit down and actually cry sometimes, which is—well I find it as natural. (Caleb)

These fathers made the difficult decision to forgo better incomes. Instead, they chose to be involved and present with their children and families, whether as protectors or as emotional and active supports of their children and partners. However, for Mitch the choice was no work in town or doing remote work to make some money.

... for six weeks straight sometimes. I just think about the money side and but I would, I would miss my kids and [his wife] day to day. So the day I was

leaving, the day I grab my swag and I know that I won't be seeing them for a while. And so I know they're sad too. (Mitch)

At the time of our first interview Luke was just about to leave his job as his position had been restructured and now required him to be away from his family travelling to remote communities. Instead, he chose employment uncertainty rather than not be around for his family (Luke Interview Notes 25/3/2013).

After Dale gave up his job in the mines, he had to deal with shift work and changing jobs, lack of job security, which made it hard for him to get to daytime or after hour school events. *"Yeah, it's just hard, because, um, I do like shift work, and, you know, the last few months I've been changing a lot of jobs, and, you know, because there's just no work"* (Dale).

In these instances, the fathers sought to balance expectations of being a provider against their strong desires to be proximally and emotionally connected with their families. For Lachie, Marcus and Luke leaving relatively well-paid remote area positions had been possible because their partners worked and they were confident they had the skills to get employment in town. Their economic position meant they could make this decision. However, for Mitch job mobility and recognised skills were a problem that meant lower paid manual bush work was the only real work option:

Yeah. You know. So it's sort of hard too. But if I don't work, well I have got no money. Sometimes I do work in town, sometimes I get lucky, I can find a bit of labouring jobs in the town. You know I can get a few weeks here and there or something. So it works out all right. The only job I can get is out bush because that's all I know, you know. And you've got no tickets in town. Even though you are a hard worker, no one is going to know you're a hard worker, not unless you have got that ticket to say that you can do this and that you know. (Mitch)

Even though his wife worked, it was important for Mitch to bring in a wage. *"But if I don't work, well I have got no money"* indicated his strong desire to be successful in a gendered provider role.

Jack described a complex association with work. Based upon the hard working ethic of his uncles, he valued work as an important component of a father figure role. The model of work he described was of extended absences, followed by intensive time at home. *“They [his uncles] all got a lot of kids and they go to their jobs. They’ve got hard jobs. They work really, really hard and when they spend time with their kids, they spend quality time”* (Jack 1). He related this to his own experience being a highly mobile worker (spending extended periods away from home) but then having the flexibility to have time with his children.

I spent a lot of time with them when they were young and spent quite a lot of time with them as my work commitments were flexible ... but when I came back, I had infinitely flexible time at home to do important things with the kids.... So yeah, that's the way I viewed it is that you work hard and you play harder. So a lot of people, they have steady jobs and it's a daily routine and then the time with the kids is the two hours after school, before dinner and bed. Whereas, dad could be gone for two weeks or a month and then when he comes back, well then, we have a week of just holiday. (Jack 1)

This pattern fitted with his self-identified need to have time for his own career—the *“life/work balance”*. At the time of his first interview, when he had recently gained full parenting responsibility with his children, he thought, *“all these things in life are achievable and children are an extra load but not impossible”* (Jack 1).

However, things became more complicated when he developed a new partner relationship, as Centrelink⁸⁴ then did not consider him single and wanted his new partner to divide her assets and provide parenting support. Trying to be a full-time parent, maintain a couple of self-employed part-time jobs, while getting a government single parenting payment, and negotiate a newly formed relationship became a Kafkaesque trap *“so therefore I had to re-join the workforce, but then by re-joining the workforce...I had to make the decision to give custody back to my partner”* (Jack 2). Jack explained that when he was undertaking full-time parenting he progressively got into debt, ironically noting he would have possibly been better served not trying to provide a quiet household for his children. He could have been financially better off

⁸⁴ Australian Commonwealth Government agency that administers social welfare payments.

living in overcrowded housing that may have provided family support and given him more time to himself.

Matthew, Mitch, and Shane all struggled with underlying issues of: social exclusion, difficult housing situations (Shane and Matthew—Town Camps), and exclusion from the workforce and low levels of education. These factors, in conjunction with experiences of contact with either prison or heavy substance abuse, have contributed to emotional distress in being able to fulfil their desired fatherhood roles, especially those of providers and protectors.

7.3.3. Protector stress

Shame, or fear of doing something shameful, was a concern raised by two fathers. Marcus, as discussed earlier, avoided potentially shameful consequences for both him and his children by not drinking and driving. Mitch had felt shame about his incarceration. In Mitch's case, this sense of shame had stifled his interaction with his family in community settings, until he had overcome the shame by taking his son to the football, "*enough of the bloody shame*" (Mitch). He had felt his own (extended) family would be against him.

Mitch: I was really shamed ... what do you lot—people think about me, you know.

Q: Did you feel that there was any?

Mitch: No. Nup. I felt really good. And it felt like, the family was happy with me too, that felt good. (Mitch)

These fathers wished to protect their children from any shame their behaviour may have caused. While this may be a feeling most fathers could identify with, in this case it happens within an environment of the tensions discussed earlier driven by negative views of Aboriginal fathers, as, for example, articulated by Langton (2016) and Leak (2016) and enacted through the Howard Government's Emergency Response to Child Abuse in the NT (J. W. Howard, 2007). This public disapproval does not exert additional self-doubt or fear of failure on non-Aboriginal fathers.

7.3.4 Protector stress: Aboriginal fathers and the Intervention(ists)

As previously discussed, there is an established discourse in Australia of the failed Aboriginal male, the violent, dangerous and dysfunctional primitive, a danger to his

family and society (Macoun, 2011). This discourse has antecedents in the settler history and is still in the settler present; it was reinscribed by rhetoric associated with the Intervention (P. Anderson, 2009) prior to this study and during the time of this study through the notorious Bill Leak ‘*Aboriginal Fathers cartoon*’ (Insider, 2016; L. Pearson, 2016b).⁸⁵ Fathers talked about these issues and events as negative experiences.

While there was some sympathy for the view that families who were not able to organise themselves may have benefitted from the focus on getting kids off the street and into school (Caleb, Dale, Tom), other fathers found the one-size-fits-all approach of the Intervention program counterproductive. Having the government tell people what to do, did not allow “*you to make decisions and learn for yourself ... whose kid is it? That’s my kid, I make decisions*” (Liam). Liam was speaking out against the coercive control of the Intervention, particularly the measures that were designed to force parents to send their children to school. His argument was that this took away from parents the responsibility to make that decision; it was being made for them. It was not that he opposed sending children to school—the opposite was true. He was a strong advocate for education as a process of social growth and uplift.

Personally, fathers felt “*shithouse*” (Liam) when the Intervention was announced and thought it was, “*degrading*” (Jack 1). Focussing on the personal impact, Liam was clear about how the Intervention impacted him and his family.

Well, I got looked at like I was a child molester, ...—just degraded us big time. ... put me down as a human being and as a young man, young father.... The way you’re looking at your kids and you—it—and it still is today, racism came up that big in this town so quick.... One of my uncles got murdered through racism, ... because of that intervention. (Liam)

During second round interviews with Lachie and Jack using photo elicitation, they were asked to comment on the Bill Leak cartoon published in *The Australian* newspaper. Both fathers thought while there was “*an element of truth in it*” (Jack 2),

⁸⁵ See discussion 5.4.4.

it was neither helpful, nor representative of Aboriginal fathers in general, “*grossly stereotypical*” (Jack 2), “*a lot of us are being tarred with the same brush*” (Lachie 2). Both fathers felt that the audience the cartoon was aimed at was not derelict fathers, but rather that it played to a wider audience, “*Oh the audience is definitely mainstream Australia*” (Jack 2), “*It’s pretty clear as to who it’s pointed to, Q: And the people who probably need to see it, are going to?* Lachie: No, I don’t think they are going to be sitting down reading the paper” (Lachie 2). Jack felt the function was to misrepresent Aboriginal people so that voters would feel that Aboriginal people should not have additional health, education and support programs and the recognition debate for Aboriginal people in the constitution would be undermined (Jack 2). Moreover, while it may not reach those negligent fathers, he felt that it undermined those who were trying, especially as the image became widely re-syndicated through social media.

It’s telling Aboriginal men that the rest of the country is saying they’re not good enough.... oh that’s what the world thinks of me, I’m no good, this is how I feel inside because my entire life I was told that I’m not good enough, so here’s the reinforcement, I see it every day and then of course, this image is going to be repeated over time and then so the kids of the next generation will be like oh look at that, just, just like the black face pantomimes and those sort of things were for the generations before. (Jack 2)

Summing up a general response to negative views of Aboriginal men as fathers, “*There’s always the stereotype of the absentee dad*”, Jack was clear that:

I do know that a lot of the fathers who are proud to raise their kids are fiercely proud and they want to be examples of the community to see that strong men can not only care and protect their children but can nurture them in ways that they can’t get from other family members by learning self-confidence and their place in society. (Jack 1)

Marcia Langton, in a widely publicised critique of the negative reaction to the cartoon, claimed that Aboriginal men needed to be vocal in opposing family violence prevalent in Aboriginal communities and not feel that they are being victimised in the debate (J. Price et al., 2016). However, from the testimony of these fathers, they do

feel the dominant discourse on Aboriginal violence blames them as a group. This raises further questions. How do Aboriginal males promote positive images of fatherhood without looking like they miss the main point in the debate, namely addressing family violence? As Jack noted “*what's that in the media, good news is not news. So stories of positive role models don't make headlines, they don't sell newspapers*” (Jack 1).

7.3.5 Protector stress: Extended family as stress factor

Extended families were important to many of the fathers in the study. They provided support in teaching culture, were potential sources of role models and caregivers, and, as will be discussed later, can be a source of emotional support (Section 7.5). These positive attributes are consistent with the discourse of the importance of extended family in contemporary Aboriginal society (Heath et al., 2011). However extended families can be “a source of stress as well as comfort” (Senior quoted in Burbank, 2011, p. 100). Fathers in this study identified examples where extended family created stress.

When extended family members were disruptive, it was often due to alcohol or other social issues. Matthew had issues with family members in his Town Camp drinking and causing disturbances for his family. He noted how it was quieter when they went away. Toby had intervened when cousins of his son had led him into trouble (Toby). Tom identified males in his extended family as a challenge for his granddaughter as she approached turning thirteen. They would try to entice her away from school to go off with them. Jack spoke of the negative impact of having extended family around the house if they are not found to be supportive.

If extended family or if their partners are not supportive, some men can lose their resolution to work hard because if man goes to work and he works hard and he comes home and all his family are drinking there, his wife or his wife's family are all at the house and nobody is going to work. And then, he starts to think well, why should he go to work? (Jack 1)

Liam found his extended family caused problems when they tried to involve him in their feuds with other families and, while when he was younger, he backed them up in their fights. Now he stays out of feuds so his immediate family does not get affected.

“You got a big family, you can get sucked in to so much things, but when you can stand back and sit back and say, hang on, that’s ... business. I’ve got my own business” (Liam). Another problem he was encountering was having:

Family that want to come over and eat our kids’ food to coming over to sleep in our house and make our kids sleep on the couch or something like this, so this is where we got to make sure that there comes—in—really well too, where we have to stand our ground for our kids’ sake, to—for our little family’s sake. So my—my missus, we do it really well. (Liam)

Tensions around extended family expectations were extensively discussed by Liam. He found he needed to set clear limits around what family events he would engage with, in order to protect his family’s wellbeing. This had elicited negative attitudes from some family members. *“Well, a lot of my brothers, especially my brothers, we don’t look at each other eye to eye. They look at me as—departed them, left them”* (Liam). Extended family play an important part in Aboriginal child and family relationships, especially in fostering and raising children (Heath et al., 2011). The severe response by his brothers of treating Liam as having ‘departed them’ indicates emotional pain on both sides of the relationship. The terms ‘departed’ and ‘left’ summon a sense of loss as well as Liam’s sense of being disavowed. It is poignant that Liam should be rejected by his brothers given he was taking on the role of fostering one of his brothers’ sons.

I was the backbone of them, did everything. Made sure everybody was right to—just the looking after side of it. Where my brothers now all look—some of my brothers, they look at me as—‘wish I could be like my brother, especially looking after my kids’. So they—a few times they’ll actually go back to their families and try and be a father and that, but then they just get that distraction, they’re gone again, so—where our fathers all lived the same. So their fathers or my fathers all did the same thing, so that’s them. So we knew straight away, my dad’s got itchy feet. We knew what he’d say, right, see you in a couple of weeks, brus,⁸⁶ so everybody knew that, so we just—that’s one thing that—it’s either you change or not. Mmm hmm. (Liam)

In this instance, Liam was conscious that, as a protective and supportive father, he was potentially a role model for his brothers. However, the spectre of their father’s

⁸⁶ Colloquialism: ‘brother’.

infidelity to the family haunted their experience of being fathered. He saw they needed to renounce that example if they were to be successful fathers.

In these examples, fathers preferred to have smaller functional family units where they could protect their children from other family members who were not seen to be prioritising their children's needs.

Mitch and his partner had felt forced to act when they saw their child falling into the orbit of other children who were getting into trouble.

Mitch: Because at that time, when I was in prison, [my wife was] there with the kids outside here by themselves. ...all [his son's] little mates was getting into trouble, at school and it was just sort of getting in the start of it at that stage, so I think [his wife] send him away. Yeah. And I'm glad we did now, because we found out that young [another boy is] in Don Dale,⁸⁷ he is locked up. A lot of the other young fellas that he used to hang around with are all getting into trouble and smoking and drinking and that, so we are glad now, so he is away from that. Yeah. Yep. No, see me and [wife] want to send our kids away for school, like if we could afford it you know. I would love to send the kids down south to do it, or to a college you know. South or over in Queensland somewhere.

Q: And is that purely to get away from just the— -

Mitch: Yeah, sort of, yeah sort of, sort of you know get out of here. Sort of to give them like a better chance in life.

Q: To see something else?

Mitch: Better education. See something else.

Q: You think the education is different somewhere else?

Mitch: Yeah. Better. Give them that experience of being away from mum and dad, you know. (Mitch)

Mitch's desire that his children could get a better education interstate may have been based on a hope his children could do better away from the toxic town environment.

⁸⁷ NT youth detention centre was the focus of the Royal Commission and Board of Inquiry into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory 2016.

Having to pay for this change may also mean a better chance at experiencing a more fulfilling education.

The need for their children to escape from destructive behaviours in Alice Springs was raised by Tom and his wife Mary, but this time the threat was more immediate. It came from family as well as friends.

Q: ... how far would you like to see her go in school, ... what's it going to do for her, do you think?

Mary: I'd like to see her go to, like, high schools, so she can finish all these, ah, school. Yeah. Some—I seen a lot of young girls finish off, you know, when—they was only thirteen. And I'm just thinking of [their daughter/grandchild], she'll be coming nearly twelve....sometime when they come to thirteen years old, she start to think that, oh, I'm a big woman now, I don't want to go to school [pause] and some kids are seeing it like that. They run away. Yeah. That's—yeah, they don't want to come to school, ...I just want her to learn, support her so she can go to high school and learn more, mmm.

Tom: More better would be come down Adelaide or Melbourne like that, you know.

Q: What would be the advantage of her going away?

Tom: More learning, ... like, like uncles and [pauses] like uncles come just like that, and not a kid, you know, like friends, they pulling them you know, oh, you can't pull away. (Tom)

Given Tom and Mary's circumstances, and the difficulty Mitch expressed about getting work, it would involve considerable financial commitment and emotional strain to realise this goal without external financial support.

Mitch brought up the idea that children might develop important skills by being away from their parents. This would seem an important admission given his recidivism. Was he reflecting on his own behaviour having just recently been in jail? Did this idea of being away from 'mum and dad' have a reflective note? Did he want his children to experience life outside their family cycle? The other father who brought up sending their children away was Liam. His reasoning was based on his own experience of

going away for school. Not only did it get him away from toxic town issues but it also gave him a sense of developing as an individual.

Liam: I was on the verge of going to jail. My mother sent me out of this town, down to boarding school....just being out of this town made me open my eyes and what [pause] what I can do.

Q: What was boarding school like?

Liam: Oh, awesome stuff, hey? Just grew you up into being an individual, to look after yourself, especially moving away from home. Like I said, the sacrifices, living in your inner circle, where your comfort zone. You're gone now. You got to be by yourself and you got to, especially the money side of it. You got to budget, all those things. I didn't care about budgeting. I just wanted to buy this thing; you don't care how much it cost, whatever. But this was where the other teachers, you had a budget to ...

Q: Did your mum teach you how to do that ...

Liam: Yeah.

Q: ... before you went away?

Liam: Yeah. She tried to. She tried to, but no, I wasn't that good at it.

Q: Yeah. And did that change when you were away though?

Liam: Yeah. Yeah, it changed heaps. Because boarding school you had—you only could get out once a week or something like that, but footy really kept me down there. I didn't really—didn't really think about school much, but I was just getting past, getting by, but I used the colleges and my football side of it as well. So I started furthering my footy side of it then. I didn't, and then I didn't even want to come home. I wanted to stay down there, so I stayed with my coach down there, or I lived at ... at the college by myself. So those things where—do you want to come home and get in trouble or do you want to just play football and do the fun things and, see, I set myself a goal. (Liam)

The two ideas seem organically intertwined, escape and personal development—being on your own in a strange environment away from town and family issues. Again, the motif that school(ing) provides the vehicle for personal development and understanding of how society works, outside Aboriginal family and community, is repeated. In contrast to the literature on parental views of sending children away,

these fathers do not see the advantage of gaining education away from community as an unfortunate necessity (Mander, 2012). Rather, community and family issues are necessities that drive the desire to send children away for school (Heath et al., 2011).

7.3.6 Generative Care: School has emotional impacts

Given the high level of belief in schooling and education as vital pathways for their children's improved social and economic futures, coupled with the time and effort commitment in supporting their children's participation in school, it was not surprising that what occurred at school had an emotional impact on the fathers in this study. Issues that arose at school had both positive and negative social and emotional impacts. Familiar emotions of pride, happiness, and anger/frustration were discussed.

7.3.6.1 Positives

There were a number of positives experienced by fathers having children attend school. Given their high expectations of school to bring benefits to their child's future, having children attend school can be considered as having a positive benefit on them. However, high expectations also bring frustration if the school does not meet those expectations.

A direct benefit of having children at school was that it gave some fathers (Lachie 1, Luke 1) more time, than those with small children who were more hands-on, *"you have to be with them all the time"* (Luke 1). Matthew, saw he had more time to himself since the children were at school *"more of, well, sort of, like, a freedom, sort of thing"* (Matthew). This included not having to take his children with him to meetings at Centrelink offices. Some fathers had indicated they had missed having time to themselves as a limitation in having children. However, having children at school also offered benefits. It helped ease stress around managing appointments, having time to think, exercise and potentially allow them to re-engage in the workforce—at least in a part-time manner.

Beyond the practicality of freeing up time, there were many personal emotional positives. Dale and Toby highlighted the pride they felt when other parents praised their children. They experienced pride in their child (Dale), coupled with a sense of reflected credit on themselves as the father (Toby).

Fathers also reported their happiness in seeing their children enjoy school. They saw positive changes in their child such as the skills they developed (Liam, Marcus, Caleb, Shane, Lachie 1, Tom). These included being chosen for sports or receiving awards (Caleb, Toby, Shane).

And it always good, every—not every week, but every couple of weeks one of the kids get the student of the week award or something like that, which is pretty good. It goes to show that they are doing good at school. They're not fighting, they're not running amuck, which is good. (Caleb)

[His son] won the dux of the school last year...we knew he was going well, but I was pretty proud of that....and I sat back and had a few beers over that....[laughter] we do put a lot of time into their schooling and homework and all that sort of stuff....so it's good to see, not only him get a reward for me too you know.....it does or doesn't matter whether he does or doesn't get the dux, but....it was pretty good really. (Lachie 1)

Being able to be part of their child's education by attending events was another positive experience, even when this may have caused some problems.

Q: What about your daughter getting an award, how did that make you feel?

Shane: Yeah good. The only reason I went was because she asked me to. I said I would and I didn't want to break that promise. But if my partner would have asked me I would have said no or someone else, but as she asked me I had to go.

Q: But it was hard?

Shane: Yes sort of hard, yeah.

Q: What about seeing her actually get the award?

Shane: Yeah it was good, yeah. It was really rewarding that. (Shane)

In each of these instances the fathers identify the positive emotional response of having their child succeed at school and be recognised for their achievements. Toby and Marcus identified having their children chosen as school captains as positive experiences, seeing this as something that brought their children pride. These positive

emotional responses would be familiar to many fathers. However, for Aboriginal fathers to have their children as school captains, duxes of the school or otherwise being identified for their high quality work, is particularly notable given the negative social/political climate in which these events occurred and the particular struggles many of these families faced.

7.3.6.2 Negatives

Negative issues revolved around the school not meeting the fathers' expectations of providing quality responses to their child's needs. This included what they saw as the school not providing a safe and appropriate learning environment for their children and when fathers felt excluded from school conversations or were unable to attend school functions.

I have outlined the high value these fathers placed on education for their children and the considerable efforts they took to support their children's schooling. It is therefore understandable that when they perceived schools to be failing in their responsibility to provide a safe learning environment for their children they felt *"very wild"* (Lachie 1). Luke was more forthright. He described how in Adelaide when his daughter was being *"harassed by a boy in her class"* he had gone to the school to get the issue addressed and he felt *"a bit angry inside... and you want to go out and get ahhh a bit violent I suppose"* (Luke 1). Bullying in its many forms, whether boys against girls or amongst boys or girls, was a common reason fathers had come to the school. It was also something that worried them (Marcus, Tom), brought about a feeling of sadness (Tom) and anger (Luke 1, Lachie 1).

Lachie detailed his negative feelings when his son had been bullied. This was discussed in the previous chapter, but here is revisited to consider its emotional impacts. He described how there had been a lot of fighting happening at the school and his son had been dragged into the process.

It is hard when your kids come home and go 'this is going on' and 'that is going on', you should be able to say, 'you need to go to your teacher about that, maybe first'....and there were times when I went in and seen them about it....and it was brushed aside. (Lachie 1)

He described how, after a period of seeming inactivity from the school to address the issue, “*they told you what had happened, but they weren’t willing to go well here is what’s going to happen*” (Lachie 1), he advised his son to fight back. Given Lachie’s strong commitment to education as an important element in getting ahead in life, just getting a call to school to be told his child had been in another fight would eventually, “*get up (his) nose a bit*” (Lachie 1). It also had the effect of making Lachie become depressed about what his son was going through and what he felt able to do about it.

Lachie: Their down themselves, and it actually would get me down as well ... I never really had those issues at school ... so ... you could see it just wore him down every day basically ... and then things started turning

Q: So that started to affect you?

Lachie: Yeah ... while he is down...it does ... every morning ... well not every morning ... but there were a lot of mornings when he basically was refusing to go to school ... and you have to basically kick him out of the car ...

Q: so how would that sit with your

Lachie: it’s not a good feeling ... you know ... you can’t do nothing for them really ... you know ... when their at school ... when I was younger, my mum said basically ‘you have to hit them first, and worry about it later’ ... you know ... and that’s what I got to with him .. I said ‘ahh well one day you might have to do something’ ... you get sick of being scared ... and that’s last resort option ... but that changed a lot of stuff for him too ... so He came home that day and said ‘I didn’t win the fight’ ... but you know ... I give him what he thought he deserved’. (Lachie 1)

Having to advise his son to fight back, whilst effective in the short term, did not fit well with Lachie’s view of what the school should be providing for his son. It did eventually, as discussed previously, lead him to become more involved in the school (Lachie 1).

Marcus and Liam both spoke about emotional issues that arose due to the school not meeting their expectations of education standards. Marcus became worried the school was not giving adequate homework for his daughter when she was in Year six (Marcus). As previously noted, Luke had moved his children from another primary

school because he saw they were not getting the attention they should have been in the classroom, not being trouble makers meant they were sidelined.

Luke: Just the education side of it. My kids felt like—they weren't myall enough—more or less wasn't black enough and—dumb enough, whatever, to be getting that attention from the kids—from the teachers to...

Q: So they weren't getting ...

Luke: Yeah.

Q: ...focused on 'cause they weren't...

Luke: No. Yeah.

Q: ...out—they weren't out there enough to...

Luke: Yeah. That wasn't—they were just middle—middle and that. (Luke)

He describes a uniquely Aboriginal issue. His children were not seen as having particular Aboriginal behavioural problems '*being myall enough, wasn't black enough*', referring to wild or misbehaviour issues and so therefore not getting adequate attention from the teachers to support them in their education.

These emotional responses, worry and anger, illustrate the father's recognition of the importance for their children's future wellbeing. Luke, Marcus, Lachie, and Liam all felt empowered and confident to approach the school to address their issues or have their fears allayed. Some of the other fathers had discussed the stress they experienced in trying to attend school events as they did not wish to let their children down, either by making the child sad or in making themselves feel inadequate as fathers. For example, Matthew had experienced emotional strain at not being in a position to attend school events.

Matthew: Because a couple of times our kids have been coming home and asking us to, "Come to this assembly," or "Come to this night," or something like that, you know ... "Come to this."

Q: And have you been able to or

Matthew: No we haven't been able to.

Q: How does—and what sort of impact does that have on you?

Matthew: Um, it makes—like—it makes—makes me feel like I'm letting them down and all that. (Matthew)

Sometimes this tension was due to trying to fulfil other obligations such as work, or they reflected the social circumstances or emotional responses of individual fathers to the school environment, as discussed in the earlier sections.

Shane found it very hard to be comfortable in having more direct involvement because of his interpretation of male and female spaces and roles, even though like Matthew he saw how valued it was by his children.

For Shane, attending school assemblies was not an easy thing to do. During Shane's interview we discussed how some Aboriginal fathers seemed ill at ease sitting in the assembly. My own observations of parents at school assemblies collected over 6 months (4 school assemblies), had identified 15 Aboriginal fathers and 30 Aboriginal mothers in attendance. All fathers were in the company of a woman. (observation notes 16/11/12, 7/12/12, 4/3/13, 20/5/13). For non-Aboriginal families there were 20 fathers and 35 mothers, with some fathers attending by themselves. Fathers were a similar percentage of the total Aboriginal (33%) and non-Aboriginal (36%) parents. It was not therefore the relative number of Aboriginal fathers that gained my particular attention. I did notice however, that on two occasions, Aboriginal fathers (on one of these occasions accompanied by his partner) leaving straight after their child had received an award or performed without waiting for the assembly to end. On one of these occasions, the Aboriginal father arrived three quarters of the way through the assembly when his daughter got an award. His partner handed over their baby while she took photos of the child receiving the award (who was on stage). Then she (the child) was beckoned out of the assembly while it was still going to get (another) photo—she then returned to sit with her class and they (the parents) left (observation note 16/11/12). This was different to the non-Aboriginal parents who all stayed for the duration.

My conjecture at the time was that either these fathers felt awkward, or they had to leave quickly as they could not afford to be away from work for long, possibly being on lower waged employment with little flexibility in hours. Most of the settler fathers were, based on dress, in office jobs or were (from personal knowledge) self-employed tradespeople.

When Shane talked about feeling out of place when he had attended an assembly, I brought up this observation,

Shane: I don't go to assemblies. My partner does, women, if they get awards at school.

[Shane's happiness and how rewarding it was to attend the assembly to see his daughter getting the award has been discussed earlier]

Q: So there is a sort of trade off there?

Shane: Yes there is...

Q: But one of the things I noticed was that ... dads in particular would come and then when their child's...

Shane: They'd go straight after

Q: yeah they'd go straight after. Did you stay for the whole lot or did you do that?

Shane: No I did the same (laughter)

Q: Just to reduce the amount of time

Shane: I didn't want to say it, but you actually said it, yeah

Q: Yeah, No that's good, I think that's ...

Shane: I was actually one of the first ones out the door there. (Shane)

Jack's perception that there may still be residual negative attitudes by some school teachers towards absent fathers, "*teachers have this—still have that stereotype that kids get left behind by the father and the mother's there to raise them*" (Jack 1). As well as Shane's annoyance about how notes are sent home to parents addressed to mothers or that in his perception, there were not Father's Day events.

In the Newsletter, they could put 'Dear Mum and Dad'. They put 'Dear Mum', that sort of stuff pisses me off, I get offended by it. Even though they wouldn't intentionally do it, it's probably just the way they've been set up to do it.

Things like that, pisses the dad's off too I suppose. (Shane)

This shows that for some fathers the experience of having their children attend school throws up negative emotional responses.

There was a sense from the fathers, as Dale put it in response to being asked about the challenges of having children, *“well if you get through it, and, you’re right the next day and you smile, you know, so it must make you, you know, make you stronger”* (Dale) that these stresses are something fathers have to endure. How the fathers coped with this challenge to become stronger, or even if all felt they could, are discussed below.

7.4 Self perceptions of fathering

Shane’s partner worked and he described himself, as *“I am just a stay-at-home father”* (Shane). His use of ‘just’ is concerning, it belittles the importance of the role of an at-home parent, as if he was failing to be a fully functional father fulfilling his envisaged role of *“He provides for the family”* which he highlighted in his next sentence. Shane’s low self-esteem in relation to being a stay-at-home parent raises questions about how he perceived the relative importance of traditional at home parenting roles. His way of describing his own role may indicate that what he saw, as normally a mother’s role is not as important as that of the idealised male provider. An adherence to traditional western gender roles was a limitation for Shane in enjoying his fatherhood. In contrast, Caleb and Lachie were satisfied with being the at-home parent. Both their partners were working at the time of their interviews and their adaptive view of fatherhood included the role of carer and domestic support as legitimate fathering roles.

A possibly more positive reading of Shane’s *“just a stay-at-home father”* comment could be that he was trying to position himself as ‘ordinary father’, the ‘just’ not belittling but rather a levelling tactic often found in other studies with males and fathers (Edley, 2001; Locke & Yarwood, 2017) where people try to fit into a normal position. Other fathers deployed this type of self-description *“I’m just a dad at the moment. Yeah... a..good dad at the moment”* (Liam), *“Probably just normal in Alice Springs”* (Luke), *“There are some fathers I know are good. Like there are some that are bad too. Like ten times worse than me, you know. So...I just think at least have a go”* (Mitch). Given the negative stereotypes associated with Aboriginal males, Lachie chose to take control over representation of himself as a father, *“that doesn’t really affect me because I don’t put myself in that category if you know what I mean”* (Lachie 2).

While not wishing to be self-promoting, fathers did see that others may look upon their fathering in a positive light. Liam said he was teaching his nephews the values implied in being a good father, as his nephews looked up to him, *“they call me dad.... Like a role model”* (Liam). Dale said his sisters thought, *“like they said, like, yeah, a good dad, you know? You do a lot, you know? And like I see myself here, I reckon I do well, you know, for him (his son)”* (Dale). In addition, Lachie felt:

In sort of my group of friends ... I think a lot of them look up to me, in a way....and some do ask for advice....I don't really give anyone advice at the end of the day....I just say you got to do what you think works...you know... I think they respect me a lot, and a lot of them just having their first or second child.....so.....I think I've probably done things pretty well, not to the best, but made a lot of good decisions for my family. (Lachie 1)

In this way fathers can create positive images. As Jake noted in his critique of the media:

It's not news enough to say look, there's ten good blokes in this community and they all look after their kids and they all go to work. Well, that's pretty boring and where's the drama? It's like well, there is no drama. We're all at work then we go home and we look after our kids and our wives are happy. So that's—there's no exciting twist in that story. (Jack 1)

7.5 How fathers deal with emotional issues in the family and where fathers seek emotional support and parenting support

As discussed, having children and having children attending school engendered both positive and negative emotional wellbeing experiences for fathers in this study. How they dealt with these emotional issues and where they sought support illustrated a high level of personal emotional isolation experienced by many of the fathers. Emotional isolation was evident when fathers discussed their attempts to shield their children from their own negative emotions and how, or if, they shared their feelings with their partners or other people. Fathers in this study identified being isolated from other male emotional contact, even when they were able to identify other males as a source of parenting advice or support. There was a distinction between their personal emotional connection and accessing parenting advice or support. This was most

evident for those who held clear gender role notions of fatherhood, but was also mentioned by fathers with a more involved role approach. This experience was present across social gradient lines, but was also more readily expressed by fathers from more disadvantaged families and who experienced social disruptive circumstances, such as alcohol or other drug use and incarceration.

Daly et al. (2009) noted that fatherhood may place strains upon relationships between fathers and partners and further, that “fathers operate in a tradition of limited support and isolation” (p. 66). In this section how fathers interact emotionally with their partners, how they access support, and whether they identify with a sense of isolation are considered.

In discussing the emotional experiences of these fathers, there is complexity in how interrelated broad social experiences, parenting experiences and interactions with school as parents have formed their emotional experiences and responses. This in turn informs what sorts of support may be sought and from whom. In this section, I draw upon a range of experiences reported around support. Where a comment is content specific, such as about a school issue, it is identified. However, because emotional wellbeing is experienced and emotional responses happen in real life in complex ways, how a father may feel about their world in general is implicit in the intense emotional experience of parenting. Therefore, when the fathers talked about support, there was often crossover between parenting support and general emotional support. Again, where this is context specific it is noted to avoid decontextualizing statements.

Controlling their emotions around their children was an important element of parenting raised by fathers in the study, as they were aware their emotional state could affect their children. Partly revisiting the story of how having children caused a change in his party lifestyle, but now in the context of how he dealt with deep negative emotions, Shane described how and why he hid his negativity from his children.

Q: Before we were talking about, when things get hard, how you try and bottle it up, and don't want them to know it?

Shane: Yeah

Q: How different is that, than the days when you didn't have kids?

Shane: Different,

Q: How is it different?

Shane: Because you try and hide something away, whereas before I would just go out and get drunk and drown my sorrows, and everything's all good. Have a party and forget about everything that is wrong.

Q: Trying to deal with it yourself, when you can't use the same release mechanism?

Shane: Yeah,

Q: You're trying to protect them from your feelings.

Shane: Yeah, yeah. Because I don't want them to be feeling what I am feeling.

Q: Because those feelings aren't good feelings?

Shane: Yeah, bad ones, and kids get vibes off it too you know. They can see within, when their dad is not happy or upset.

Q: Again there are two things happening at once...

Shane: Yeah

Q: ...there are the things you want for them, you are trying to protect them from. Things about yourself that compounds?...

Shane: We always put them first, always put the kids first, and put yourself last all the time. (Shane)

In putting himself last, Shane clearly saw that his emotional needs had to be subsumed to protect those of his children. The personal implication of this came out later when he was discussing what issues might impact upon his mental wellbeing; he described his process of dealing with negative issues, *"just block it out for my kids. I don't even tell my partner if we are just sitting down ... just let it slide"* (Shane). Shane's extreme emotional isolation was embedded in his family experience growing up and how he saw the role of men. He talked about how for him negative emotions led to anger, depression, and violence, and how he had experienced this, *"when we were kids, but there is none of that in our house now"* (Shane).

Shane's rigid view of male gender roles (discussed previously) meant he did not have a mechanism to talk to others to seek support as, *"You would sort of show your weakness I reckon... to sort of sit down and talk about it like a girl or a lady. Yeah so*

everything's ok don't worry about it I'll be right mate" (Shane). Nor would he ask his brother even though they had experienced the same issues in their upbringing. Ultimately Shane was not satisfied, but rather seemed trapped in his way of dealing with emotional issues.

Shane: Umm I just put on a happy face for my kids you know.

Q: Is it hard to always keep the happy face on though?

Shane: Yeah, yep (pause) yeah it does (long pause)

Q: does that effect how you are with them do you think? Not necessarily openly, but you know...

Shane: Yeah it does (long pause). (Shane)

He somewhat despondently responded when asked, *"Who looked after the dads?"* that, *"We look after ourselves"* (Shane).

Shane's brother Mitch had a similar response when asked about seeking support. Mitch identified that emotional isolation was the norm of his life even before he was a father, *"Before [having children], I had thousands of friends, thousands and thousands, but no mates"* (Mitch). When asked about whom he would seek support from in dealing with fathering issues this isolation continued.

Q: Who do you talk to?

Mitch: No-one. I just struggle on.

Q: Do it yourself and do it alone?

Mitch: Yeah. It makes me stronger too. Because it feels like, other fathers, you know like yeah, I would rather not ask at times. Sometimes I need it, but sometimes just no. I am right you know. Most times that is, that comes, it works itself out right. (Mitch)

This stoic attitude of 'struggling on' and looking after themselves was echoed by other fathers who identified being isolated from other males in a general sense even if they had family support (Matthew, Marcus, Jack 1, Liam, Caleb), *"Sort of deal with them [issues] myself"* (Marcus). Liam could only identify a few 'mates' that he might talk to.

This town it's pretty hard to find people like that, so I usually just tend to deal with the problem. If I have to I'll make sure that I work it out, especially if I've got some sort of – if I'm down and out I'll get myself up. (Liam)

When Matthew discussed the drinking culture on his Town Camp, a negative issue he was grappling with, he identified a lack of support from other males.

Q: Are there blokes there who support people—each other to try and keep out of it?

Matthew: No, not really.

Q: Okay. That makes it hard [pause] not having people there,

Matthew: Yeah.

Q: sort of, to give you backup, alongside you.

Matthew: And that's, like, mainly where I am now, like, there's no support there to, like, backup and stuff like that [pause]. (Matthew)

Recognising that old notions of male stoic behaviour did not serve fathers well, Jack described the conflict of males and their need to develop, 'new skill sets' as fathers to be able to ask for help.

Well, see, the other thing that men need is support. See, men don't ask for support. It's part of our code. We don't say we need help. So without that support, that won't happen but, of course, men don't ask for this help. So I think that society is a lot more supportive nowadays of parenting. Whereas even 10 years ago, there was still a bit of a thing of whether—if you're working class, just got to suck it up and keep going. Whereas now there's all kinds of social things that kids in public spaces are more acceptable now. So this is a skill that parents have to develop. So I think part of the thing of being a father is that, you have to admit to what you don't know and then if there's a new skill set that you have to learn—and the other thing about it is that asking for help. We have an unwritten law of saying that we don't usually ask for help but, sometimes, dealing with certain situations, you have to. (Jack 1)

While Jack said, it would only be working class men who had been brought up reluctant to ask for help, his identification of a past where fathers just dealt with issues and now the need to move beyond this approach, is notable. The idea of seeking a ‘new skill set’—to seek support, illustrates the move from gender role theory (Parsons, 1955), to engaged fatherhood, where fathers reflect on their roles in childrearing (S. Williams, 2008).

Many of the fathers felt estranged from other non-family males as a source of either emotional or parenting support. However Shane and Mitch, with their common family background and strong identification with highly gendered role models of fatherhood, articulated an extreme isolationist view of avoiding seeking support because of a concern over ‘loosing face’ as males. For others, their sense of isolation from other non-family males was better characterised as being driven by a lack of suitable people to approach, *“it’s pretty hard to find people like that”* (Liam) and *“where I am now, there’s no support there”* (Matthew). Or, as Dale recognised, talking to other fathers would be about general issues not personal parenting issues, *“probably just, you know, sort of like footy, or, what he did, you know, this and that, but it’s not like, you know, full on parenting talk or something like that”* (Dale).

As discussed earlier, Mitch spoke of his troubled relationship with his partner that arose from jealous gossip. Their conflicts included how they dealt with parenting issues. While Mitch did not hit his children, he said his wife’s approach was more harsh and that at times they would argue over how to manage difficult behaviour, *“Then me and (his wife) argue at times, me and (her) argue over the kids a lot”* (Mitch).

In dealing with emotional issues arising from parenthood, Luke, Marcus, Liam, Toby and Matthew identified how their partners were important sources of support. Despite being separated, Marcus and his ex-partner still communicated amicably, especially over issues related to their children, *“[we] still communicate all right, so if I’m stuck with anything, I normally ask her”* (Marcus). When Matthew found he could not cope with his children, for example if they were very upset, he would often turn to his wife to take over, *“she deals with it differently”* and other times they would try and work

together to get the child settled. Luke would also “*debrief*” with his partner in dealing with the children. Liam described a very close relationship with his partner, which was not limited to examples related to parenthood issues in particular, but included general emotional support. As discussed earlier Liam described a very tight, almost nuclear family model of his household, “*We just draw strength between each other, me and the missus. Yeah. [pause] there’s only us two. We got a big [extended] family, but we stick together, me and her*” (Liam). Previously Luke, Marcus, Lima and Toby had discussed situations where there had been stresses related to their child(ren)s’ behaviour either in the school situation or outside of school where they had resolved an issue together with their partner.

Most of the fathers (Caleb, Toby, Dale, Luke 1, Jack 1, Matthew, and Tom) readily identified close or extended family as a source of practical parenting support. Siblings were one source of support and advice. Luke spoke with his brother while Dale and Toby asked for advice from their sisters. Caleb would ask for advice from his brother-in-laws, whom he felt had been brought up in a similar way to him. Tom identified only males, “*Q who would you talk to, other blokes? Tom: Yeah. Q: or is it women or [his wife]? Tom: all men*” and in his family, “*my mother’s brothers*” as sources of parenting advice with whom he would share stories and would be taught about how to look after his kids. The child’s grandparents were also sources of help or advice with issues for Matthew, Dale, and Jack. As a single father, Jack recognised the value of calling for assistance from his:

Extended family. Especially if you're dealing with a child of the opposite gender, well then, it's better to do the traditional way and give them back to their own. It's like all right, girl's having problem, send her to Nana. You talk about it over there. You don't want to deal with me, that's fair enough. You deal with—so that's extended family lending a hand. Grandparents, aunties and uncles. So sometimes children feel that because they're too close to their parents that, maybe, their point of view is not valid enough so that a bit of validation with extended family. Feeling like there's a third person that they can speak to and feel more secure so they don't feel as trapped within their nuclear family. (Jack 1)

Toby's children had a similar experience in talking things over with extended family members if they were not able to talk with him or his wife, if they were "*having a dispute*" (Toby).

All the fathers spoke of the close nature of shared child rearing with their partners. However, only five identified their partners as sources of parenting support and only one (Liam), spoke of close emotional support with partner. This was noticeable given the fathers identified their partners, and family, as being strong motivations in their efforts to be good husbands and fathers. This disjunct between identified role and reality was striking in Mitch's case, "*Yeah. So being a father, being a husband that is being a real, yeah, being a real man.*" Yet he had conflict with his partner over perceptions of fidelity and about approaches to parenting where disciplining their children was involved. Daly et al.'s (2009) observation that having children may place a strain on the parent's relationship would seem to only partially hold true for this group of fathers. Having children, including school aged children, led to a process of shared decision-making or problem solving through varying degrees of active parenting for nearly all the fathers in the study. Nevertheless, what was missing from most of their narratives at the time of the study was an active identification of emotional support between those who were couples. Even in families where there were active partnerships in parenting, fathers, with the exception of Liam, did not identify their partners as sources of emotional support, even if they did identify them as providing mutual parenting support.

It was also apparent that not all fathers in this study accessed support from extended family members. Those who accessed parenting support predominantly did so from only one or two extended family members, siblings being the main sources of advice and support. Other fathers drew upon a wider individual selection of extended family for parenting support but not emotional support. Heath et al.'s (2011) finding that extended family support in rearing children was an important value in parenting for Aboriginal families was only partially supported by the testimony of this group of fathers, with half of the group not mentioning support from extended family. As has been discussed in Section 7.3.5, for some families in this study extended family was a source of disruption, which may explain one reason why fathers may not call upon

them for either parenting or personal emotional support. In other circumstances, fathers had outlined growing up in fragmented family settings, which may be another factor in their individualised and isolated approach to dealing with emotional issues, especially related to parenting. These fragmented families may also explain why fathers identified only selected family members as sources of support, as contacts with wider family may have been limited. However, physical distance from relatives did not seem to be a limiting issue in seeking or getting parenting advice. For example, Toby's family lived in far northern Western Australia, but could be called upon to intercede in disputes between him and his children. Extended family were called upon for parenting advice, but were not identified as being providers of emotional support *per se*, further underlying the relative emotional isolation of fathers in the study.

7.6 Summary of findings

Fathers described the positive things children brought to their lives, as well as the impacts upon their lifestyles. A common theme was having slowed down their previous party lifestyles. This was generally seen as a positive, although the sense of freedom that may have been lost pervades some descriptions. However, the only real limitation reported was a lack of personal time for thinking or maintaining physical activity, balanced against the reduced partying. Some fathers had difficulty in meeting their expectations of being good fathers. Drug and alcohol use affected two fathers, while an extended period of jail time impacted heavily upon another. Becoming fathers had created a sense of responsibility to others and a better understanding of themselves and what they valued. While fathers expressed a sense of pride and happiness from their children, being fathers also generated strong emotional responses when they had to deal with conflict with their children and at times issues they dealt with left them feeling frustrated through a loss of control.

Having children at school also elicited strong emotional responses. Positive emotions were reported as arising from pride and happiness in their child's school achievements. However, negative emotions were discussed when their children had to deal with bullying at school and if staff were not supporting their child academically or emotionally. In addition, perceptions of demands to attend school created guilt or problems when they could not attend school for their children.

A number of fathers in this study identified their relationship with their partners as being supportive in their parenting practice. Even when strains in the relationship were occasioned due to an event the child may cause, mutual support in dealing with issues was mentioned. Only one father spoke about negativity in his relationship with his wife arising from parenting.

While some fathers identified their partners and family as sources of parenting support, when it came to emotional support, most fathers reported dealing with their emotional issues by themselves. Emotional isolation was described as gendered—men do not seek support. However, some fathers recognised this was a learnt behaviour. One they saw that would need to change as they took on more engaged fathering roles or undertook fathering as single separated parents.

Fathering creates strong emotional responses and while it may be undertaken at times with a sense of isolation, it also brings its own sense of happiness and achievement through struggle to meet children's needs. The undertakings and the recognition that fathers receive from their children, family, and other fathers may also strengthen their resilience to be able to deal with the struggles of undertaking fatherhood. These themes are discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 8. Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis, I raised the question of freedom. To what extent are the fathers who participated in this study free to enjoy and instigate their own ideals and notions of being fathers—creating positive subjectivities as fathers? As discussed in Chapter 3, freedom is here being understood as the opportunity for individuals to use their own capacity and creative potential to escape closed or coercive authority.

In order to address this question of freedom and my other research question(s), I have used a narrative discourse analysis in the thesis to describe the internalised discourses that the fathers involved in this study discussed as constituting their fathering practices and ideals. I also identified what stresses and contradictions were apparent in attempting to fulfil these ideals and how the fathers dealt with these stresses. In light of these findings, I return to discuss the Research Questions outlined in the Introduction:

- How do the Aboriginal fathers participating in this research represent themselves in relationship to constitutive fatherhood discourses?
- What conflicts are present in their subjective representations?
- How do these Aboriginal fathers choose to represent their social relationships in the context of their fatherhood practices?
- To what extent are these fathers free to develop and practise their own version(s) of fatherhood?
- Are there ways in which the fathers sought to escape coercive discursive practices present in their representations?

I have framed the discussion of these research questions within the hermeneutic narrative structure that informed the analysis. Discussion of issues relating to the research questions is embedded throughout the descriptions of the internalised discourses in this chapter. The first four questions are discussed throughout Sections 8.2.1-8.2.7. Whether there are ways of escaping coercive discourses is the explicit focus of Section 8.2.8, Lines of Flight. Finally, I directly address the research questions in the Conclusion to this chapter.

As a sociological study, the issue of representation is central to this research. On the one hand is how the participants self-represent and, on another hand, is how Aboriginal fathers are represented in dominant discourse. These are two key issues. How I have represented them is also a major methodological and ethical issue. I will deal with how I endeavored to represent these fathers and their ideas ethically in Section 8.3, the Reflection on methodology. The answer to this question is constituted by how veracious the findings are considered. With an understanding that the choice of a research analysis is partly determined by concern over representation, caution is therefore necessary when judging whether the interwoven and interrelated issues of methodological suitability can be discussed as a topic to/in/of itself separate from its output—how people are represented.

8.2 Discussion

8.2.1 Being real: children make fathers real

“See, I told you he was real.”

Jack’s recall of the time his daughter turned to her friend and announced, “See, I told you he was real”, captures a memorable and significant moment for the child and her father. Presumably having previously had her credibility of having a father questioned, she was now vindicated in front of her peer.

In Jack’s retelling of this incident, he was discussing the invisible or absent father labelling discourse. At the time of the incident he was part of his daughter’s life, but was physically absent for extended periods realising his provider commitment. He was not living with his daughter; she was living with his estranged partner. He did not often come to school pick-ups and had a lesser daily presence at the school than the mother. This lack of presence had made him all but non-existent to his daughter’s friend and, in the context of our conversation, potentially her school.

An important reading of the recalled statement “he’s real” is how for Jack his daughter made him real. Without her recognition of his role, would his fathering exist? This reflects the sense of purpose and fulfilment that most fathers in the study described they experienced from having children. The fathers in this study also

expressed great love and pride of being fathers and having children. They talked about the happiness that their children gave them. This interaction between a father and their children is therefore a mutually constitutive relationship.

Jack's daughter's use of the term 'real' other than in a physical and familial relational sense brings up other questions about 'real' fathers. What did fathers in this study see as constituting being a real father? Moreover, beyond being real to their own children, were they real to others? If so, to whom and in what ways?

8.2.2 Being real: enacting ideals of fatherhood

*"Yeah. So being a father, being a husband that is being a real,
yeah, being a real man."*

In this statement, Mitch expressed a highly gendered view of being a father; fatherhood defined being a real man. This image draws very heavily upon conservative heteronormative models of masculinity and familial social relationships. Similarly, all the other fathers referenced the provider and protector discourses in their initial descriptions of what a father does. These roles were an association they sought to be identified with in their own narratives. As the interviews progressed, more nuanced information about what they did as fathers was raised. Many of these commentaries described actions and undertakings that would confirm a more involved and 'new fathering' understanding of what constitutes being a real 'modern' father.

The constitutive nature of these discourses is apparent in these narratives. This is particularly noticeable when the fathers talked about from where they drew their ideas of being fathers. Many studies of fathering have promoted the notion that it is a father's own father who is the main source of this influence (C. Lewis & Lamb, 2007; Masciadrelli et al., 2006). However, only three of the fathers I interviewed thought their fathers had been positive role models from whom they could draw ideas of fathering. Most expressed negative views of their fathers in their upbringing, whether they were present or absent.

In discussing where their ideas of fathering came from, one father made what I imagine is a probably oft-quoted comment *"There's no book for it, is there."* Yet the

prevalence in common discourse of the dominant provider/protector and emotionally involved fathering practices is such that these discursive practices were immediate in the fathers' thoughts. These discourses are reanimated when the fathers articulate what it is to be a father and are in turn reproduced in their daily practice. They therefore assist in maintaining these discourses through their discursive practices.

Given the often-fragmented family upbringings or the current family situations these fathers experience, it is important to note that all were invested in generative fathering. In its various forms, generative fathering represents a strong commitment to developing their children's emotional, social, and economic capacities. Generative fathering represents a strong attachment to children. It is noteworthy that this attachment existed for fathers, who were, and those who were not, co-resident with their children as well as those who were raising grandchildren or nephews from extended family.

8.2.3 Just a normal bloke: trying to be real

"Probably just normal in Alice Springs"

This statement by Luke, at once self-deprecating, whilst claiming a common unity with other fathers and situating himself in his community, represents a strong desire to be understood as just a normal father. Invoking the status of being similar to other fathers was one way in which the fathers in the study sought to identify as being real. This narrative can be read as seeking to fit into the mainstream view of what being a father is in their community. Given the highly socially stratified nature of Alice Springs, where Aboriginal people have for generations been placed on the outside of that sociality, trying to be normal in Alice Springs is, or can be, understood as a statement of seeking to fit into the mainstream. Beyond the specific spatial context, being 'normal' also signifies a desire to avoid overstating their fathering as being in any way special. However, it could also be viewed as not wishing to be associated with deficit views of Aboriginal fathering. Here, a desire to be invisible rather than negatively hyper-visible may come into play. Identifying with dominant positive fatherhood discourses is one way to achieve the desire to fit in. Whether or not this is achievable, such identifying can create tension and stress as described in Chapter 7 and discussed further below.

These fathers are aware of the deficit discourse that others can hold when thinking of Aboriginal fathers and, for some of these fathers, this knowledge weighs heavily upon them and their life choices.

8.2.4 Coercive discourses

“Put me down as a human being and as a young man, young father.”

Liam was discussing how he felt after the NT Intervention. Many Aboriginal males and fathers shared his view elsewhere across Australia. They expressed a feeling of being demonised throughout the debate that preceded and followed the Intervention. Being placed in the spotlight of public censure severely restricted these fathers' sense of freedom and ability to enjoy simply being fathers. Literally feeling the public gaze when they walked down the street holding their child's hand served to restrict a father's freedom of movement and enjoyment of their child's company in public. Constantly living under such a cloud of negativity limited their freedom to enjoy being fathers and to enact fatherhood in their own manner or on their own terms was raised in their interviews. When internalised, this coercive discourse may have interacted with other concerns to influence their behaviour. Fathers in this study spoke about how they were conscious not to misbehave in public, i.e. drink driving, as this would be shameful for their children. In light of the negativity that specifically adheres to Aboriginal male public behaviours, it is possible that this fear of causing their children shame is greater for this group of fathers than for settler fathers.

Here, we are dealing with the many ways in which the 'external dialogue' can become an internal 'enemy within'. The fear of being judged can limit their ability to enact fatherhood. Lachie's statement *“that doesn't really affect me because I don't put myself in that category if you know what I mean”*, when discussing the discourse around the Intervention, can, on the one hand be read as an attempt to take control over self-representation by distancing or removing himself from being someone it applied to. However, the very act of acknowledging the Intervention illustrates his awareness of this negative discourse and how, as an Aboriginal male, it was part of him. It is a frame of Aboriginal fatherhood that he is forced to recognise, even in its disavowal.

Negative internal dialogue limits freedom. Examples of this can be drawn from the fathers' descriptions of the frustrations or stresses they experienced in seeking to fulfil their idealised fatherhood roles.

Some of the fathers expressed slight frustrations with internalised controls they had placed upon their behaviours when trying to realise their newfound sense of responsibility. There were references by some to a perception that they had lost some of their previous lifestyle freedoms. Yet this was usually tempered with a statement or comment that, in their relationship with their children or through healthier lifestyle choices, they had gained more than they had lost.

There was stronger emphasis on stresses in their fatherhood representations where contradictions between competing discourses were evident. The dominant discourses of the provider, protector and caring father gave these fathers internalised and embraced models through which to express their fathering. These discourses constituted both ideals and restrictions upon their ability to define their fathering and therefore shape their subjective selves. The contradiction between the provider/protector discourse and the emotionally present 'new' father discourse caused stress for these fathers. Many struggled with how to realise their provider/protector roles with being physically and emotionally present in their children's lives, including attending school events, when work options often meant they were living away from Alice Springs or could not get away from work if they were in town.

It is worth returning to Mitch's definition of being a father, *"Yeah. So being a father, being a husband that is being a real, yeah, being a real man."* Coming from Mitch who had been in jail, this is a poignant statement. His ability to fulfil measures of being 'real' was obviously severely compromised by being away from his family due to incarceration. He was now struggling with his desire to be present in public places with his children while being ashamed of what he'd done. He was also struggling in his relationship—being a husband—because of jealousy issues that had arisen within him while in jail. Being incarcerated can have deep psychological impacts that

continue after release, severely limiting freedom to create a positive subjectivity as a father. This is on top of the interruptions that incarcerated or recently released fathers experience in being able to enact their provider, protector and carer ideals. The oft-repeated discourse of the ‘absent non-caring incarcerated Aboriginal father’ is one-dimensional when the reality is animated by dealing with the multiple contradictions posed by the experience of trying to be a real father.

These fathers expressed many times and in different instances their frustrations in trying to balance or enact their fatherhood ideals with their lived reality. Partly, this can be understood as contradictions among multiple internalised discourses the fathers experienced and could identify. It could also be giving recognition to external discourses and social experiences that, for some, negatively shape their sense of self.

8.2.5 Dissonance

“You know you’d like to do more ...but sometimes you know, I got to make money”

The dissonance the fathers in this study experience included the struggle, as stated by Dale, to meet economic criteria of being a good provider. Not just the daily stresses embedded in negative social relations previously considered, but also from a class consideration. Their historic inheritance often meant they were living in poverty compared to others. How could they realise the provider role when they did not have the capacity to earn enough or to maintain secure work? Some fathers were able to deal with provider/involved father conflict by changing jobs or leaving the workforce because their partners earned an adequate main income. As was noted in Chapter 6, the ability of two of the fathers to send their children away from Alice Springs to escape the negative social experiences they were exposed to in Alice Springs was not possible on the incomes they earned. The desire to create a good home environment where children would have a place to study was severely limited by the social conditions of some of the families, living in overcrowded and disruptive spaces. The ability to provide the kind of support they recognised as being valuable for their children’s education was also constrained by their own level of schooling. This, in turn was linked to their inherited social conditions. Despite their desire to provide good generative fathering by ensuring that their children attended school, even in comparison with other Aboriginal fathers in this study, their children were at a

disadvantage. More advantaged children had parents who had received an education and were confident in providing out of school educational support or who undertook proactive interactions with the school and teachers on their behalf. There exists an economic and social gap between Aboriginal families.

Racism and perceived race-based responses to Aboriginal people created further dissonance. Luke described how he felt that at a previous school his daughter was not getting the positive attention she needed from the teacher to thrive in the classroom. She was not seen as being 'myall enough' i.e. wild enough to constitute being an Aboriginal child worthy of the teacher's attention. 'She was just in-between'. Her and her parents' efforts to fit in meant she became invisible. This is an example of the sort of dissonance that Lowe and Spry (2002) describe. His daughter was left in the middle of clashing cultural expectations of students that settler teachers may hold. On the one hand, settler students were considered able to cope and, on the other hand, 'myall' Aboriginal students were not expected to cope. Luke and his daughter were left in the middle, suffering the dissonant noise of this clash.

Aboriginal society, as I have discussed earlier in the thesis, should be understood as being a relationship based society, with particular emphasis on extended family relationships. When estranged from their fathers or parents, fathers expressed a loss of access to cultural and kinship knowledge and, often a reliance upon extended family to assist in making cultural connections. However, some of the fathers identified their extended family as a negative presence they had to deal with. In such situations, extended family may contribute to dissonance between current lifestyle desires and traditionally framed relationships.

How fathers dealt with family as disruption was governed, to a degree by their economic circumstances. Those without the means to move away from disruptive family contact mainly spoke of hope that the disrupter(s) would leave or that their children may be able to go away to school interstate. Those with the economic means took the 'nuclear' option. They embraced the smaller nuclear family structure and at times, in so doing, risked the censure of their relatives. These fathers tried to build a wall around their immediate family (for one father, this included his nephew) to

ensure food was always on the table and a secure and safe home could be maintained. It also meant a severing from extended family feuding and associated fighting and potential court appearances. As one father put it, they were a ‘middle-class’ family.

However, in isolating themselves in this way, how are these fathers able to participate in cultural activities that are socially based and continually reinforced activities? Interestingly, one father said that while he, ‘wasn’t really into that side’, he would not stop his children from becoming involved in Aboriginal cultural activity. How Aboriginal parents will conceive of their social and cultural relationships in a changing world will be important for them to define. Will it remain a dissonant cultural space? Will it lead to negative or positive experiences of structured cultural relationships?

8.2.6 Feeling alone

“Where I am now, there’s no support there”

While fathers in this study shared parenting roles with their partners, less than half expressed the view that their partners were sources of parenting support. However, in contrast to negative experiences of extended family previously discussed, many fathers referenced siblings and extended family as a source of parenting support. For others, family was fragmented, with their own parents absent from their lives.

Of considerable concern from these fathers’ narratives is the isolation they feel from not having, or being able to access, emotional support. Only one father identified his wife as a source of emotional support. He also noted that there were not suitable other males he felt comfortable with to talk about emotional issues. Matthew’s statement that where he was living—despite there being many people in his community—‘he felt there was no support’ captures this sense of isolation among a crowd.

These narratives highlight a need to overcome fragmentation and isolation between Aboriginal males, family members, and partners. Overcoming such fragmentation and isolation is vital for fathers to enjoy being fathers. Otherwise, if they are ‘bottling up’ or just ‘dealing with it themselves’, then the negative or dissatisfying elements and emotionality that inevitably arise and go along with all stages of life, including

fatherhood, will continue to take a toll on their emotional wellbeing. This will limit their capacity to create their own freedom to be fathers in a manner they may desire to be. They need to access family and community supports as well as professional support (R. Williams, 2009b; S. Williams, 2008). It is an irony to note that, while in their daily lives these fathers did not talk about their emotional travails, they were willing to do so in the research space. This may indicate that given access to the right services and at the right times for them, they do wish to address and share their emotional experiences. Fathers need more male-to-male, particularly Aboriginal father support. The lonely road is not a positive road to travel.

8.2.7 Care of self—or power to

“I always thought, I want to be there, be the dad for them”

Against this background of dissonance and emotional isolation, the fathers balance the positive experiences they feel fatherhood brings. The pride and happiness that their children bring inspires them. It inspires their fathering role and positively modifies their behaviour, creating self-awareness. Caleb’s comment captures the importance of fatherhood to him as an individual for whatever else is going on in his life he has a purpose. I see this as a form of ‘care of self’, that being a father brings a heightened sense of purpose and of their role in the world to these males, along with the confidence to make changes for their families, as well as for themselves.

Through their narratives fathers identified ways they sought to exercise ‘power-to’ control their lives. This often meant confronting the difficult issues that have been outlined, such as family disruptions, pushing back against negative discourses, trying to balance relationship issues for the benefit of their children or dealing with work-based conflicts.

Power always circulates. How these fathers try to exercise power and gain control over their lives to enact their fatherhood ideals was a consistent presence in their narratives. Rejection of the negative discourses associated with the Intervention represents such a pushback. Finding solutions to dealing with disruptive family members is another. While fathers in this study were conscious of these negative discourses, their concurrent rejection of them is an attempt to create control and

exercise ‘care-of-self’. This resilience in the face of negativity is a powerful act of self-care. Identifying and embracing the love and enjoyment of their children is another.

8.2.8 Lines of flight

*“To make decisions and learn for yourself...whose kid is it?
That’s my kid, I make decisions”*

Liam, speaking out against the coercive control enacted through the Intervention, captured the mood that ran through the narratives. While fatherhood is a learning experience, fathers wish to make decisions for their children. It is in their generative fathering practices that the fathers exercised the most freedom to make these decisions.

In teaching and immersing their children in their Aboriginal culture, most of the fathers in this study operated outside of the limits and the confines they experienced in settler fathering discourses or negative views of Aboriginal dysfunctionality. Here, they followed Aboriginal ways of teaching knowledge and identity. In so doing, they were actively recreating a sense of their own rightful place in their world, as an Aboriginal parent, with the responsibility that entails in their Aboriginal community.

This form of generative care encompasses a protector ethos centred not in fear of the other or the outsider, but in culturally grounding knowledge for their child becoming aware of who they are and where they come from, in the physical, social, and cosmological sense. This knowledge animates their children’s lives in a world outside that of western discourses.

I recognise in their generative cultural fathering role, there are lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) from the territorializing discourses of the settler world. However, in fulfilling discourses of new father care or older protector roles, or in avoiding stereotypes of Aboriginal dysfunctionality, isolation from family or distance from disruptive relatives, these acts may reterritorialize Aboriginal fathers’ discursive practices. These actions, in turn, potentially isolate them from cultural interactions with culturally significant family and their own community. Earlier in this thesis, I

noted that Aboriginal people's cultural activity occurred outside of settler social frameworks and that it was a space for creating singularities, away from territorializing discourses. The space of cultural identity and engagement (or family dissonance) is therefore a key element impacting upon how these fathers may or may not develop positive singularities.

It is within the context of their interactions with the settler institution of the school education system, that another line of flight is apparent. While the school itself may act to territorialize an Aboriginal father's discursive actions, it is the foundational desire that drives them to engage with it that is of importance. Here, generative care can be understood as intergenerational escape from current social conditions. Overwhelmingly, the fathers spoke of education as a means to get a good job. This provided them with the motivation to ensure their children got to school and performed well. There was also a narrative of how this would empower them in the future to negotiate their perceived two-world reality, '*having a foot in both worlds*', as Jack described it. Thus, their children will have learnt the skills to perform within the western/settler framework. Coupled with their Aboriginal cultural knowledge, this may create for children a new space and experience to escape from the negative discourses that have impacted upon their fathers. Therefore, we can consider these fathers interaction with schools as both reinforcing notions of generative care focused upon economic advancement, but also as creating the seeds for their children's lines of flight from limiting negative discourses related to Aboriginality. They may be able to create new lived experiences through knowledge of how these systems operate, how they can be utilised, how they can be limiting, but also how they can be resisted.

8.3 Reflection on methodology

I am cognisant of being an outsider to Aboriginal experience. I therefore spent a long time seeking a research framework that was respectful of Aboriginal people and their experiences. With this concern, I sought an approach that could address issues of representation.

Anarchist theory gave me a basis from which to consider the axiology of my research and particularly in its preconfigurative approach to means and ends. This approach guided my respectful engagement with differing worldviews and social experiences,

as well as the paradox or aporia of representation in research. For while the fathers are the participants in the research, I did not want to problematise them as subjects, but rather convey their experiences and how they develop their subjectivities.

I drew upon my knowledge and experience of anarchism, both in theory and practice, to address a central issue of the freedom of the fathers to enact fatherhood in their contemporary setting. It also grounded the notion of freedom: all individuals having the capacity and creative potential to create freedom and develop their own subjectivity free from closed or coercive authority. I believe it also provided a strong critical theoretical base to understand the various forms of power circulating in the lives of these Aboriginal fathers.

I developed my own postanarchist sociological research methodology and analysis. I based this upon available anarchist writings on research practice, although most focused on historical or contemporary social movements, rather than sociological studies of social phenomena or other personal experiences. I have characterised key elements of what anarchist sociology should look like as methodological praxis as being concern with dominance in social relationships and (already noted) a prefigurative practice.

The valuable theoretical works of anarchist approaches to narrative discourse and hermeneutics informed my narrative analysis. The post-structuralist approach embedded in anarchism has been valuable in allowing an exploration of the manner in which real people as ‘assemblages of practices’ embody and reproduce discourses and therefore constitute subjectivity. This approach humanises people, rather than seeing individuals as being worked upon by structures. Power is constitutive and therefore lines of flight from limiting and coercive power are always present. I did not go seeking individual agency. I was able to consider great complexity and internal struggle and contradictions within the ever-changing lives of individuals.

The aim of the research was to explore the manner in which Aboriginal males experience fatherhood of school-aged children and how this impacts upon their emotional wellbeing. As I have outlined in Chapter 1, my initial approach to this

question was framed as a case study, in one school and applying a structuralist thematic analysis. This approach shaped the questions and the focus of questioning in the interviews. As my analytic approach moved to a post-structuralist one, concerned with subjectivity and embracing complexity, I now reflect that I may well have pursued or asked questions differently during the interviews. The original approach shaped the narratives that the fathers shared and from which I have drawn my analysis.

As well, focusing upon, and recruiting from one school narrowed the community of fathers from whom I could recruit. If I had taken a whole of community approach and been less focused on how the fathers related to one school I could have potentially gained more participants. Therefore, the relatively small cohort of participants from which to draw my findings as a limitation of the study may not have been an issue. Alternatively, a larger number of interviews could have affected the depth of analysis that was possible for me to manage.

Not being an Aboriginal person set limitations upon how I interpreted what Aboriginal fathers in this study said and their experiences. It has probably also influenced how we interacted in interviews. The extent that this has affected the research is difficult to capture. However, I also have to consider whether being an outsider may have made it easier for fathers to talk openly, as I have no local Aboriginal family connections framing perceptions of them individually or compromising my confidentiality.

While I have reflected upon the value of the anarchist research design that I have employed, I am also cognisant that in the context of working with Aboriginal people others may identify limitations to a non-Indigenist theoretical approach. I describe here a process, approaches that were most appropriate for me, and I do not suggest this approach is *the answer* to the issues of representation, complexity, and Aboriginal contextual research. It reflects my personal journey in this space, addressing my positionality in dealing with these issues. I feel it may provide *some answers*, or at least has framed from a settler researcher's standpoint a set of questions and is not a claim to 'critical superiority' (Tuck & Yang, 2012). It is claim to transparency and

reflexivity, allowing readers to understand how I have developed my findings and approached this research.

For me this approach has addressed two key domination processes that act to limit the value of sociological research, labelling and focalising representation (Cohn, 2006). I believe the anarchist narrative discourse approach has allowed the voices of the participants to be heard without undue distortion in the representation process. In this way I have addressed the first form of domination ‘labelling’ representation. The second limitation from dominating processes is about what information is included and conveyed and what is excluded—‘focalising’ representation. I have addressed this by being clear that what is being presented is partial, it is what I have taken from the interviews, what I have understood or what I have recognised. Where it is my voice that drives representation, this approach to discourse analysis makes my presence obvious. It does not pretend to be a neutral process. A different analytical approach could draw different conclusions or highlight different issues I have overlooked. While my interpretation is necessarily partial, how I have come to this analysis should be transparent.

I believe that these anarchist approaches to research practice, theory development, and methodology have met the needs of this research project in grounding my subjectivity in the project whilst ensuring an ethical and rigorous research design has been implemented. This approach has allowed the complexity and voices of the Aboriginal fathers to be amplified.

8.4 Conclusion

Loving voices permeate fathers' narratives in this study. They reveal great commitment to generative care of their children; developing strong character traits and emotional stability for the children, teaching Aboriginal culture as a basis of sound identity, and support for their children's schooling. They seek ways for their children to have a positive future in contemporary society.

How did the Aboriginal fathers participating in this research represent themselves in relationship to constitutive fatherhood discourses?

Fathers clearly identified with the provider and protector roles as dominant discursive practices. However, this undertaking was at times thrown into conflict with their desire to have an immediate physical presence in their child's daily life and to have close emotional bonds with their children. These were strong discursive currents that flowed through the narratives.

This commitment and connectivity stands in stark contrast to the prevalent views of dysfunctionality and neglect that dominate public discourse and policy responses in relation to Aboriginal fathers and their family involvement, especially in the central Australian region. There are complex and at times contradictory roles present in the competing discourses of fatherhood that all fathers can experience, internalise, and reproduce. These are further compounded for Aboriginal fathers as they experience these predominantly negative discourses surrounding themselves as Aboriginal males.

What conflicts were present in their subjective representations?

As for many other fathers, economic factors can play an important part in their ability to fulfil their fathering goals. Social position, based upon capacity to enact provider expectations, and in a related manner, their living conditions can cause stress for fathers wishing to fulfil their desire to be a protector of their children. Fathers experience work stress when they want to take up a new more caring and physically and emotionally accessible presence for their children. This can include balancing time at work and time with their children, and concerns about gaining work. In addition, contemporary fathers can struggle to find suitable role models. The previous generation often adhered to and practised more distanced forms of fathering.

However, racist attitudes, based in historicised and contemporary Aboriginal inferiority discourses, are a unique experience for Aboriginal fathers. This experience permeates and gives a particular shape to all their fathering experiences.

Within their discursive practices, there was considerable variation in how the fathers in this study dealt with competing discourses. Some fathers reduced their incomes in order to have more involvement with their children. Others lamented their ability to get jobs to be providers. Some embraced a strong stay-at-home role. Others placed restrictions upon themselves over perceived gendered roles. All fathers strongly endorsed education in a generative care model. However, their own education experience or social confidence shaped the degree of practical support they did or could provide either, at home or in school. Often, the level of support reflected their gendered view of parenting. More traditional views of the roles of fathers correlated with lower levels of practical education support. An important factor that correlated with school involvement was the level of social integration—often gauged as employment—or sense of exclusion or isolation from the community, including the school community.

How did these Aboriginal fathers choose to represent their social relationships in the context of their fatherhood practices?

Great pain and at times sadness was expressed by these fathers who navigate social expectations and their own expectations in order to meet dominant discourses of fatherhood. Disassociation and loneliness are often evident as outcomes of struggling to negotiate the pressures inherent in fathering discourses. As dominant settler society embraces greater individualisation, this study reveals how, in the face of challenges, fathers struggle to find satisfactory solutions. Role stress, the need to develop emotional fathering ability without role models, the pressure to stoically shoulder emotional and other burdens to fulfil conservative masculinity discourses that are still powerful, are not stresses that can be easily negotiated, especially if they are being experienced in emotional isolation.

There are many conflicts and contradictions expressed through the fathers' narratives that reconfirm the view that Aboriginal males experience a sense of dissonance in

trying to balance and harmonise the competing discourses of Aboriginal fatherhood. There are strong social expectations embedded in these discourses. As Gregory and Milner (2011) noted, fathers must spend time in proving their ability or right to claim being fathers. Aboriginal fathers must do so, not only struggling with the socio-economic parameters that assist in realising these claims, but also having to negate a range of stereotypical expectations of them and their children for being Aboriginal.

These fathers describe experiencing considerable complexity in how they express fatherhood. Within a relatively small cohort of fathers, there were very different daily experiences of fatherhood and ways in which discourses of fatherhood constituted their subjective selves. These subjectivities, these living and breathing complex individuals, these shifting assemblages of practices often expressed contradictory views about what they thought of fatherhood during their interview. This reflected the complexity or singularity of individuals. These individuals, like all people, were not a unified set of ideas. They each expressed and embraced at times contradictory discourses. These same contradictory discourses constitute fatherhood in the broader community and society. Therefore, there are no exemplary models of fathering, and hence none were presented in this study. Rather, complexity and contradictory struggles are revealed, discussed, and considered.

Were there ways in which the fathers sought to escape coercive discursive practices present in their representations?

To what extent were these fathers free to develop and practice their own version(s) of fatherhood?

I commenced this thesis talking of an event—the NTER or Intervention—that is widely acknowledged as having severely wounded Aboriginal males. Given how they describe the NTER, the fact that commentators have described this as a ‘hunting’ or ‘witch-hunt’ of Aboriginal males is telling. The current and historicised discursive landscape is overpopulated with types, stereotypes and predominantly negative characterisations of Aboriginal fathers.

However, to be guided by the negative in the lives of the fathers who participated in this study would be doing them an immense disservice. There are many ways in

which the fathers in this study expressed positive and committed fatherhood ideals and values in their discursive practices. Each father, in turn, became a singularity. The telling of their stories rehumanised the discursive landscape and animated a positive discourse.

In this discursive space, these fathers got to experience their freedom to be fathers. In this space, fathers sought lines of flight from the reterritorializing dominant western discourses of fatherhood and negative views of Aboriginal masculinity. This was particularly evident in their generative fathering practices: cultural knowledge and identity transmission, as well as in their support and involvement in their children's schooling and education. The effort to enact positive experiences of fatherhood remains a constant struggle. Their resilience in the face of these stresses, contradictory discourses, and social negativity is considerable.

In titling this study 'For the love of their children', I am deliberately inviting a double reading. On one hand, the Aboriginal fathers in this study continue to enact fatherhood in a generative and immediately supportive manner. They express their fatherhood identity as part of their desire to do these things because they love their children. However, the title can also be read in a co-constructive way: the love their children reciprocate co-constitutes them as fathers. Without that love, they would not be able to do these things as fathers.

Appendix A. Ethics Approvals

CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Centre for Remote Health
PO Box 4066 Alice Springs NT 0871
Ph: (08) 8951 4700 Fax: (08) 8951 4777
Email: cahrec@flinders.edu.au

Dr Brian McCoy
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Health
Faculty of Health Sciences
La Trobe University VIC 3086

24th September 2012

Our Ref: HREC-12-93

Dear Dr McCoy

RE: Ethics Application – Approval

The Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee (CAHREC) considered your research project '**Aboriginal fathers and their child's primary school: What are the experiences of Aboriginal fathers in a primary school setting?**' at their meeting on the 20th September 2012.

The Ethics Committee agreed that this project meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

The Committee members decided to **grant approval** for your project to proceed.

The period for which approval has been given is from the date of this letter until the **31st December 2014**. If you do not complete the research within the projected time please request an extension from CAHREC.

Ethics Approval is contingent upon the submission of an annual Progress Report and a Final Report upon completion of the project. It is your responsibility to ensure you provide these reports. Please make a note of the following dates as failure to submit reports in a timely manner will result in your Ethics Approval lapsing.

Your reports are due on:

19th September 2013

19th September 2014

31st December 2014

Copies of the report form can be downloaded from the CAHREC website.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely



Chris Schwarz
Secretariat Support
Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee



RESEARCH SERVICES

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr Brian McCoy, Division of Health Research, Faculty of Health Sciences
Mr Clive Rosewarne, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Faculty of Health Sciences

From: Secretary, La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee

Subject: UHEC acceptance of Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee (CAHREC) approved project – HREC-12-93

Title: Aboriginal fathers and their child's primary school: What are the experiences of Aboriginal fathers in a primary school setting?

Date: 23 November 2012

Thank you for submitting the above protocol to the University Human Ethics Committee (UHEC). Your material was forwarded to the UHEC Chair for consideration. Following evidence of a full review and subsequent final approval by CAHREC, the UHEC Chair agrees that the protocol complies with the National Health and Medical Research Council's *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and is in accordance with La Trobe University's *Human Research Ethics Guidelines*.

Endorsement is given for you to take part in this study in line with the conditions of final approval outlined by CAHREC.

Limit of Approval. La Trobe UHEC endorsement is limited strictly to the research protocol as approved by CAHREC.

Variation to Project. As a consequence of the previous condition, any subsequent modifications approved by CAHREC for the project should be notified formally to the UHEC.

Annual Progress Reports. Copies of all progress reports submitted to CAHREC are to be forwarded to the UHEC. Failure to submit a progress report will mean that endorsement for your involvement in this project will be rescinded. An audit related to your involvement in the study may be conducted by the UHEC at any time.

Final Report. A copy of the final report is to be forwarded to the UHEC within one month of it being submitted by CAHREC.

If you have any queries related to the information above or require further clarifications, please contact me through Research Services on telephone (03) 9479-1443, or by e-mail at: humanethics@latrobe.edu.au.

On behalf of the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee, best wishes with your research!

Ms Barbara Doherty
Administrative Officer (Research Ethics)
University Human Ethics Committee
Research Compliance Unit / Research Services
La Trobe University Bundoora, Victoria 3086
P: (03) 9479 – 1443 / F: (03) 9479 - 1464

Appendix B. Aboriginal Indigenous Education Workers in this study

During the time of this study Aboriginal Indigenous Education Workers (AIEWs), and to a lesser extent other Aboriginal support staff, worked in school and in outreach functions. In school they were often deployed by teachers to provide additional supervision of Aboriginal students either in classroom settings or in supervising students in time out situations. The Aboriginal Liaison Unit had its own room which, in addition to providing desks for the two AIEWs, was often where other Aboriginal staff would sit when not in class and where all would gather at morning tea and lunchtime—not in the main teacher staff room. The school lunch program was also administered and distributed from this room. Often there would be a student sitting in ‘time out’ being supervised by one of the AIEWs during my project related visits to the school. In addition to the in-school work, AIEWs would spend a considerable amount of time going out to meet and talk with families about their children. This included checking on absenteeism, tracing families who had ‘disappeared’ from the school, often finding they had gone back ‘out bush’ or had transferred to a different school in town. Sometimes they would return with a child who, for various reasons, missed the school pickup bus. They also liaised with parents about health matters.⁸⁸ Sometimes the AIEWs would take a child to an external medical appointment either with or without a parent.

When I started the project at the school there were six Aboriginal staff (2 experienced AIEWs, 1 part-time Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) tutor, 1 Inclusion Support Assistant (ISA), 1 Aboriginal Resource Officer (ARO), 1 part-time Cultural Liaison Officer (CLO) who also drove one of the buses). Eighteen months later, three had left, the two AIEWs had resigned and the ISA had been deemed supernumerary. A new AIEW was appointed, leaving four staff. Other than the ARO, the other three staff all had less than one year of experience and limited outreach roles (the CLO in addition to bus driving duties was doubling as an ITAS tutor at this point). Given the high regard in which both previous AIEWs were held, their extensive community

⁸⁸ Primary schools in the N.T. liaise with the N.T. Health Department on immunisation and dental service programs.

knowledge and outreach responsibilities, it is noteworthy they had felt under pressure from the new principal over his perception of their work accountability when off campus (observation note 26-3-13). Both staff left by the end of the year due to his questioning of their roles and yet, as noted in other studies, AIEWs provide an important identifiable and trusted engagement pathway for community members to the school (Chenhall et al., 2011; Peacock & Prehn, 2019). The role of the AIEW in creating a bridge between the community and the school was also raised by Luke (research participant) in regaling his experience of his child's school in Adelaide, positively describing the AIEW there as someone "who liked to be involved with people and was pretty welcoming" (Luke 1). The lack of understanding of roles between the AIEWs and the principal also underlines the confusion surrounding the roles of AIEWs in schools and how their engagement with the community can be translated into school expectations of visible engagement (Chenhall et al., 2011). Having drastically reduced the number of Aboriginal support staff, the school's capacity to meet the needs of some of the fathers in this study was compromised.

Appendix C. Copyright Permissions

Figure 1 Mparntwe Language Groups. Institute for Aboriginal Development
17/07/2025

Figure 2.1 Petro-Chemical Refinery Nth Altona. Australian Academy of
Technological Sciences and Engineering 16/07/2025

Figure 2.3 Section of ‘Spencer and Gillen Outline Map of the Central Area of
Australia 1899/1968’ showing concentration of ‘dreaming’ stories around Mparntwe.
Estate of R. Kimber 16/07/2025

Figure 2.4 Key Elements of Warlpiri Culture. Ninti One 17/07/2025

Figure 2.5 Forever Arising From and With Country. Institute for Aboriginal
Development 17/07/1025

Figure 2.12 Contiguous Primary School Boundaries 2019-202. Alice Springs News
24/07/2025

Figure 2.15 Bill Leak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day Cartoon.
Newspix 22/07/2025

Figure 5.1 Bill Leak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day Cartoon.
Newspix 22/07/2025

Figure 5.2 Bill Leak Cartoons Depicting Aboriginal Male Violence. Newspix
22/07/2025

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