

## CHAPTER THREE

### IDENTITY

#### **Introduction**

This chapter begins by examining relevant literature on identity formation and development and the relationships between identity and concepts of self. Although identity formation begins in childhood, the emphasis here is on what occurs during adolescence, the time when students are undertaking secondary education, as this is also the time when an individual's self-awareness undergoes a dramatic growth spurt (Peck 1993).

The chapter then considers definitions of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality from the perspective of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal writers. This exposes the extent to which non-Aboriginal constructions of Aboriginality have been based on inappropriate attitudes and stereotypes, tied to non-Aboriginal law, internalised by some Aborigines, and used by non-Aborigines to put Aborigines 'in their place'.

The next part of the chapter examines the complexity of Aboriginal identity formation given the fact that increasingly large numbers of Aboriginal people now live very much like non-Aborigines. Some of the myths about urban Aborigines and their identities are also exposed. This is followed by an analysis of literature relating to the significance of identity crises for Aboriginal adolescents and the way Aboriginal adolescents communicate their Aboriginality during different phases of their identity development. The chapter concludes by focusing on the importance of identity for Aboriginal students at secondary school and how this study adds to existing knowledge.

#### **Developing concepts of self and identity**

People are often referred to as 'social animals'. This implies that in order to be fulfilled in their lives people need to interact with other people. Each interaction with others is both determined by and contributes to the relationships with these others and, according to social interactionist theory (Harris 1980; Bogdan and Biklen 1992), through reflecting on these interactions, individuals construct or define themselves. Thus:

The self is the definition people create (through interacting with others) of who they are. In constructing or defining self, people attempt to see themselves as others see them by interpreting gestures and actions directed toward them and by placing themselves in the role of the other person. In short, people come to see themselves in part as others see them. The self is thus also a social construction, the results of persons perceiving themselves and developing a definition through the process of interaction. This loop enables people to change and grow as they learn more about themselves through this interactive process.

(Bogdan and Biklen 1992, 37)

This idea is not new. In 1922, Cooley (1964) used the metaphor of the *looking-glass self* to describe the process of self-concept formation. Cooley said:

A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his [sic] judgement of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling such as pride or mortification.

(Cooley [1922] 1964, 184)

The following analysis provides an outline of some of the processes relevant to identity development and signifies when they most commonly occur, beginning with childhood.

### Childhood

Through *primary socialization* in childhood, children identify with those around them by internalising the roles and attitudes of significant others and making these roles and attitudes their own. At the same time this identification with significant others enables children to identify themselves and acquire subjectively coherent and plausible identities. In other words, children learn that they *are* by what they *are called* (Berger and Luckmann 1973, 150-152) or, in the words of Eric Willmott (1982, 17), it "is the way we tell our children what they are".

It is believed that the interaction between the mother and the infant is the ground out of which the child's sense of identity begins to grow (Peck 1988). Members of the immediate family, kin and close friends are also significant others in the young child's primary socialization. At this time the child has little choice of these significant others. The world into which the child is socialized is determined by the adults and older children with whom (s)he interacts. The child has no concept of any other world or social reality. Therefore, the 'recipes for living', internalised in primary socialization, are deeply embedded in consciousness (Harris 1980, 13). These identifications of the individual's 'first' or 'home' world are particularly enduring regardless of how far (s)he may travel in later life. They become "an integral part of a child's personal biography

and link him [or her] to the historical heritage of the cultural group of which [s]he is a member by birth" (Harris 1980, 13).

Later, when the child attends school and participates in a range of social activities outside the family setting, new friends, teachers and other adults become significant others in the individual's *secondary socialization* (Young 1979). Through interaction with gradually more and more significant others the individual child progressively abstracts until (s)he identifies with the 'generalised others' of his or her social groups (Berger and Luckmann 1973, 153). However, commitment to these 'new' social realities is usually less than that to those of primary socialization (Harris 1980). In fact, the individual may function adequately within a secondary reality without forming any commitment to it (Partington 1987, 75), simply 'going through the motions', so to speak.

According to Franks and Gecas (1992), much of the contemporary self literature has emphasised the passive and dependent aspects of Cooley's theory of the looking-glass self. This ignores four important qualifications to the looking-glass self, made by Cooley himself, that are particularly relevant here:

- the reflected appraisals of others are *actively interpreted* by the individual;
- to a large extent, the individual *selects whose appraisals* will affect him/her;
- a relatively stable, transituational sense of values allows the individual *autonomy* from the immediate appraisals;
- the relatively autonomous, yet social, dimension of self-formation is based on *feelings of efficacy* [emphases in the original].

(Franks and Gecas 1992, 50)

These qualifications are important in both primary and secondary ontogenetic socialization processes which enable individuals to become members of social groups and, thereby, members of society.

Thus, children are active agents in determining their own *life meaning* (Harris 1980, 8) or *looking-glass self* (Cooley [1922] 1964). They build this image of themselves (Geise 1988, 7) and define their own identity by internalising and abstracting (Mugny 1982, 157) the composite of self-identifications and identifications of significant others (Young 1979, 13) stored about them in their own brains (Willmot 1982, 15). This self-identification attains stability and continuity (Berger and Luckmann 1973, 153; Partington 1987, 73) by the location of the self in a particular world of meaning (Jordan 1983, 36). Therefore, each child's identity is located, both temporally and structurally, in a particular socio-historical context that enables the individual child to establish a

'solid ground' from which to interpret the meanings of his or her actions for him or herself and others (Harris 1980, 6).

The capacity for self-awareness increases gradually throughout childhood. However, in adolescence it undergoes a dramatic growth spurt (Peck 1993).

### Adolescence

The sudden growth in self-awareness that occurs in adolescence is often accompanied by "a season of passionate self-feeling" (Cooley [1922] 1964, 200). Then:

by the time of mid-adolescence, young people know that they are individuals, confined to the boundaries of their flesh and the limits of their power, each one a relatively frail and impotent organism, existing only by cooperation within a group of fellow organisms called society. Within this group they are not particularly distinguished, yet they are isolated from others by their individual identities, boundaries and limits.

(Peck 1988, 87)

For most young people, the fantasy world of para-social images and sound into which they may have been socialized by television and video (Chapman 1972, 187) has been replaced by reality.

According to Erikson (1968 cited by Weinreich 1979, 157), one of the main purposes of this period of life is to "resynthesize all childhood identifications in some unique way and yet in accordance with the roles offered by some wider section of society."

Erikson also postulated that the changes in identity that occurred during adolescence and early adulthood could be characterised as progressive developmental shifts (Waterman 1982, 355). Although crisis and commitment may vary from one individual to another, Marcia (1980 cited by Heaven 1994, 31-33 and by Chickering and Reisser 1993, 175)) has distinguished between four *identity statuses*:

- *Identity diffusion* - adolescents have not yet made a commitment to any particular set of cultural values, beliefs or attitudes.
- *Identity foreclosure* - adolescents have accepted without question the cultural norms of their parents or peer group.
- *Identity moratorium* - adolescents are experiencing an identity crisis or are fully involved in identity formation, during which they may experiment with different roles and behaviours with accompanying inconsistency.
- *Identity achievement* - adolescents (or adults), having successfully resolved a crisis (or series of crises), have made a commitment.

Not all adolescents go through each of these identity statuses to the same extent or necessarily in the same order. However, many adolescents are likely to face at least one identity crisis. What makes these transitional periods into problematic and painful experiences is the fact that, in order to successfully work through them, the adolescent "must give up cherished notions and old ways of doing and looking at things" (Peck 1988, 71). For example, many adolescents are challenged by disparate role models or the desire to participate in new social situations which are based on antithetic value systems. Similarly, existing roles and relationships may be brought into doubt and choices have to be made.

Identity decisions made at this time are situationally dependent but they are still made within the framework of pre-existing primary socialization and personal autonomy. Therefore, even though situations may appear to be similar, individual adolescents may make different identity choices. Identity crises are resolved when *identity achievement* (Marcia 1980 cited by Heaven 1994, 31) or *self-actualisation* (Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 11) occurs, when individuals know who they are and are comfortable enough with this to stand up "without shame or arrogance" (Cooley [1922] 1964, 225) for who they are.

Group membership is an important part of the process of identity development (Partington 1987, 74) and peer groups are particularly important during adolescence. Comprising companions and other acquaintances, peer groups embody the wider cultural norms and values that confront the adolescent and form a major context in which the adolescent learns social skills and strategies (Heaven 1994, 78-79). However, by identifying themselves with a particular group, individuals attribute to themselves the stereotypical characteristics of the group (Mugny 1982, 157), some of which may be undesirable.

Individual friends are also important in identity development.

At the best, friends seem to bring out parts of oneself that do not otherwise come fully alive. Friends, it has been suggested, are almost like part of oneself: a partial identity that only becomes fully activated when friends are present.

(Goodnow and Burns 1988, 125)

This is because friends are good company, they share things with you, they protect you, and they are there for you, to help you (Allen 1980 cited by Goodnow and Burns 1988, 126-131). Richey and Richey's (1980) summary of research relating to the significance of best friends in adolescence went further than this.

[The] best friend is a more or less constant companion, a confidant with whom one can share very private information, a critic / advisor whose counsel is acceptable, a standard against which to measure one's self, an ego support whose affection and respect for one are known and reliable, an understanding ally, and a moral support in times of emotional crisis.

(Richey and Richey 1980, 537)

So far, an individual's identity has been defined as a product of interaction with others and the social groups of which (s)he and/or significant others are a part. To the extent that all of these interactions take place within rich cultural contexts, identity is culturally defined. However, individuals also have a fundamental need for a personal identity, an image of self, that is "basic to person-hood - to constitution as a human person" (Egan 1986, 63).

### **Identity as self-image**

Opinions differ as to the relative importance of personal identity and cultural identity. For example, Egan (1986) stated that culture had a role in forming individual identity. This opinion was supported by Partington (1987, 73) who viewed self-concept or self-image in the same way that Chickering and Reisser (1993, 179) viewed self-esteem, as part of individual identity, of which cultural identity was but one component. On the other hand, Adler (1974) viewed self-image as a central part of cultural identity.

The centre or core of cultural identity is an image of the self and the culture intertwined in the individual's total conception of reality. This image, a patchwork of internalized roles, rules and norms, functions as the coordinating mechanism in personal and interpersonal situations.... It is fundamental to a person's existence because it is a functioning aspect of individual personality.

(Adler 1974 cited by Geise 1988, 6)

Regardless of which position one takes, the "concept of identity is related to that of the self-concept...and to that of self-esteem, the feeling of personal adequacy and worth" (Young 1979, 345), "based on how the 'real' self stacks up against an 'ideal' self" (Chickering and Reisser 1993, 179). According to Hudspith and Williams (1994, 30), the gap between how one sees oneself and the way one would like to be seen determines one's self-esteem, and this self-esteem colours or gives quality to one's identity. Cooley ([1922] 1964) also recognised the importance of self-respect to identity formation. Self-

respect is always positive. Self-respecting persons value others' judgements and think about them deeply, but they also discriminate and select, and will not submit to influences that are not compatible with their own self-views.

The imposition of an identity on an individual or denial of choice of identity puts the individual "at a great psychological disadvantage" (Moon 1977 cited by Geise 1988, 5). Geise added:

A person without an identity is a person lost - they have no idea who they are, where they are going, or why they should bother anyway. A person with a positive identity is a person who can face anything in his/her life. Identity gives people the strength to say this is what I am and I am proud of it and, from this stand, I can face whatever you throw at me.

(Geise 1988, 5)

Thus, identity formation is extremely important in an individual's life. In summary, the processes that lead to an individual's identity are childhood socialisation, developing perceptions of self, questioning those perceptions (outside as well as inside perceptions) as the child gradually interacts with more and more significant others, possibly going through some form of identity crisis during adolescence and, finally, achieving some kind of accommodation whereby the individual accepts and becomes comfortable with his or her own identity. For Aboriginal people the pattern is the same except that their identity is frequently defined or imposed from the outside. Therefore, the following section examines the concepts of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality before linking these to the education of Aboriginal students.

## **Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality**

According to Tonkinson (1990, 199), although the terms *Aboriginal identity* and *Aboriginality* are widely used, they are seldom defined because the meanings are usually assumed to be self-evident. Both terms are used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people but not necessarily in the same ways. Despite this, definition and identification are important for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people because they give individuals power. Rhoda Roberts, Current Affairs Presenter of *Vox Populi* on SBS-TV, talked to Roberta Sykes (1993) about this.

The position of Presenter is powerful. Once I received an abusive letter from a viewer, following a report in which I'd spoken about a 'non-

Aboriginal'. The writer said, 'How dare you call me a non-Aboriginal. I'm not a non-Aboriginal - I'm a white. And you're a non-white.' That's when I began to realise the power of definition and identification.

(Rhoda Roberts recorded by Sykes 1993, 67)

Given the power associated with definition and identification, the rest of this section examines views of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality, divided into three parts: non-Aboriginal views recorded by non-Aboriginal writers, Aboriginal views recorded by non-Aboriginal writers and, finally, Aboriginal views recorded by Aboriginal people themselves.

### *Non-Aboriginal views of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality*

During the 17th and 18th centuries serious attempts were made to relate aboriginal 'blackness' to alien barbarism compared with the civility of 'white' western society. Australian Aborigines were classified as *Australoids*.

[O]ne major legacy has derived and survived from all this: race came to mean 'full-bloodedness', 'purity' of blood.... But since we didn't have geneticists or haematologists (even bad ones) to guide us, we defined degrees of mixture and alleged 'impurity' on *the sole criterion of what our eyes told us was full or half or quarter* [emphasis in the original].

(Tatz 1980, 353)

Colour became and to a large extent still is the main way most non-Aborigines identify Aborigines. In law Aborigines became a separate class of people subject mainly to their own laws unless it was more convenient to apply 'white' laws to them (see Tatz 1980, 353-354 for examples of such discrimination). In other words, Aboriginality was defined in law.

The concept of being Aboriginal by descent only began legally in the 1960s. Since then *descent* has come to include or be at least partially synonymous with *culture*. For example, Tonkinson (1990, 193) believed that at least two aspects of Aboriginal identity should be considered: the identity of specific local or regional groups sharing history, culture and social organisation and a more inclusive pan-Aboriginal identity. It is the latter, referring to Aboriginal identity in the broadest sense, encompassing all people of Aboriginal descent, which is most commonly referred to as pan-Aboriginality (Watts 1981; Barwick 1988).

Watts (1981, 131-132) and Tonkinson (1990, 208) expressed the belief that the attitudes



and behaviours of non-Aboriginal Australians towards Aboriginal people have been significant in the formation of Aboriginal identity. This is understandable because the experiences of Aboriginal people that have led to "the formation of their personal and cultural identities have been in contexts created largely by white Australians" (Tonkinson 1990, 214-215). Tatz (1985, 52) listed some of the basic elements of the political process which he believed institutionalised these attitudes: the nature of policy and decision-making, the nature and nexus between policy and practice, the allocation of functions by clientele or by specialist service problem, the role of law in political development, the origins and the fashioning of the black consciousness and voluntary separation movement, the frustration-alienation-withdrawal syndrome in political minorities and the rhetoric and/or reality of civil rights. He believed that these could confine and confound the actions of Aboriginal people in devastating ways. For example, Coombs et al. (1983) produced a description of Aboriginality for use in official government contexts. They regarded the following set of characteristics as being universal, enduring and essential in the definition of Aboriginality:

1. Being and identifying as a descendant of the original inhabitants of Australia.
2. Sharing historical as well as cultural experience, particularly that arising from relations with non-Aborigines.
3. Adhering to, or sharing, the Dreaming or Aboriginal worldview.
4. Having intimate familial relationship with the land and with the natural world; and knowing the pervading moulding character in all matters Aboriginal.
5. Basing social interaction on the mutual obligations of kinship.
6. Giving importance to mortuary rituals and attendance at them.
7. Speaking and understanding more than one language.

(Coombs et al. 1983, 21)

Keeffe (1992, 75) expressed disbelief that these elements were common to all Aboriginal people as they were based on work in the north and centre of Australia. Therefore, this construction excluded most urban Aborigines. In contrast, the working definition, developed by W.C. Wentworth in the early 1980s, and still used by the federal government for establishing eligibility for specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, is simpler and excludes references to traditional cultural links.

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.

(cited by Dodson 1994, 6)

Despite this, a more recent definition still perpetuates the myth that to be Aboriginal implies a close link to the place, language and culture of one's heritage. This is apparent in the criteria used by Madden (1995) to indicate the level of cultural identity and maintenance of Aboriginal people. These criteria included:

...participation in Indigenous cultural activities, use of Indigenous languages, the extent to which people identify with clan, tribal or language groups and recognition of and access to homelands.

(Madden 1995, 2)

Not many urban Aborigines could meet all of these criteria, yet they might well feel that they have significant cultural identity. For example, there is a growing feeling among all Aborigines, no matter where or how they live, that they share a common descent and a cultural identity based on the experience of dispossession in the past and racism both in the past and present (Pettman 1992). In addition, most Aborigines share a belief in a spiritual connection with the land, the value of 'caring and sharing', consensus decision-making and the persistence of kin oriented networks that underpin social behaviour. These elements are often used to define the common Aboriginal culture that has been inherited by every person of Aboriginal descent. They constitute what Keeffe (1988, 1992) has referred to as *Aboriginality-as-persistence*.

Over the last fifteen to twenty years non-Aboriginal researchers have identified an emphasis by Aborigines on building or constructing their own Aboriginality (Jordan 1983; Tonkinson 1990; and Pettman 1992). Aboriginal views of this have been recorded by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal authors. These sets of records are examined separately in the subsequent parts of this section.

#### ***Aboriginal views of Aboriginality recorded by non-Aboriginal writers***

According to Watts (1981), Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal literature have had an affirming and sustaining role in Aboriginal people's search for identity. Tonkinson (1990) and Pettman (1992) viewed this construction of Aboriginality as part of a political process on the part of Aborigines themselves. For example,

...many Aborigines are consciously and actively working to establish positive images of themselves and their cultures. This involves the rejection or reversal of white people's definitions; the promotion of color as a desirable feature rather than a taint; and the revival, invention or adoption of distinctly Aboriginal cultural behaviours and symbols - in short, the construction of a new identity in which all Aboriginal people can share and that will evoke acceptance and respect from the rest of Australian society.

(Tonkinson 1990, 215)

This was, according to Pettman (1992, 108), "a mobilised political identity contesting both imposed categories and forms of discrimination and exclusion on the basis of those categories". Put another way, one could view "the construction and use of an ideology of Aboriginality [as being] a specific attempt by Aborigines to regain and retain control over both things and ideas" (Keeffe 1988, 67). However, Aboriginality:

...is still a new concept that does not fully describe identity as it is perceived by many Aboriginal people.... While Aboriginality is developing as a political force, local and regional Aboriginal identities continue to have salience and provide, though not exclusively, some of the content of Aboriginality. And there are reciprocal influences on local attitudes. The two forms of identity help to sustain each other.

(Tonkinson 1990, 215)

At the local level, few Aboriginal people have had problems expressing what makes them Aboriginal. For example, Groome (1988) was told by Aboriginal people themselves that most Aboriginal people, including those whose families have lived in urban areas for quite some time, identify themselves by describing where they and their family come from and to whom they are related (Groome 1988, 151-154). Another non-Aboriginal author expressed collective Aboriginal views in the following way:

They identify or place one another...by asking.... 'Which place do you come from?', 'Which family is yours?' This subculture emphasises allegiance. Its members share a strong attachment to the land, to the 'home place' or region surrounding the Aboriginal reserves where their forbears lived, worked and lie buried. Members of each regional population are knit together by reciprocal obligations of hospitality and help, by lifelong bonds of affection, duty and loyalty to the relatives and friends who alone provide complete acceptance and security in a seemingly hostile world.

(Barwick 1988, 27)

Aboriginal views collected by Aboriginal writers have confirmed the Aboriginal views expressed above by non-Aboriginal writers.

### ***Aboriginal views of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality***

Sykes (1986, 86) found that "identity was thought to be the vital link between individual and community." One of her respondents reported:

I've been doing a bit of thinking about this, and I've started a paper called 'Do Urban Aborigines have a Dreaming?' I have come to the conclusion that we do have a Dreaming, and for some the Dreaming is that we are

Aboriginal. For others of us, it's not a dream at all. It's a nightmare - because of the identity crisis that we have to face. We have to accommodate one of the worst histories since the world began.... [I]t's not a negative, but in some ways it's a hindrance on our growth.

(Sykes 1986, 85)

Similarly, Aboriginal people believe that Aboriginality has to be constructed. This was forcefully expressed by Grandfather Koori (in Gilbert 1977, 304-305) in his now famous comment: "Aboriginality, eh! I don't care how hard it is. You *build* Aboriginality boy, or you got nothing!" Lois O'Donoghue (1995) provided some insight as to how this construction occurred.

There can be no doubt that, in contemporary Australia, Aboriginality is a passionately felt form of identity. But we construct our identity from various sources, with various materials, in response to various impetuses. It is a process of negotiation and interaction between us and another world that has effectively framed and enclosed our world since contact.... We are being offered positive images of our culture with which to identify. We are also being offered negative images of Western history and culture, with which to strengthen our opposition.

(O'Donoghue 1995, 9)

However, it is important to Aborigines who does the building. Michael Dodson (1994) expressed his belief that any definition of Aboriginality by non-Aboriginal people was politically motivated to put and keep Aboriginal people in their place.

[T]here is ample evidence that Aboriginality will continue to be defined and constructed for Aboriginal peoples.... 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.... At the most immediate level, constructions of Aboriginality are directly linked to the policies of 'management' and control of Indigenous peoples. They form part of the ideology that creates the framework in which the state can act upon and justify its treatment of Indigenous peoples.

(Dodson 1994, 6,7)

Even when this was not the intention, the expression and growth of Aboriginality could be restricted and limited because of the expectations and assumptions non-Aboriginal people had of Aboriginal people (Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 3-6). Dodson (1994) was emphatic that Aborigines did not need to make reference to non-Aborigines when defining their Aboriginality.

This does not mean that we experience our Aboriginality only as a relation to non-Aboriginality, or as imposed representations. We have never totally lost ourselves within the others' reality. We have never fallen into the hypnosis of believing that those representations were our essence. We have never forgotten that we have an identity that cannot be reduced to a relation, and cannot be destroyed by misconception.... However, without our own voices, Aboriginality will continue to be a creation for and about us.... It is for this very reason that I cannot stand here, even as an Aboriginal person, and say what Aboriginality is. To do so would be a violation of the right to self-determination and the right of peoples to establish their own identity.

(Dodson 1994, 9, 10)

In common with non-Aboriginal writers, some Aboriginal writers have used the term pan-Aboriginality to encompass all people of Aboriginal descent (Willmot 1982; Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990). Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990) expressed the view that a phenomenon they call *kindredness* is at the heart of pan-Aboriginality. In using the term *kindredness*, they were attempting to create their own terms of reference for something they found very hard to describe.

It cannot be fully articulated through white words - it is largely an intuitive sense and manifests that way.... We believe that kindredness is an implicit depth of feeling / spirituality which transcends our cultural diversity and contributes to the continuing unification of Aboriginal people. It is a feeling that is specific to Aborigines.... Kindredness is our unity. It cuts across and ties together Aboriginal diversity.

(Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 15)

This comes out very strongly among urban Aborigines whose Aboriginality is often challenged by non-Aboriginal people.

### **Identity as an issue for the urban Aborigine**

One of the main themes to emerge in the literature on urban Aboriginal culture is that of identity (Groome 1988, 41). Schwab (1988, 78) saw that for the urban Aborigine identity was both 'complex and multilayered'. In his study of a small number of Aboriginal teenagers residing in an Aboriginal boys' hostel during the early 1980s he found that there was a recognition of both cultural unity and diversity, with a common emphasis on the importance of kinship, coupled with a shared sense of history.

Groome's urban Aboriginal participants talked about "knowing who you are", "knowing your background, especially who your relatives are" and having "pride in one's cultural

background...where you come from" (Groome 1988, 151-153). Further:

For many participants, identity appeared to be viewed as a productive response to prejudice. They believed that if Aboriginal children developed a strong sense of identity they would be able to survive in a prejudiced world.... However, for many of the participants identity was stronger than just a defensive reaction. For them it represented a sense of personal meaning and establishing a distinctive place in society.

(Groome 1988, 154)

Barwick's (1988) findings were similar. Urban Aborigines were generally very proud of their Aboriginal identity: "To publically identify oneself as an Aborigine is a matter of defiant pride for many who could readily 'pass' and be lost as anonymous citizens" (Barwick 1988, 27).

Some Aboriginal people are more readily identified than others because of their skin colour and/or other physical features but, according to Schwab (1988, 94-95), Aboriginal identity has nothing to do with these. In agreement with this view Fesl (1989) asserted, "Your identity comes from who you grow up with and not the colour of your skin". However, this does not mean that skin colour is totally irrelevant for Aborigines.

Sometimes Aborigines privately question claims of those who do not look Aboriginal and do not have the family credentials that make appearance unimportant; and Aborigines sometimes use 'black' as an epithet in teasing and quarrelling in the same way that whites might.... Some Aborigines adopt the label 'black' to apply to all people of Aboriginal descent, whatever their skin color.

(Tonkinson 1990, 207)

Of much more importance are the family relationships and the shared history. For example, Aboriginal people who currently live on the fringes of country towns have often maintained a degree of separateness, not all of their own choosing. Their traditions are usually intricate and complex, a product of institutionalisation and discrimination, economic circumstances and remnants of the traditional past (Eckermann 1988b, 38; Pettman 1992, 114). Such people are also readily identified by others as being Aboriginal, regardless of their skin colour or physical features.

Then there are the many Aboriginal people who have non-Aboriginal partners whose children are usually regarded as Aboriginal (Pettman 1992).

Here definitions of identity do matter, beyond their crucial significance in terms of personal identity, and political mobilisation. Identity is also important in determining entitlement, and in the state's administration and delivery of services.... People's readiness to identify as Aboriginal depends on the categories and criteria available, and also on the social and political consequences of identification. Political mobilisation and affirmation, and increased provision and funding offer encouragement and support to identify as Aboriginal.

(Pettman 1992, 115, 117)

Jordan (1988, 126, 122) expressed the view that urban Aborigines "select from the past to establish credentials, characteristics that mark them off as Aboriginal" and that "Aboriginal children of school age interact with and accept or reject the Aboriginal identity offered by their parents or the Aboriginal identity offered by the reality definers in schools."

This identity is, at its strongest, a militant pride in being black, and a deliberate adoption of a way of life which promotes Aboriginal values. At its most diffuse, Aboriginal identity may mean an individual sense of belonging, possibly supported by half remembered stories heard in childhood.

(Groome 1988, 41)

This provides a continuum along which one could rate Aboriginal people's sense of their Aboriginal identity. However, given findings in the literature about the development of identity cited earlier, one could expect that an individual's position on this continuum will depend on time and place and vary according to who does the rating, the individual or someone else. Also, "there is now a growing recognition of the variations and diversity of Aboriginal peoples" (Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 1), even among those Aborigines living in urban areas. Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990) have explained the nature of this diversity in the following way:

Diversity is not one dimensional, it is not linear, it is not discrete groups of people. It is multi-dimensional and dynamic, whereby interaction occurs across and between all groups. For instance, the Aborigine living in an urban situation may have a mother, sister and/or brother living in the traditionally oriented group. Indeed they themselves may return to the group occasionally during the year and also bring members from that group into their group.

(Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 2)

In addition, some of the unrealistic and negative stereotypical perceptions of Aborigines held by non-Aborigines, both past and present, have been internalised by Aborigines themselves. Therefore, some Aboriginal people still hold negative white values and attitudes toward other Aborigines.

They accept the positive aspects of Aboriginality because it satisfies something deeper within them, but they are uncomfortable because they conflict with the internalised white attitudes towards Aborigines. Consequently there is a lack of consistency and internal cohesion among their values and attitudes regarding their Aboriginality. This may lead to an identity crisis forming.

(Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 6)

This complicates the formation of an Aboriginal individual's identity.

### **Complexities in Aboriginal identity formation**

Today, increasingly large numbers of Aboriginal people live very much like non-Aboriginal people in single family homes. They may only be in contact with other Aboriginal people socially or occasionally because their lives are dominated by non-Aboriginal ways of life (Varcoe 1994; Pettman 1992). Despite this "they may still have a strong ideological and emotional investment in an Aboriginal identity, as an intrinsic part of who they are and how they define themselves" (Pettman 1992, 114). Some may have brought with them "many of their Aboriginal ways, including the language, dreaming stories and memories, their cultural traditions and their Aboriginality" (Varcoe 1994, 33). In addition, Aboriginal children learn from their families an awareness of attitudes to and perceptions of Aboriginal people in general and their family group in particular by the dominant non-Aboriginal majority. According to Jordan (1983, 44), their perceptions of themselves are filtered by the awareness of these typifications and the stereotyping of Aboriginal people that abounds in mainstream society. This colours their primary identity. In turn, their primary identity intrudes upon all later interactions with others. Therefore:

It is not sufficient to take into account only the manifest identities which are relevant to the particular situation, for latent identities intrude upon persons' expectations and judgements of, as well as their behaviour towards, others and therefore have a significant effect on identity formation.

(Harris 1980, 8)



As Jordan (1984, 275) pointed out, "Aboriginal identity, like other identities, must be studied as located in a particular world." When Aboriginal children go to school for the first time they enter a new *institutional sub-world* (Berger and Luckmann 1973, 158). It is likely that many Aboriginal students will find significant disparity between this new sub-world of the school and the sub-world of their primary socialisation. For example, many urban Aboriginal children have been encouraged to be more self-reliant, independent and to have greater equity with adults than most non-Aboriginal children (Eckermann 1980; Malin 1989 cited by Hudspith and Williams 1994). These behaviours can be in conflict with those expected by the mainly white middle-class teachers at school.

In addition to these more structural differences between the two sub-worlds, Aboriginal children will probably interact with more people who reflect a variety of attitudes towards them on the basis of their perceived identity. All of these interactions impact on Aboriginal students' identities. As school students Aboriginal children learn new ways of looking at themselves as they actively interpret the reflected appraisals (Cooley [1922] 1964; Franks and Gecas 1992). According to Hudspith and Williams (1994, 28-29), when outsiders react positively to them, Aboriginal students feel that they 'belong' and they expand their existing identities to encompass the new social environments. However, if Aboriginal students are consistently made to feel that they are unacceptable in certain situations their identity development regresses.

Argyle (1973) proposed three criteria by which to assess the stability and positiveness of an individual's sense of self. According to him the following criteria are necessary: a sense of being at home in our body, a sense of knowing where we are going and an inner assuredness that we will get recognition from those who count. Hudspith and Williams (1994) used these criteria to analyse why the search for identity is sometimes more difficult for Aboriginal students than for white middle class students, in particular how Aboriginal students feel about being Aboriginal in the context of the school situation.

1. *Being at home in your body:*

There are many ways in which Aboriginal students may consistently get the message that they don't fit with the teacher or the classroom because of their physical characteristics. They will begin to feel that in the world of school their physical attributes are disadvantages rather than assets.

(Hudspith and Williams 1994, 32)

For example, teachers and their peers can react negatively to such things as the colour of a student's skin, their physical features and even the way the student speaks.

## 2. *Knowing where you are going:*

Knowing where you're going in any given social context depends on knowing and applying the rules that govern the social interaction within that context.

(Hudspith and Williams 1994, 32)

In the school context, not all rules are explicit.

The 'hidden curriculum' refers to those rules that are often unstated about the structure rather than the content of classroom interaction, for example, the power relations between adult and child. It is necessary that students learn and obey these rules if they are to be accepted and succeed in the classroom.

(Hudspith and Williams 1994, 33)

Misunderstandings can occur on the part of the student and the teacher because of 'cultural mismatch'. Students may feel confused and frustrated because they may not understand what is expected by the teacher, and the teacher may feel that the students are deliberately misbehaving.

## 3. *Recognition from those that count:*

As has been mentioned earlier, a young person's identity is influenced by the expectations of significant others and the way these others behave toward him or her. This is particularly important in the school context because teachers are generally regarded as being significant others and:

in some classrooms this recognition of Aboriginal students is sadly lacking.... [O]ften it is the negative rather than the positive behaviour that is most commented on by some teachers.

(Hudspith and Williams 1994, 33)

Given this, one can begin to appreciate the complexity of identity development for urban Aboriginal youth as they are frequently subjected to a variety of adult role models. One can also understand why some Aboriginal young people face an identity crisis during adolescence greater than that of their non-Aboriginal peers.

## Identity crises for Aboriginal adolescents

According to Partington (1987, 75-76), Aboriginal adolescents frequently experience some form of identity crisis as they seek to develop their own personal identity. The processes of identity formation or achievement are more complex for them than for the majority of non-Aboriginal adolescents. For example, adolescence is a time of hero-worship, of high resolve, of vague but fierce ambition and of strenuous imitation (Cooley [1922] 1964, 200). It is common for adolescents to try on one new identity after another and constantly compare themselves with peers and parents (Peck 1993, 23). For Aboriginal adolescents the tensions between their world at home and the various worlds with which they come into contact are particularly evident as they progress through secondary school (Groome 1995). Also, there are fewer positive Aboriginal role models than non-Aboriginal ones and by this time a significantly large number of their Aboriginal peers have already dropped out of school or are talking about doing so. In addition, many Aboriginal adolescents have developed negative expectation of themselves because they have internalised the negative expectations and assumptions they have been faced with each day (Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 6). With whom, then, do they identify? This may well lead to an identity crisis. Therefore, Aboriginal adolescents' search for their identity can be compounded by their Aboriginality.

However, not all Aboriginal adolescents react the same in similar circumstances because of differences in earlier primary and secondary socialization. In different situations only certain components of their identities will surface because only these are relevant to that particular context (Harris 1980, 8-10).

Sometimes constant denigration of Aboriginal people leads to such intense identity conflict that identity regression occurs where Aboriginal students feel that they do not have an identity. Binnion and Lunnay (1974 cited by Jordan 1983) found evidence of this when they held discussions with Aboriginal secondary school students as part of an action research project.

Among issues emphasised as problem areas was the perception of the Aboriginal students that they did not feel they were 'people', they lacked an identity and were made to feel they had nothing to offer.

(Binnion and Lunnay 1974 in Jordan 1983, 7)

Rather than having no identity at all these students had what Erickson (1959 cited by Jordan 1983, 32) would call *negative identity*. At critical stages of identity development

these students had been confronted by very real identifications and roles that were undesirable and possibly even dangerous. From these the students had internalised a lack of personal worth. Jordan (1983, 32) believed that this "concept of negative identity had particular implications for the study of Aboriginal identity."

According to Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990, 10-11), there is often a sequence in such identity crises. These include:

### 1. *Internalisation and shame*

Initially, when confronted with negative attitudes toward them, the Aboriginal adolescent may internalise these and feel *shame* in the presence of people who espouse these attitudes and others they think might share them. It takes time for Aboriginal students, when they first go to high school, to appreciate that not all teachers have the same negative attitudes toward Aboriginal people. Until this occurs they may feel *shame* in the presence of *all* teachers, particularly if the ones with whom they have first or most contact have negative attitudes towards them.

### 2. *Resistance*

Some Aboriginal adolescents, particularly those who have only one Aboriginal parent and whose visible features do not lead others to identify them as Aboriginal, may resist being labelled as Aboriginal. This resistance may be active or passive; at school it may include denial of their Aboriginal heritage to peers and teachers or refusal to participate in special activities for Aboriginal students. The resistance may also depend on the situation at school; if there are few Aboriginal peers and supports some students may not identify as Aboriginal at school, although they may do so openly at home or in social situations (Pettman 1992, 115; Fordham and Ogbu 1986). However, official identification as Aboriginal can enable adolescents to access entitlements and services which bring independence and this often counterbalances resistance.

### 3. *Acceptance and hostility towards the oppressors*

Many Aboriginal adolescents accept Aboriginal history, including invasion, as part of their own cultural heritage. Some act with hostility towards the oppressors, viewing people with authority over them as the current oppressors. This hostility may include: refusing to work at school, challenging authority and aspects of school they identify as being unsupportive of their cultural identity, becoming involved in anti-social activities or leaving school early (Groome 1995).

#### 4. Consolidation

The hostility persists until they find that they can more usefully employ their energies in activities that consolidate their Aboriginal identity. For example, some Aboriginal adolescents decide to stay at school and to achieve well despite the lack of this expectation for them, take the opportunity to learn as much about Aboriginal history, culture and issues as possible and/or become politically active in the school. These actions are taken consciously to put them in a better position to 'further the Aboriginal cause' when they do leave school. According to Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990), during this phase:

Individuals will choose to work and socialise with Aboriginals only, to trace Aboriginal roots, to be involved in social action activities (ie. land rights rallies, etc), wearing of the Aboriginal colours and incorporation of the deliberate usage of Aboriginal words in their vocabulary.... Aboriginal identity at this phase is newly emergent and sensitive. There is a need to prove Aboriginality and to watchdog and judge other Aborigines' "commitment to the cause". At this stage there is a strong tendency to cry coconut (that is, to question another's Aboriginal identity).

(Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 11)

#### 5. Self-actualisation

The identity crisis is over when self-actualisation in relation to the individual's Aboriginal identity is achieved.

This is where the individual has accepted their Aboriginality and also there has been an acknowledgement and working through of those parts of themselves that reflect dominant society values, with some retained and some rejected.... Being Aboriginal is...that you feel and identify as Aboriginal.

(Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 11)

However, the identification and sequencing of these stages to identity self-actualisation may be more complex than indicated by Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990). An American study of attitudes to self-actualisation of black students using a similar model concluded that "the racial identity process either may be more complex than [sic] previous authors had speculated or it may be a more difficult process to operationalize" (Parham and Helms 1985, 437). What the study did reveal was that black women were more comfortable with their blackness and more highly inner-directed than black men. A similar gender difference in identity self-actualisation may be related to the fact that

more female than male Aboriginal students stay at school (Parham and Helms 1985). Although adolescence may be the first time a young Aborigine experiences an identity crisis, it may not be the last. Vynette Hay (1988), an urban Aborigine, talked about her own experiences and feelings of an identity crisis as an adult:

Sometimes, in the course of my living, I have what I call an 'identity crisis'. I feel it is the product of living in a white society with all its white values and prejudices.... I sometime wonder, "Just who am I? What am I?" I look white, but identify myself as Aboriginal.... Often I think it would be simpler to exist in only one world, for there is racism on both sides.... [M]any people on both sides consider that a person must be one or the other.... This manifests in an attitude amongst some Aborigines as "think as we do, talk as we do, become part of our group".... But how can I say I really think Black. I am a product of white education and society, with the majority of my Aboriginal relatives living far away to the north. All I can say is that I have what I call 'Aboriginal Soul Feeling'.... I am a member of one of those loyal clans having over 500 relatives in the Far North. I know what it's like to exist as if I were part of the land, that special feeling of belonging. For me, knowing from where I came comes through no lore or custom but through a sensitive acknowledgement deep within me of being a child of the earth, upon which I stand. That is our Soul Feeling!

(Hay 1988, 43-45)

How, then, are these deep feelings communicated?

### **Communicating Aboriginal identity**

According to Groome (1995, 24), "In expressing their identity Aboriginal adolescents draw on cultural features which they receive from their kin and the wider Aboriginal community." This view was supported by Schwab (1988). After working with a small number of Aboriginal teenagers in an urban hostel, he concluded that Aboriginal identity was:

...portrayed, expressed, and articulated through a distinctive Aboriginal style which creates and reflects much of the tone and mood of life for Aborigines.... The distinctive style used by Aborigines in Adelaide consists of a whole complex of components which together afford a symbolic presentation of identity, directed both outward to non-Aboriginal society and inward to the Aboriginal community. These components together provide both a means of identification and an orientation.

(Schwab 1988, 83)

Schwab (1988) also isolated some of the components of this *style*. They include:

- 'the Lingo' or 'the language' - remnants of languages that no longer exist in their fullest forms
- colours of clothing and accessories
- the identification with different types of music which are considered Aboriginal in flavour
- deportment, body language and etiquette.

(Schwab 1988, 83-84)

To this list Eckermann (1988b, 37) would probably add sharing 'folklore', stories of particular happenings that are handed down from generation to generation. These strengthen an individual's sense of belonging, of being part of the long and rich history of Aboriginal people in Australia. This fits in with Schwab's belief that the *style* itself is but a visible manifestation of a pervasive cultural system, a system which provides a particular orientation through which the world is viewed (Schwab 1988, 84).

In addition, a number of symbols, themes, activities and events have become significant, particularly in relation to an Aboriginal separateness and a unified status. Among these are the focus on land and land rights, the Aboriginal flag and NAIDOC week celebrations (Tonkinson 1990, 196-197; Keeffe 1988, 71). Individuals can identify themselves by associating more closely with their Aboriginal kin and peers, displaying the associated symbols publically and by participating in local events.

Here Aboriginality involves the choosing of cultural markers for identity maintenance and foreclosing against others. In the process an Aboriginal identity speaks to and in opposition to the dominant culture.

(Pettman 1992, 113)

All aspects of the above discussion concerning Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality have implications for the education of Aboriginal young people.

### **Aboriginal identity and schooling**

From his experience of working with Aboriginal people in more remote areas, Stephen Harris (1988) extracted some general principles that he believed applied to the education of Aborigines in any part of Australia. For example, he stressed the importance of the connection that existed between education, culture and Aboriginal

identity, and the way this relationship created barriers for many Aboriginal people, particularly in the school setting.

[A]ny kind of education is a very cultural activity. Education is culture learning.... [T]o become and to stay Aboriginal means to hold an Aboriginal world view in the middle of many forces for change.... To go very high on the white education ladder a person has to learn a lot of un-Aboriginal white culture world view which is tied in with industrial economy and the way white culture survives.

(Harris 1988, 170)

The greater the cultural gap between the world of home and the world of school, the greater the challenge to maintain identity while participating in white education. Sommerlad (1972) found this when she examined the relationship between schooling and Aboriginal identity among 95 Aboriginal adolescents from missions, settlements and pastoral properties throughout the Northern Territory who attended boarding school in Darwin. Her findings suggested that, in this situation:

the basic goals of education could not be simultaneously attained and that the retention of a pride in Aboriginal identity was inimical to the internalisation of western value orientations.

(Sommerlad 1972, vii)

After talking to a large number of Aboriginal people, Sykes (1986) expressed a belief that some of this occurred because of the necessity for many Aboriginal people to leave their communities if they wished to undertake further study. Here they faced challenges to their Aboriginal identity while isolated from cultural support. She cited one person's thoughts about this:

[I]t just depends how strong you are. There are certain traps, but if you can get through them because you want to achieve something, then you've got to do it as an individual.... It's a lonely road.... It's an achievement if you can get through it and maintain [your identity].

(cited in Sykes 1986, 107)

Owen Brady (1990) added that maintaining Aboriginal identity was getting harder for each succeeding generation because of the way non-Aboriginal culture was dominating the lives of so many Aboriginal people.



I feel that I've had a very good upbringing. I was introduced to everything, mainly Aboriginal foods and things. I would like to take my kids back and show them.... The trouble now is time. We've got no time left. I mean, we've got time but our kids are torn between two cultures. Now one culture is taking over from another. The European culture is dominating Aboriginal culture in the sense of language, culture and identity. It's all dying out.

(Brady 1990, 51-52)

In South Australia the inservice associated with the implementation of the Education Department's Anti-racism Policy ensures that school staff are made aware of how the ravages of prejudice and racism that abound in non-Aboriginal schools affects the education of Aboriginal students. In the urban school setting it is common for many Aboriginal students to stick together. As a group many leave school as soon as they can. Part of this is a way of demonstrating their resistance to white culture and values, or their perception that 'white' education is of no use to them. According to Eckermann (1988a, 12), even if they are academically successful, individuals often fear the isolation they would face if they tried to succeed at levels higher than their peers. For students who do go against the grain, so to speak, this isolation is very real. They are isolated from their non-Aboriginal peers because they are Aboriginal. But, most of all, they are isolated from their Aboriginal peers who accuse them of being 'coconuts', black on the outside but white inside, something Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990) said was the worst insult Aboriginal people could give one another.

It seems that as soon as Aboriginal people step away from the norm they are negatively sanctioned. There is a tendency to cry 'coconut' if you speak differently, if you dress differently, if you do not marry Aboriginal, but most of all if you choose to be educated.

(Dudgeon and Oxenham 1990, 12)

Despite all the associated problems, some Aboriginal students have chosen the more difficult path and sought to stay at school and to succeed. The effect their active participation at school has had on their Aboriginal identity has varied. According to Jordan (1983, 1984) one of the determinants of this variety related to the school, its curriculum and ethos. Jordan sought to establish the components of Aboriginal identity and the social construction of Aboriginality in educational contexts. She worked with three sets of schools in very different communities: one, an Aboriginal community where Aborigines had very close links with their cultural heritage; another, a regional centre which had a significant population of Aborigines who gave high status to the

knowledge of their cultural heritage that separates them from the world of white society; and the third, part of the metropolitan area of a state capital.

Jordan's (1983, 1984) analysis indicated that the kind of Aboriginal identities fostered at participating schools varied because the theorising concerning Aboriginal identity was different. That meant individual schools were constructing distinct worlds of meaning for Aboriginal students. This concept was "accepted by all those interviewed" (Jordan 1984, 285). One of her findings was that:

Where there is highly visible representation of Aborigines, and a school policy that highlights Aborigines as a different group and holds policies that discriminate in favour of Aborigines, there will be less support by non-Aboriginal students.

(Jordan 1984, 289)

However, she concluded that this negativism could actually have positive outcomes in terms of the Aboriginal students' search for identity.

Owen Brady's (1990) report of his experiences of being subject to racist remarks at secondary school supported the notion that secondary school was a critical time in the development of Aboriginal identity. For Brady, it was during this time that he became acutely aware of himself as an Aboriginal person. A more recent study of a small group of Aboriginal students who were succeeding at senior secondary school by Day (1994) has also indicated that the students did not think consciously about their Aboriginality until early high school. For some this was intensified by the process of applying for Abstudy (financial support for Aboriginal students and their families to help them to stay at school). For others, feelings about their Aboriginal identity were consciously raised when they were exposed to the history and literature of Aboriginal society, and they then began to question their parents about their own cultural heritage.

Various other aspects of schooling, particularly secondary schooling, have been identified as either assisting Aboriginal students in the development of their Aboriginal identity or hindering the process. Keeffe (1992, 68) asserted that the commonalities between public attitudes, teacher attitudes, curriculum content, the restricted form of learning about Aboriginal Australia and student perceptions of Aboriginality were too striking for there not to be a direct connection between them. Keeffe (1992) cited findings from 1985 Australian National Opinion Poll Market Research (ANOP) which:

...suggests that teachers, as an influential segment of middle Australia, do not understand Aboriginality, do not accept the validity of urban Aboriginal culture and do not support programs of government intervention in relation to Aboriginal education for the majority of the student group.... Given this,

how can programs in schools for Aboriginal students and Aboriginal studies curriculum development be made to work?

(Keeffe 1992, 68)

Harris (1980, 19) would agree with these sentiments. He felt that Aboriginal Studies could be very important to Aboriginal people because it helped them to strengthen their identity by establishing a firm relationship between past, present and future. He cited Paul Coe's words:

[P]eople who live in a political and social vacuum have got no future because they have no past. If you can give these people a past you can give them a future.... [However], Mere inclusion of cultural heritage in the curriculum... will not produce the desired results if teachers do not support the assumptions underlying this inclusion.

(Harris 1980, 19, 38)

Keeffe (1992, 81) also felt that lack of teacher support for the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the curriculum could be a problem because most teachers represented the attitudes of 'middle' Australia. Despite this, Sykes' (1986) interview data supported Fesl's (1982, cited by Sykes 1986) finding that Aboriginal Studies was one of the most popular first choices in course preferences among Aboriginal people in general, not just young people at school. From this Sykes concluded that, for Aboriginal people:

...education, if and when they have been able to access it, has been irrelevant, and not at all related to their lives as Aboriginal people. It is consistent with the data that Aboriginal people *do* wish to acquire basic skills, whether literacy or numeracy, but on their own terms and around subjects that relate to them.

(Sykes 1986, 97)

Syke's (1986) findings are consistent with the Aboriginal Consultative Group's vision regarding education:

We see education as the most important strategy for achieving realistic self-determination for the Aboriginal people of Australia. We do not see education as a method of producing an anglicised Aboriginal, but rather as an instrument for creating an informed community, with intellectual and technological skills, in harmony with our own cultural values and identity. We wish to be Aboriginal citizens in a changing Australia.

(Schools Commission Report 1975, 138)

It is for these reasons that some groups of Aboriginal people have advocated strongly

for their own schools, even in urban areas. Deuschle, in her submission to the committee investigating the need for an urban Aboriginal School, stated:

The desire to affirm Aboriginality through the school system is not a desire for separatism. It is a desire to become strong and assured in Aboriginal identity, to be able to withstand the onslaughts that come from being a racially oppressed minority. Maybe one day it will come about that the mainstream schools will have sufficient Aboriginal input that Aboriginal children will feel enough encouragement to remain in them until year 12, but that is not the case at present.... Despite the goodwill of many in the education system of this State, the present school system has failed Aboriginal people. Their children don't get through the system. On the whole they feel their Aboriginality has been denied or dismissed as of no consequence or that it is held to be a negative factor for anyone wanting to be educated and get a job. So they lose confidence, their self-esteem drops and they leave.

(Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works 1985, 26-27)

Harris (1989) would support these arguments. He asserted that those Aborigines who have survived the white education system so far have done so by *domain separation*; they have learned to adopt situationally appropriate behaviours without losing their own values and beliefs. He went on to say that:

[T]he pattern needs to be strengthened, needs to be dignified and normalised and white society needs to accept it as positive and friendly human behaviour, and a pattern which needs to last, not just for some temporary phase, but possibly forever.... [If the] domain separation is voluntary: it increases choices rather than lessening them, and is not motivated by racism but by a freedom to be different.

(Harris 1989, 9)

In Harris' view, this made voluntary domain separation by those Aborigines who want it very different from apartheid. He felt it could provide a way of supporting the survival of Aboriginal identity in the long term (Harris 1989, 13) because:

...acculturation towards white norms does not necessarily imply that such norms replace those of the membership group. The individual may be able to combine elements of both cultures and the expression of a particular norm may be merely situationally determined.

(Sommerlad 1972, 34)

Willmot (1986 cited by Phillips 1992) went even further than that. He asserted that:

[P]ersons who know who they are, and preserve their culture, function best in both worlds, behaving completely differently in the different milieu, as is appropriate.

(Willmot 1986 cited by Phillips 1992, 29)

However, Henze and Vanett (1993) cautioned about taking the *two worlds* metaphor too far. Their work with Yup'ik Eskimos led them to challenge the assumptions underlying the metaphor. For example, they found little uniformity within either Yup'ik culture or Western culture in the region where they worked. They also found that the associated metaphor *walking in two worlds* meant different things to different individuals and that the goal implied by this metaphor - to achieve success in two worlds - became idealized and unreachable. The *two worlds* metaphor did not do justice to the complexity of choices facing indigenous students and could, in fact, dangerously reduce their options; it became a barrier rather than a model of how indigenous students could live in the world today (Henze and Vannett 1993, 119-123).

## Summary

The literature cited above indicates the importance of *identity*, particularly for Aboriginal adolescents at school. This has been demonstrated by examining the concepts of identity formation and development, and the relationships between identity and the concepts of self for children and adolescents in general. Definitions of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality were then considered from the perspective of both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, and some of the myths about urban Aborigines and their identities were exposed. The chapter then focussed on the phases of identity development encountered by Aboriginal adolescents, the importance of those phases associated with identity crisis or conflict, particularly for Aboriginal students at secondary school.

The literature has also emphasised the individuality of identity development, the complexity of identity formation for Aboriginal students, and the importance of identity to Aboriginal secondary school students. Despite this, there is very little information about how the various factors that are important in fostering Aboriginal students' identities are interrelated, or how these factors are related to the students' retention and attainment at school, particularly for individual students. As indicated by the literature cited in this and the previous chapter, such interrelationships are complex.

Therefore, the following chapter provides a theoretical and methodological framework for the development of a model to conceptualise complex interrelationships between various factors that comprise descriptive data. The model is then used to conceptualise the data presented in this and the previous chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A MODEL FOR CONCEPTUALISING COMPLEX INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VARIABLES

#### Introduction

The previous two chapters have given some indication of the complexity of the interrelationships between variables that have been associated with students' retention, attainment and identity. Although most of the data about the retention and attainment of students in general was produced by quantitative means, the meta-analysis I undertook to bring all these findings together in Chapter Two resulted in a richly descriptive text more common to data derived from individual qualitative studies. The same is true for the outcomes of the analysis of data concerning the retention and attainment of Aboriginal students in Chapter Two, and Aboriginal students' identities in Chapter Three, even though much of the original data came from less quantified analyses.

I felt a need to conceptualise these three sets of descriptive data, to demonstrate in some graphical manner the complexity of the interrelationships between the different factors that had been identified as being important in students' retention, attainment and identity.

This chapter provides a theoretical and methodological framework for the model I developed to conceptualise such data. The model is then used, as a case study, to conceptualise how a hypothetical student could have developed a positive academic self-concept.

#### Conceptualising descriptive data

According to Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) field research data can be analysed so that it has both a *descriptive* and an *explanatory* function. Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) suggested that all the events, factors, outcomes and processes that seem to be important, be turned into variables. Assuming that some factors exerted a directional

influence on others, they proposed that these be listed as antecedent, mediating or outcome variables. Then, by carefully going back to the original data, the variables could be linked to one another by arrows in a series of streams and cross-stream connections to make up a *causal network*. This created, for them, "a visual rendering of the most important independent and dependent variables in a field study and the relationships between them" (Miles and Huberman 1984, 132).

Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) did not claim that this kind of approach was in any way related to rigorous multivariate analysis. Instead, they saw the production of causal networks as a way of condensing and sorting descriptive or qualitative data to reveal themes and configurations, a process:

...operating at a higher level of interpretive inference.... Doing a causal network forces a more inferential level of analysis that pulls the data together in a single summarizing form. The analyst has to look at *all* the data and preceding conclusions, and map them in a coherent way. Risk, of course, is building order and purpose into events that are more loose ended, random, inconclusive, and perverse than causal networks would have them. In any event, causal analysis is an epistemological leap of faith.

(Miles and Huberman 1984, 141)

Strauss and Corbin (1990) also recommended that descriptive or qualitative data be analysed by looking at the relationships between different variables and tracing what they called *conditional paths*, which appeared to be very similar to the interconnected streams that comprised Miles and Huberman's (1984, 1994) *causal networks*. However, in addition, Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocated the use of a *conditional matrix* which:

...may be represented as a set of circles one inside the other, each (level) corresponding to different aspects of the world around us. In the outer rings stand those conditional features *most distant* to action/interaction; while the inner rings pertain to those conditional features bearing *most closely* upon an action/interaction sequence [emphasis in the original].

(Strauss and Corbin 1990, 161)

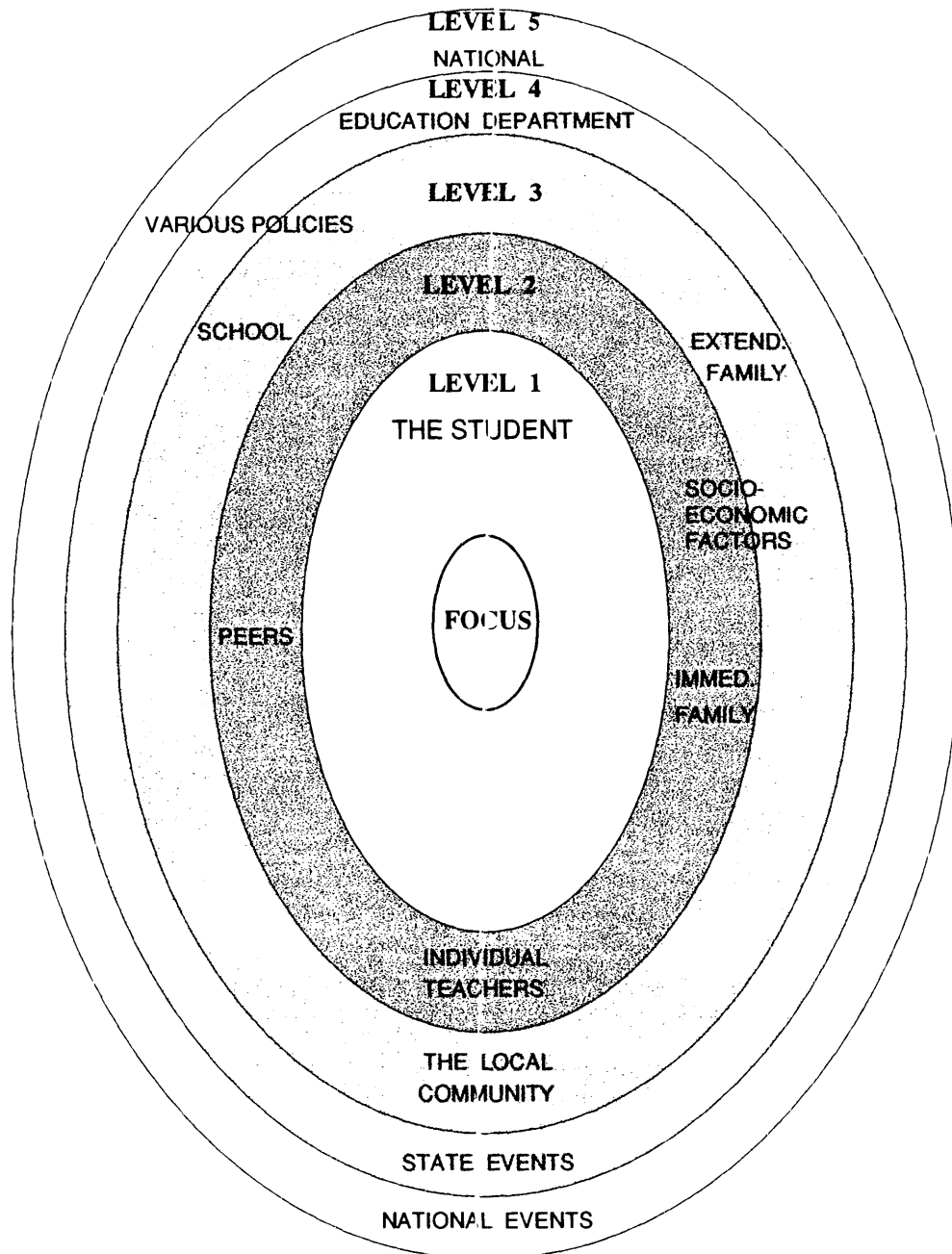
Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that the innermost circle contain any actions pertaining directly to the phenomenon under investigation and that the circles moving out from this contain related actions / interactions that were successively further removed from the phenomenon. Conditional paths could then be plotted on the conditional matrix, thus indicating not only the effects of these actions / interactions but also the levels of the influences affecting the phenomenon.

Watts (1976, 96; 1981, 347), developing the work of Jessor and Jessor (1973), used a similar model to distinguish between student characteristics and environmental variables, both *proximal* and *distal*, as they related to students' academic success. Individual student characteristics, including their attitudes, values, behaviours and aspirations, and the students' perceptions of others' attitudes and values were placed in the innermost circle. Proximal environmental variables related to students' relationships with immediate family members, individual teachers and peers; distal environmental variables included socioeconomic factors in the home, socio-cultural factors in the local community, and the ethnic composition of the school. Jessor and Jessor (1977) emphasised that these environments were those perceived by the actor from his or her experience with them. This meant that whether a variable was proximal or distal depended on the behaviour (or attitude or value) to which it was being linked, and was not inherent in the nature of the variable.

Combining the concepts of proximal and distal environments and variables with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) *levels* I developed my own conditional matrix to conceptualise descriptive or qualitative data. My matrix is illustrated in Figure 4.1 (see next page).

Concentric ovals have been used rather than the circles advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) because ovals provide more room for information. The reason for this will become clear as the use of the model is demonstrated. The shading helps distinguish the different levels. Each variable can be placed in a level on the conditional matrix according to the proximity of its influence on the phenomenon. The placement of the general headings on the conditional matrix in Figure 4.1 suggests the probable level of importance of various groups of factors. However, these are not necessarily fixed and the position of specific variables can vary from one situation to another depending on the context.

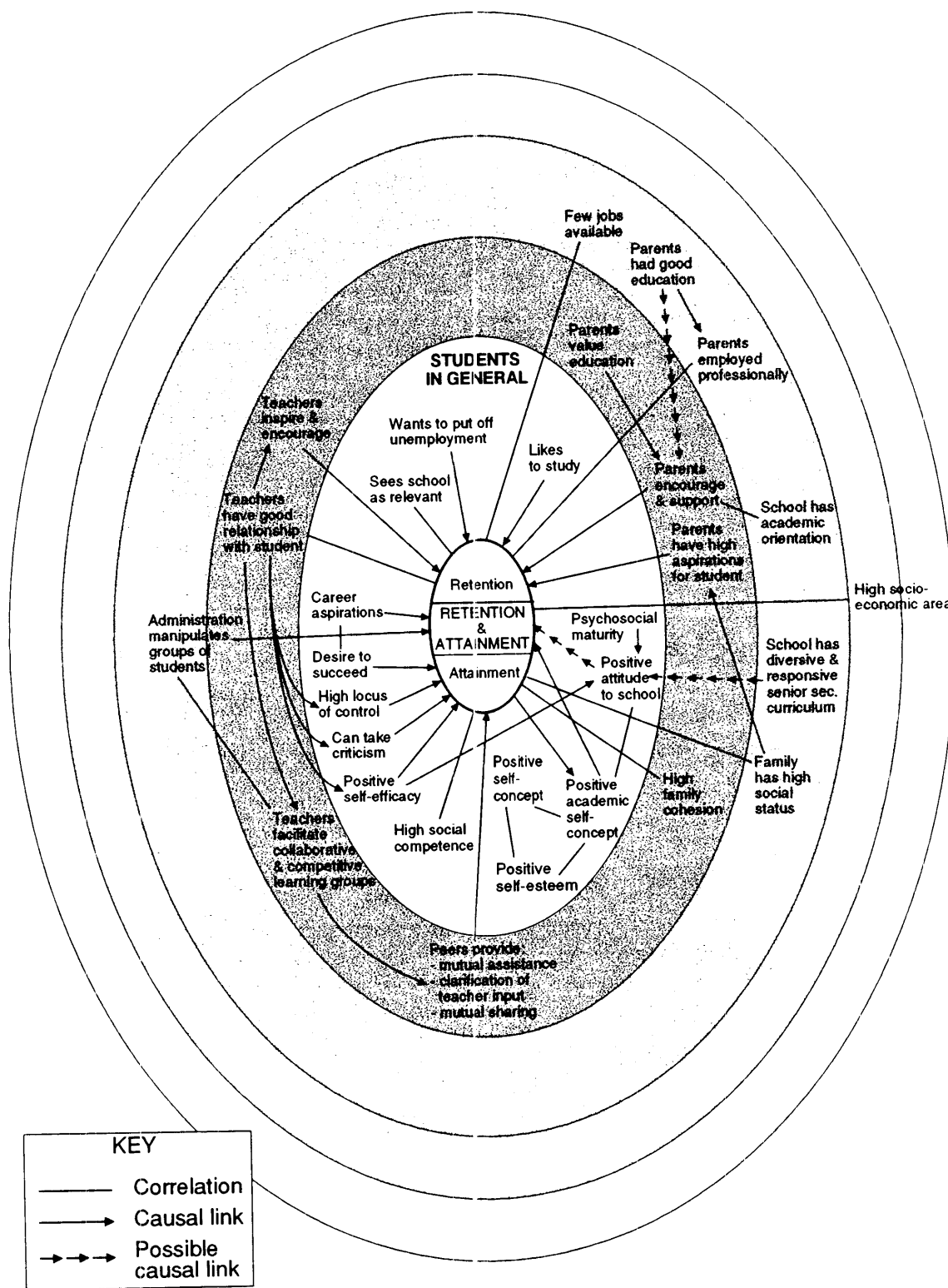




**Figure 4.1. A conditional matrix adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Watts (1976, 1981).**

To explain more clearly how this model can assist in the conceptualisation of complex descriptive or qualitative data let us take, for example, the interrelationships between the factors identified in Chapter Two as being associated with the retention and attainment of *students in general*. Figures 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 (pages 22, 29 and 36) highlighted the interrelationships between discrete sets of factors. Figure 4.2 combines the data from all three figures. All variables have been plotted on a conditional matrix, and individual factors have been linked by lines and arrows to indicate the directions of

influence or causality. This has created a causal map superimposed on the conditional matrix. I call this conceptualisation a *causal network matrix*.

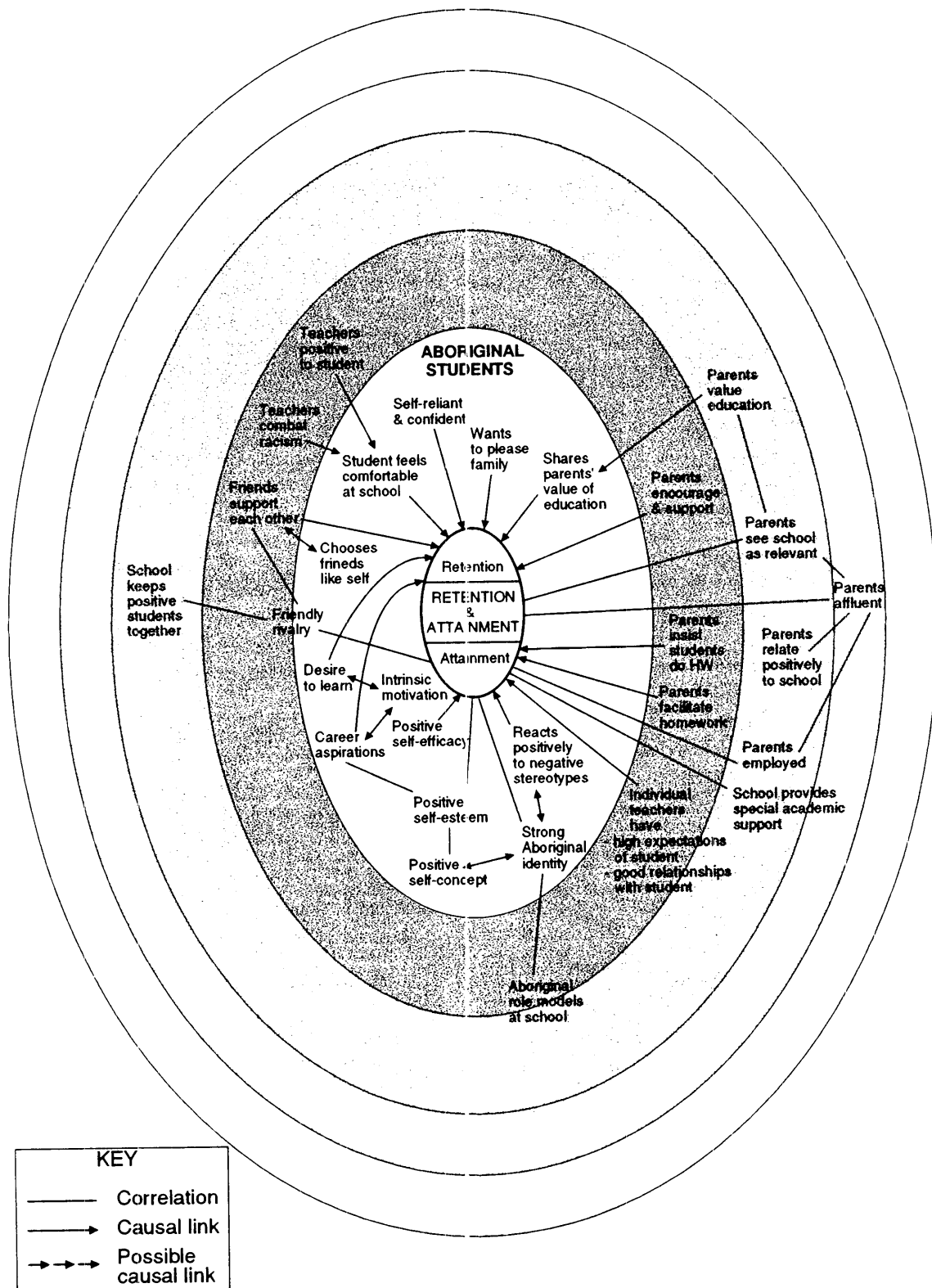


**Figure 4.2** A causal network matrix showing the interrelationships between the various factors indicated in the literature in chapter two to be associated with the retention and attainment of *students in general*.

In Figure 4.2 the interrelationships between the factors have been conceptualised as correlations, causal links or possible causal links. To clarify this: a *correlation* indicates a mutual association between two variables or between a variable and a phenomenon where there is no clear indication that one precedes or causes the other; a *causal link* indicates the existence of evidence that one variable is an antecedent of the other or the variable is necessary for the phenomenon to occur; and a *possible causal link* indicates that there is at least anecdotal evidence of causality.

Figure 4.2 clearly demonstrates the true complexity of the interrelationships between the different factors identified in Chapter Two as being associated with students' retention and attainment because it also conceptualises the levels of influence of individual factors associated with the two focus areas, retention and attainment, and the interrelationships between the different sets or types of factors.

Similarly, the data about the retention and attainment of *Aboriginal students* from Figure 2.5 have been conceptualised in Figure 4.3 using my causal network matrix model.

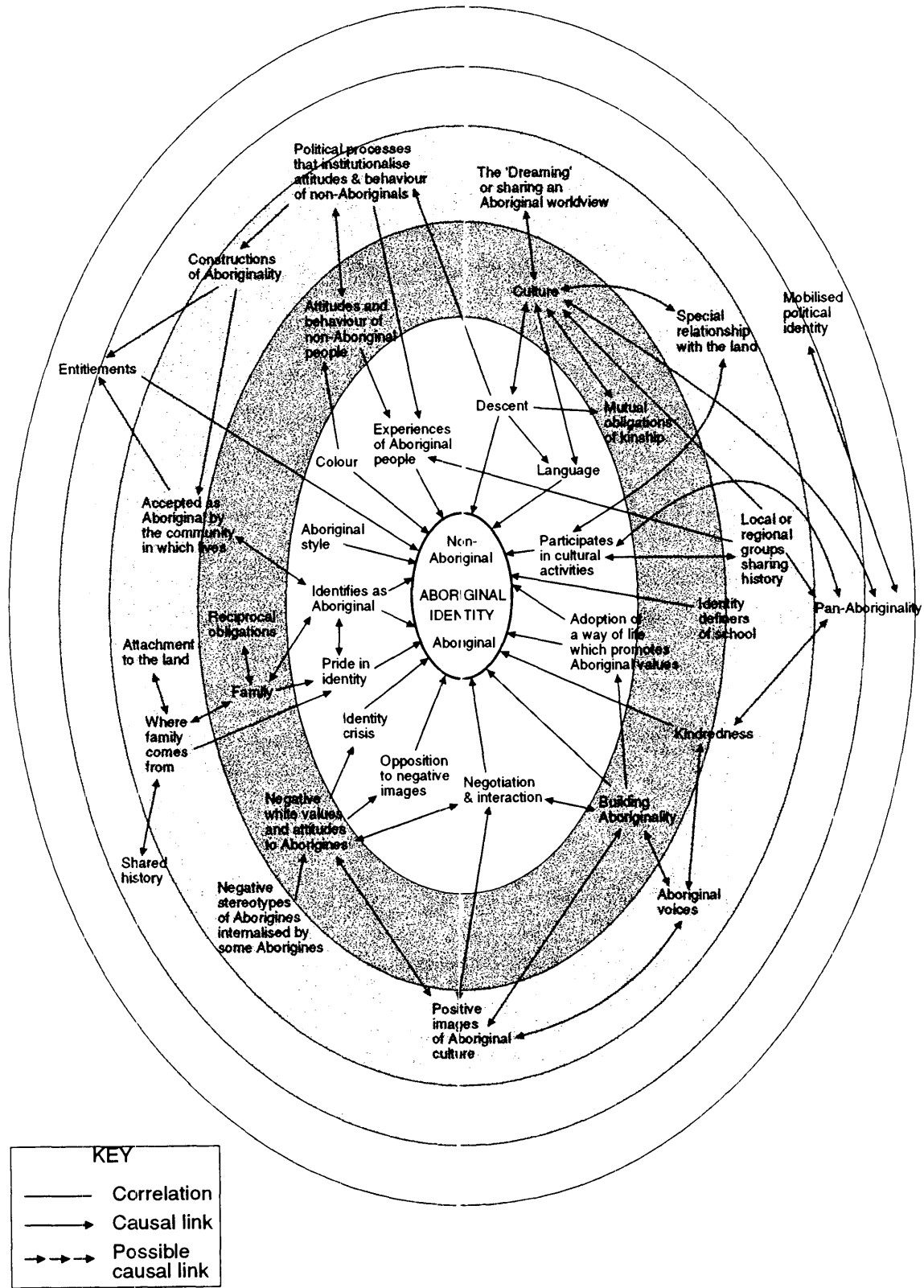


**Figure 4.3** A causal network matrix conceptualising the interrelationships between the various factors identified in the literature in chapter two as being associated with the retention and attainment of *Aboriginal students*.

One point of significance is that there are more correlational links between the variables in Figure 4.2 which conceptualises the data for *students in general* than in Figure 4.3, conceptualising the data for *Aboriginal students*, where there are more causal links. This is to be expected because a large number of the studies from which the data was derived for Figure 4.2 (students in general) used statistical analysis of grouped data which indicated more correlational than causal relationships between variables. In comparison, several of the studies that provided the data for Figure 4.3 used smaller scale qualitative methodologies where it was easier to determine *local causality* (Miles and Hubermann 1984, 1994).

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 facilitate comparison between the types of factors that have been shown to be important in the retention and attainment of students in general and those for Aboriginal students and the interrelationships between the various factors in each case. For example, although career aspirations are important for both students in general and Aboriginal students, for students in general these lead to both retention and attainment whereas for Aboriginal students these lead only to retention. For Aboriginal students, Aboriginal role models, Aboriginal identity and teachers combatting racism stand out as additional factors.

In the same way, my causal network matrix model has been used in Figure 4.4 to conceptualise the data from Chapter Three relating to the identity of Aboriginal students.



**Figure 4.4** A causal network matrix showing the interrelationships between the various factors felt to be associated with Aboriginal identity by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal writers.

Notice that Figure 4.4 shows only causal relationships. Again, the studies cited in Chapter Three that provided the data for Figure 4.4 used smaller scale qualitative methodologies where it was easier to determine *local causality* (Miles and Huberman 1984, 1994). In a sense, Figure 4.4 conceptualises a conglomerate of multiple examples of local causality. Individual causal relationships 'ring true' and illustrate the data presented in Chapter Three if one reflects on separate parts of the conceptualisation.

To test whether the same model could be used effectively for conceptualising case study data for individual students, I extracted variables from Chapter Two that could be associated with a hypothetical student acquiring a positive academic self-concept. From these I then extrapolated other more specific variables such as personal student and family characteristics, special school and departmental policies and programs, and other special opportunities that might relate to a student with a positive academic self-concept. Following through this partial example explains more explicitly how various factors and their interrelationships can be mapped on a conditional matrix to form *causal network matrices* like Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.

A positive academic self-concept is a student characteristic that can be placed at the student level, level one. A positive academic self-concept generally comes from achieving success and having this recognised (Bandura 1986; Moriarty 1991; Heaven 1994). The success is usually determined by a variety of values and actions of the student, such as the student:

- wanting to succeed
- working hard
- asking for help.

These can also be noted at the student level. Directional lines can be drawn between these student actions and the *attainment* focus to which these values and attitudes lead.

A student's interrelationships with others and the values espoused by these others can also be important to the student's achievement. The most influential others are likely to be members of the student's family, his or her peers and individual teachers (Watts 1976, 1981). Chapter Two identified the following variables as being associated with student attainment:

- best friends also being success oriented
- parents and teachers encouraging and supporting the student
- parents conveying their aspirations for the student.

These factors can be placed in level two. Directional arrows can be drawn from these to the student actions which led to the student's attainment.

At level three one can put:

- the characteristics of the school and its associated policies and practices which may determine many of the actions of individual teachers, for example, basic skills testing, and public recognition of academic success;
- educational attitudes and values of immediate family members associated with family socio-economic factors, particularly those determined to a large extent by their experiences and those of their extended family (for example, parents valuing education, parents having unskilled occupations because they had little education themselves and relatives having good jobs because they had a better education); and perhaps even
- local community factors such as the limited availability of unskilled jobs.

The influence of these factors on the individual student is generally more indirect and is often mediated by factors in level two although, occasionally, there may be a direct effect. These effects can again be indicated by directional lines.

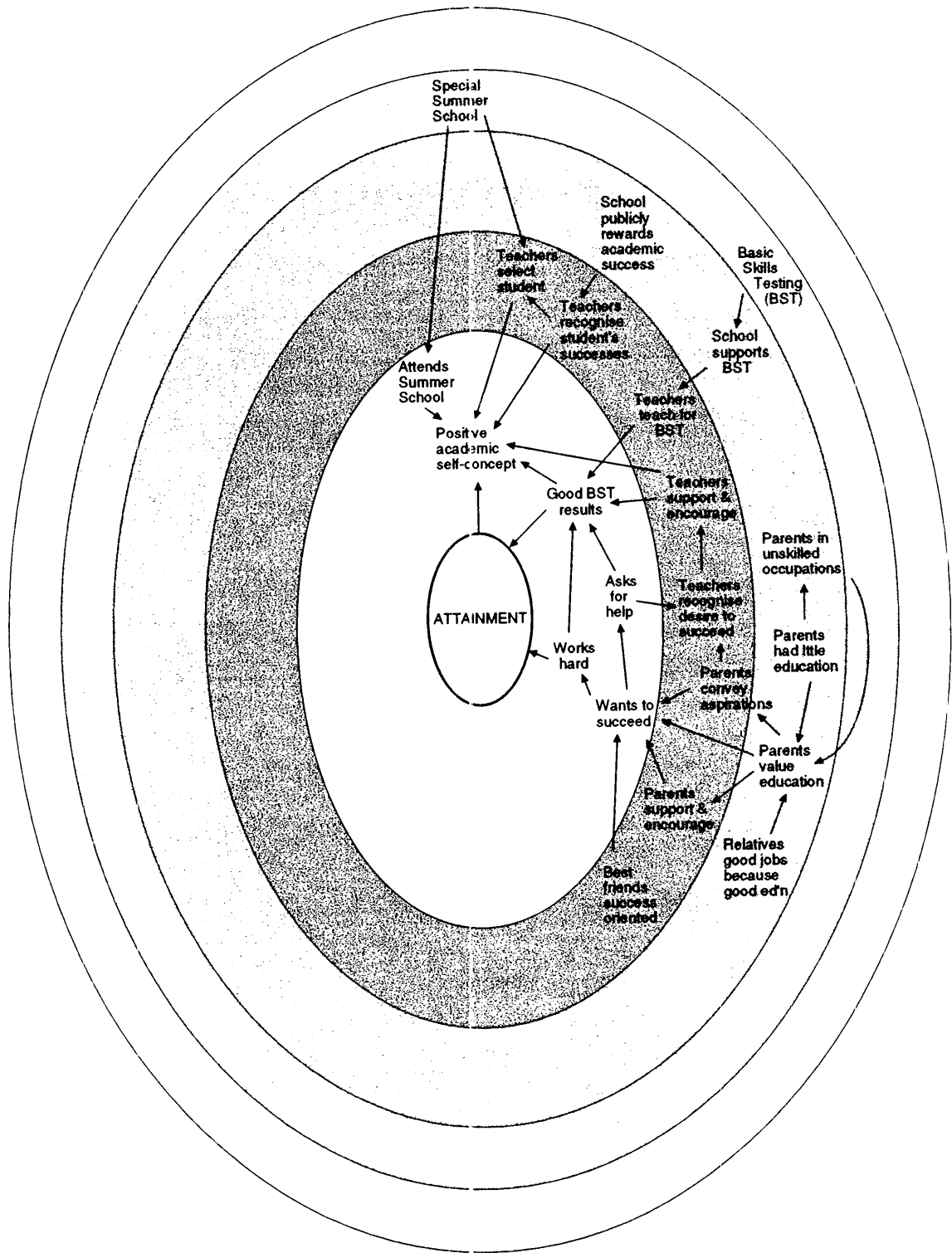
Particularly in terms of the retention and attainment of students, the policies and practices of the state education system can impact on what happens in schools and indirectly influence a student's academic self concept, as can actions of other state bodies. For example:

- The implementation of Basic Skills Testing occurs at the school level but it is an initiative of the Education Department.
- Some universities ask teachers to identify students who are talented in particular fields so that these students can be invited to participate in special Summer Schools.

Doing well on the Basic Skills Test and being invited to participate in the Summer School could increase the student's academic self-concept. However, these factors are even further removed from the student so they can be included in level four and the intervening variables between them and the student's academic self-concept indicated at the appropriate levels. Again, directional lines can be drawn to indicate the direction of influence or causality.

Using the variables discussed above, we can create a causal network matrix associated with the hypothetical student's development of a positive academic self-concept. This could look like Figure 4.5 (see next page). Only part of the conditional matrix has been utilised because having a positive academic self-concept is merely one student factor associated with an individual student's attainment.





**Figure 4.5** A causal network matrix conceptualising how a hypothetical student developed a positive academic self-concept.

Notice that all links between the various factors associated with the student's development of a positive academic self-concept and *attainment*, the phenomenon to which all these factors are ultimately related, are causal links. Here we are talking about:

*local causality* - the actual events and processes that led to specific outcomes.... How the path of causality actually works in the case of a specific adolescent in a real family is...what we mean by 'local causality' [emphasis in the original].

(Miles and Huberman 1984, 132)

## Summary

This chapter has provided a conceptual framework for the development of *conditional matrices* (Strauss and Corbin 1991). These matrices were then used to conceptualise the data from Chapters Two and Three relating to students' retention, attainment and identity, creating what I have called *causal network matrices*. A hypothetical case study of an individual student's acquisition of a positive academic self-concept was developed to demonstrate *local causality* (Miles and Huberman 1984, 1994).

The following chapter provides a theoretical and methodological framework for the field work which produced the case study data and the subsequent analyses of those data. As such, it refers back to the *causal network matrix* model developed in this chapter.