"R3presentin` Inclusive Communities:" What Does Social Inclusion Mean in Australia When You Obviously Stand Out?

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Abstract

On the streets of Melbourne's suburbs young people from African backgrounds, as a minority group in Australia, have expressed that they often feel misunderstood by the wider Australian community particularly as a result of misleading media reporting. This prohibits feelings of inclusion or "fitting in."

This paper focuses on the research question of my Master's Thesis, "what does social inclusion mean in Australia when you obviously stand out?"

I developed this question due to experiences working with existing communities of African Australians in Melbourne. During my fieldwork, I interviewed 31 first and second generation migrants (primarily from South Sudan) aged between 13 and 35, and a select few professionals affiliated with *Footprints*.

Footprints is an organisation that I co-founded which aims to create spaces to bring about social change through the creative arts.

Through these interviews I attempted to understand my participants' first-hand perspectives on, and experiences regarding, my research question. This paper outlines and analyses of the responses given.

The responses to this question were not clear cut. Some felt that it was possible to "fit in" in Australia if you obviously stand out depending on what your definition of what "fitting in" is. Some were definitive in saying that it was definitely not possible to feel like you could feel included in Australia due to always being made to feel like you stood out. Others felt like "fitting in" in the Australian context would be possible over time, maybe in a couple of decades. Finally, a select few questioned whether the goal actually is to "fit in" in the first place. Here "standing out" and being able to express yourself was seen to be a more important goal in terms of being able to open up a dialogue.

In giving voice to young people I hope to express support for the challenges that I have observed this community (primarily South-Sudanese) facing in Australia. I hope to contribute to the discourse of social inclusion in the Australian context and offer meaningful exchanges which may also inspire future joint initiatives and collaborations.

Key Words: social inclusion, African identity, youth identity, "fitting in," Other, multiculturalism, South-Sudan, African diaspora, Australia, culture, migration.

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1. Introduction and Background Context

In contrast to subtle forms of prejudice, *VIC Health* conducted interviews to determine levels of overt prejudice in Australia. In 2006 and 2013, *VIC Health* conducted telephone interviews to monitor changes in attitudes of racism (VICHealth, 2014: 9, 20). As a result,

> 'just over half of all respondents do not believe that there are groups that do not 'fit in' (54%) or identify any groups toward whom they feel 'cold' (59%). However, **40% can identify at least one group they believe does not 'fit in' and 41% identifies a group toward whom they feel cold**' (VICHealth, 2014: 10).

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Between 2006 and 2013, there was a '17% increase in the proportion of people agreeing that there are ethnic and racial groups that do not 'fit in'' (VICHealth, 2014: 10).

This is quite a concerning result. In addition, 'respondents who express prejudicial attitudes about certain groups are also more likely to feel negative towards people from Muslim, Middle Eastern, African and refugee backgrounds, than people from other backgrounds' (VICHealth, 2014: 10).

This Action Research Project summary offers a qualitative analysis and some background context regarding issues facing young people of culturally diverse backgrounds (with a focus on the South Sudanese community[i]) and proposed focus points from the perspective of the writer (community cultural development practitioner).

I am of Anglo Australian descent. I am not of South Sudanese origin and I do not profess to speak for the South Sudanese community. I have however, been accepted into this community in Melbourne to some extent and have been to Sudan and South Sudan on two occasions in 2008 and 2010. These experiences have led me to co-found an arts organization *Footprint Enterprises Inc.*[ii] In *Footprints* I continue to walk alongside young emerging artists from a range of culturally diverse backgrounds and develop arts-based projects together.

As a result of engaging with young people from culturally diverse communities, it has been my experience that the number of deaths of young people in the South Sudanese in particular community are quite concerning. In 2013-14 I had attended three funerals in Melbourne, VIC of young people within the South Sudanese community, whilst one young person remained seriously injured in hospital. I am aware of at least another four somewhat suspicious, preventable deaths of young people within the broader African communities over the last eight years in Melbourne (2008-2014).[iii]

The arrival of a large intake of Africans in the post-World War II period marks the unprecedented arrival of large communities from Africa where 'increasing African immigration has been part of the post-war transformation of Australia from an overwhelmingly British-dominated population to a multicultural society' (Hugo, 2009: 17).

It is my contention in this research summary, that the African community in Australia is a community with noticeably darker skin[iv] in contrast to the majority of mainstream Australians and other migrant groups and due to this factor this has limited feelings of inclusion in Australia for this community (Colic-Peisker, 2005; Khan & Person, 2010). The only other predominant cultural community with noticeably darker skin that exist in Australia are Aboriginal Australians with a history of facing their own challenges.[v] It has been suggested that both of these groups are 'of lower socio-economic status and are highly visible in the context of a predominantly white Australia' (Colic-Peisker, 2008: 38).

2. Aims of and Justification for the Research

The concept of 'increasing social inclusion'[vi] is a catch phrase that is often used in funding submissions to capture the honourable intentions of the submitters in order to address the question of how Australians are going to get along and live harmoniously with one another. With increasing cultural diversity and increasing members of traumatised populations in Australia (Australian Government: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012: 6, 34) it becomes seemingly difficult for the Australian community[vii] to imagine that this ideal is obtainable particularly when structural racism is embedded in our society and takes many forms often affecting the culturally diverse communities of Australia (VIC Health, 2008).

On the streets and in Melbourne's suburbs a strong support for multiculturalism (State Government of Victoria, 2009: 22) has not always been evident as minority groups (such as youth from African backgrounds) have expressed that they often feel misunderstood by the wider Australian community particularly as a result of misleading media reporting:

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> "We come from terrible places and think this will be somewhere to call home, and all I hear now in the newspapers is that we are criminals and that we are gangs and we should go home. Politicians should be very careful about what they say because they are very powerful.
> - Community focus group" (AHRC, 2010: 51).

The visibility of different groups of migrants is said to be the determining factor as to whether one faces disadvantage whereby it is acknowledged that the

> 'diversity of immigration intake has increasingly brought visibly different communities to Australia who may be subject to real or perceived racism and discrimination in their dealings with government and therefore may be tentative and reluctant to engage with the Australian Government and its service providers' (Access and Equity Inquiry Panel, 2012: 27).

Similar to this research study, Henry-Waring's interest is the link between multiculturalism and visible migrants and refugees where she states that 'skin colour is one of the most visible markers of difference and along with ethnicity, religion, language, and culture, forms a key part of how society includes and excludes' (Henry-Waring, 2011: 7). She unapologetically emphasises that 'we are clearly not all equal...some groups are not given 'a fair go', but instead they have time limits imposed on their inclusion and period of settlement' (Henry-Waring, 2011: 9).

The research question "what does social inclusion mean in Australia when you obviously stand out?" was therefore developed due to the experiences that I had with the existing community of African Australians (predominantly South Sudanese[viii] young people in Melbourne). Members of this community have expressed that they feel that due to their noticeably darker skin they feel like they "stand out" in the Australian landscape and as a result, this therefore makes feelings of inclusion or being able to "fit in" in Australian society seemingly difficult. For example, Farouque and Cook report that 'their skin tone, height and clothing and a certain defiant attitude make these [South]-Sudanese-born youths stand out' (Farouque & Cooke, 2007, 3). Height in particular is 'frequently evoked in relation to the [South]-Sudanese' (Windle, 2008: 557). There is however, 'no social psychological research that directly examines community attitudes towards this group' (Khan and Pederson, 2010: 116).

3. Methodology

The research design is not limited to a literary approach but rather an Action Research approach where it includes observation of young people through *Footprints* projects and collecting evaluation material, interviews, review of policy documents, research papers and media reports, collection of social media comments, group discussion and attendance at public forums, photography and film-making and most importantly, talking with members of community who have been a part of *Footprints' projects* who are artists themselves or who may have attended a performance as an audience member. I have also chosen to interview practitioners associated with *Footprints* who have come from teaching/education, police, arts curator, arts and cultural development, youth-work, health/mental-health or public policy backgrounds.

The basic premise of Action Research (AR) is that 'action has to be followed by reflection, as reflection has to be accompanied by action' (Levin, 2012: 133-134). This involves:

> 'the emancipatory notion of praxis... where knowledge is not only about finding out about the world, but bout changing it. Therefore, not only are participants of an inquiry analysed in terms of their potential for developing group action, but critical researchers themselves engage oppressive structures, and their own inquiries thus embody praxiological concerns' (Truman, Mertens, & Humphries, 2000: 6).

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Wadsworth (1997: 36), describes 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR) as a process whereby the researcher immerses himself/herself in a community over a period of time rather than observing from a far-off distance and making comments.

Throughout the research report I see myself as the primary researcher/storyteller and have chosen to use an auto-ethnographic approach[ix] which allows me to speak in first person. By doing so, I feel it is more personal and reflective of the type of approach I use in my practise as a relational being.

Participants are grouped as being either primary (young creative persons aged 14-35), secondary (people working with the young people or community representatives aged 35+) or general specialist participants (arts patron). I've used the abbreviations p, sp and gsp. Those from African backgrounds (A) and those who are Person's of Colour (POC) that may have lighter skin/ come from migrant backgrounds.
Participants are primarily from culturally diverse backgrounds (e.g. Afghanistan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, Burma, New Zealand, Cook Islands, Zimbabwe, and also originate from parts of Asia, European descent, and Australian born minority groups) as well as young people with artistic talent who may identify as disenfranchised from the mainstream community.
The particular focus is on young people primarily from African descent who have come to Australia on a Refugee (subclass #200) or Humanitarian VISA (subclass #202) (DEECD, 2011: 2; Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2007; UNHCR 2008; Gifford, Correa-Velez, & Sampson, 2009: 18).

I am however primarily only commenting of the experiences of those from South Sudan who arguably are a community of whom have the darkest skin in Africa.[x] As of 2008, the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Population Census* reported that there are an estimate of 24, 796 Sudanese residents in Australia (as a result of the influx of refugees since 1992 and especially since 2006) with a strong concentration living in metropolitan areas such as Sydney and Melbourne. The South Sudanese are the fourth largest population of those persons born in Southern and Eastern African nations with those from South Africa leading the way (136,201 residents in 2008), followed by Zimbabwe (27,369 residents in 2008) and then Mauritius (23,379 residents in 2008)(AHRC, 2009: 19-20, 23, 57). This research does not seek to generalise to all African Australian experiences as these are varied as the countries they come from.

The information gathered provides case-studies and auto- ethnography about the impact of *Footprints`* initiatives as well as generative discussion formulating new ideas and projects (McIlveen, 2008; Freire, 1970/1993; Bourdieu, 1977; Tillmann-Healy, 2003; Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012: 147; Truman, Mertens, & Humphries, 2000: 15, 17; Ellis, 1999: 673).

This project works with small samples and uses a common multi or mixed method approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bowen, 2005; Denzin, 2010; Halcomb, Gholizadeh, Digiacomo, Phillips, & Davidson, 2007; Jehn & Jonsen, 2010; Jubany, 2011; Konecki, 2008; Pascale, 2009; Perlesz & Lindsay, 2003; Shwartz, Steffensmeier & Feldmeyer, 2009; Sweetman, Badiee & Creswell, 2010; Vikströma, 2010; Young, 2009) whereby multiple sources of information are layered together in attempt to answer complex social questions. The project does not seek to extrapolate to the wider population.
A multi-method approach is said to be beneficial as it 'provides options for answering a variety of questions, which in turn generates a rich, comprehensive set of data and information. It also enables a process of triangulation to be applied, thus increasing and verifying the validity of the final analysis' (Dockery cited in Truman, Mertens & Humphries, 2000: 97).

Additional research methods include:

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- Indigenous Methods (Truman, Mertens & Humphries, 2000; Macmillan, 2005; Wilson, 2008). This research tool provided an opportunity to include the voices of 'people of colour' (my friends and colleagues) without presuming to speak for them. The use of "storytelling" or "narrative" is a strong feature of this method.

- Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Bushe, 2013; Wadsworth, 1997: 39 – 41) – a form of interviewing technique that recognises the strengths of individuals in dialogue and not necessarily from a deficit approach.

- 'Intercultural Facework Competence' techniques (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998: 200) – as a community cultural development practitioner I am aware of the complexities of working amongst various cultural groups in complex environments and therefore aware of the potential for conflict to occur. As a result, upholding the relationship between the participants was seen to be of high importance over research outcomes.

I have chosen as a research site the City of Greater Dandenong (CGD) [xi] in Melbourne where I live. This area is a common settlement zone in Australia for former refugee communities particularly those from African nations. For example, the [South]-Sudanese population in the City of Greater Dandenong accounted for little over 100 in 2001 compared to 2650 in 2006. This represented one third of all [South]-Sudanese people settled in metropolitan Melbourne and almost half of the humanitarian arrivals in Greater Dandenong during that period (City of Greater Dandenong Statistics, 2008).

In addition, the *CGD* is the 'most culturally diverse locality in Victoria, and the second most diverse in Australia, with residents from over 150 different birthplaces, well over half (60%) of its population born overseas, and 55% from nations where English is not the main spoken language [metro. Melbourne: 26%]' (City of Greater Dandenong, 2012: 1).

The area also faces a number of challenges. In 2001, the suburb of Dandenong in Victoria had

> '4,000 people living in one of the most disadvantaged 5% of CDs based on the 2001 SEIFA index of relative disadvantage, from a total population of approximately 16,700 people. In 2006, Dandenong had approximately the same total population of 16,700. However, almost 5,000 of these people lived in one of the most disadvantaged 5% of CDs based on the 2006 SEIFA index' (Australian Government, 2010: 84-85).

I have worked in the Settlement sector here for nine years now and have observed the common disadvantages of former refugees where everyone appears to be "settled" in the same (often lower socio-economic) area. Some of these common disadvantages include high unemployment rates, difficulty with access to affordable housing and services, experiences with discrimination and a struggle with English language proficiency to name a few.

As a person who has acquired research skills working with, alongside and in the community, I hope to offer back to the community a critical reflection and embark on knowledge sharing from the expedition of the last nine years of experience.

4. Results - "What Does Social Inclusion Mean in Australia When You Obviously Stand Out?"

This section focuses on hearing first-hand accounts from young people in particular from this community and from those invested in walking alongside this community and multicultural communities in Australia. This section is therefore designed to address the research question *"What does social inclusion mean in Australia when you obviously stand out?"* We move to the participants responses themselves as to whether they feel it is possible to "fit in" in the Australian context and whether "fitting in" is in fact the desired goal at all.

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Social Exclusion and Standing Out

We will now turn to what two participants had to say about what the concept of standing out means to them:

Secondary participants	
Caucasian appearance	*"I am white and middle class so I don't stand out at all."* (ID 15, sp)
Person of Colour (Migrant)	*"It is the social element of it or the everyday micro-living aspect that will tell us whether inclusion happens when you obviously stand out – practise in the everyday. I stand out as a woman, I stand out as a brown woman, I stand out as a professional woman, I stand out as a Mother. It is not just those with disabilities or CALD groups. Social inclusion in all sectors has a different meaning."* (ID 21, sp, POC)

From the two participant responses and this analysis we may now infer more directly that being of Caucasian appearance in Australia is perceived to be the "in-group" or the group as a whole that often feels "included" in Australia (however as suggested there are also other ways described where people of different sub-groups may not feel included or feel like they stand out). For the purposes of this research summary, for those who are not included in this "in-group" (e.g. as is suggested in this report "People of Colour") it is implied here that a number of behavioural responses may occur as a result and certainly emotional responses which we will turn to shortly.

Oxoby describes how identifying with a particular identity or group behaviour often distinguishes "in-group" and "out-group" members. Being labelled into a particular group can therefore lead to a level of exclusion which limits some individual's access to resources or institutions, and may result in being discriminated against. As a result individuals might begin to make choices about how they express or present themselves to society (Oxoby, 2009: 12-13). Here, Oxoby uses an example of Eitle and Eitle's (2002, 19-20) research where they studied cultural capital and the decisions made amongst "black and white youth's." One scenario that was described was where a particular young person might feel excluded due to poor performance at school but then find they may be able to perform well in a sports team and therefore feel more included.

This description of exclusion and identity implies that as a result of not being in the "in-group" an individual or group may therefore experience being "stereotyped." For example, a common stereotype in Australia is that if a group of young people who are People of Colour are hanging out at a train station they are often perceived as something to be feared or cautious about.[xii] Oxoby describes how the introduction of inclusive policies can assist with inclusion whereby 'developing an inclusive economy requires attention to how policies foster identity and influence of beliefs about oneself and others' (Oxoby, 2009: 13).

What does "Fitting In" Look Like?

In the 2006 *ABS General Social Survey*, it was identified that 'almost half of the Australian population aged 18 years and over found it difficult to have a say in their community about issues important to them' (Australian Government, 2010: 57). This research report was therefore produced to give a small number of young people and stakeholders the opportunity to have a say about issues important to them, namely "What does "fitting in" in the Australian context look like?

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See below a small extract of what some of the 31 participants had to say about this question. Once again, it appears, the participant from an African background appeared to view this question on a more personal level where being made to feel like you didn't fit in was an impingement on his human rights:

Primary participant	
African background	*"People are allowed to judge other people but when it gets to the point where they are stopped from being free that encroaches upon their humanity."* (ID 11, p, A)
Secondary participants	
	"Fitting in would be walking down the street and not being judged by what you look like and what you wear. Fitting in would mean having the same opportunities as everyone else." (ID 12, sp)
	"For people to feel included I believe it is about other people valuing their culture. Generally, people like to see a representation of themselves to feel included. When people get to do what they like to do they are more likely to feel more socially included.[xiii]*"* (ID 15, sp)
	"It is difficult to make statements about whether it's possible to fit in or what fitting in looks like. Everyone feels differently." (ID 19, sp)
	"In order to be socially included it means that people make choices as to how much they modify or perform their opinions, dress, behaviour etc." (ID 3, sp)

In terms of looking at what fitting in looks like on a theoretical level, Michael Ignatieff argues that 'to belong' means to feel safe' (Yuval-Davis, 2010: 276). Ghassan Hage claims that 'for a person to feel 'at home' requires the combined effect of familiarity, security, community and a sense of possibility' (Yuval-Davis, 2010: 276).

In terms of people who come from ethnic minorities, Vaughan (1986) has identified that these groups who are often disadvantaged (educationally, economically, and politically) are typified by lowered self-esteem when they are compared to the mainstream. Vaughan suggests that if such groups experience a level of social change, for example if their status within society is improved, this may lead to a significant improvement of feelings of pride and individuals feeling a sense of "self-worth" (Vaughan & Hogg, 2011: 146).

Is It Possible to "Fit In"?

There were varying degrees as to whether participants felt it was possible to "fit in" in the Australian society in the current context.

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One primary participant of South Sudanese background who is a professional and has completed university stated enthusiastically stated that *"Yes, straight up yes I do think it is possible to fit in in Australian society when you obviously stand out"* (ID 30, A). He went on to speak about how focussing on commonalities helped him to connect where he believed that

> *"...It doesn't necessarily mean we have to change our own morals or views about things. It is possible to coexist and clash on some morals. You might physically stand out but it is possible to mentally fit in"* (ID 30, P, A).

For this young person he alluded to the fact that his amount of time living in Australia assisted in his feeling included. His ability to find employment and have a wide range of friends assisted in this process.

Another participant was also optimistic about the possibility of fitting in for some individuals particularly young people where she stated that *"some young people then might fit in, there are pockets of great things happening but overall we have a long way to go. It is not a statement about the whole of society."* (ID 19, sp) Others described the amount of effort taken and the context of "fitting in" amongst certain sub-cultures or a certain area but not amongst "the whole of Australia" whereby you may feel comfortable belonging to an interest group such as attending regular reggae nights where people of many cultures are united by music or in a particular suburb such as Footscray in Victoria.

Some participants were adamant that it would never be possible to "fit in" particularly because of what it is that you are expected to fit in to, i.e. you might have to "become white" in order to do so. A participant of South Sudanese descent stated that in his experience

> *"You never fit in if you stand out (especially if you have noticeably darker skin). You feel like the target market and constantly on the look-out.*
>
> *People do not actually care what you do with yourself until you mess up or make a mistake and are ready to respond then. It then justifies what they first thought.*
>
> *Having to fit in is a burden."* (ID 2, A)

Is Australia Going to Improve Over Time?

Finally, I asked participants whether they felt this would improve over time. There were a small number of participants who did not feel it was not possible to feel like they would "fit in" in Australia anytime soon, particularly if you "stand out". This was especially true for those with noticeably darker skin. Their responses could be summarised by one participant response where a young South Sudanese artist and youth worker stated:

> *"I believe no matter what you will always stand out in Australia. Australia has not reached that point as the same with the UK or America where those from African backgrounds or those who are black don't necessarily stand out, they are more accepted.*
>
> *Australian society might start to become more accepting however the Australian government are puppets and try to perpetuate the not fitting in."* (ID 29, p, A)

When Henry-Waring conducted similar research[xiv] and looked at this notion of belonging many of the participants in her studies 'wanted to belong to Australian society. Yet at the same time, there was a realisation amongst a number of migrants and refugees that they could never fully belong to Australian society' (Henry-Waring, 2012: 6). She went on to explain that this was 'due to a constant questioning of their presence and the largely negative and pervasive public and political discourse about migrants and refugees as a problem' (Henry-Waring, 2012: 6). There was a 'hope and expectation that it would be different for their children' (Henry-Waring, 2012: 6).

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Is There a Need to "Fit In"? The Nature of Standing Out as Positive

Not all participants felt that it was in fact necessary to "fit in" and that it was ok to stand out in Australia and still be in dialogue.

One participant who is a former refugee shared some insightful comments and broke this down into the following points to which other participants also reflected on to some degree:

- *"To stand out should not be the issue. We are all individuals whom should stand out in our own right based on our own unique self.*
- *It is when we conform and become slaves to society that we lose a track of our identity and point out those who will not or cannot conform to our own set of ideals.*
- *In today's society, not "fitting in" to the dominant social construct is not seen as a celebration but rather a negative aspect and negatively impacts on the individual. This is the society we live in.*
- *Change will happen when we appreciate our uniqueness knowing well that each one of us should stand out based on our opinion, beliefs, looks etc, because this will nourish a strong society based on strong opinions and ideas."* (ID 1, p)

In some ways, this study moved beyond whether People of Colour feel like they "fit in" in a dominant Caucasian society in Australia or feel comfortable with their skin colour in general as a result of being in the minority. I have noticed a more significant presence of Black Power movements even in Australia as observed through *Facebook* where young People of Colour have set up groups affirming that there are ways to "fit in" when you obviously stand out when you stand proud in your cultural identity. For example, the *Team Dark Chocolate* (TDC) page[xv] was set up by a group of friends from the South Sudanese community in Melbourne where the group states their purpose:

> *"We love, protect, respect and support black life. This page is to celebrate, educate and unite the black community."*

When discussing this concept with individuals who set up this group it is clear that they don't want to live or hang out exclusively together but wish to highlight the positives of black culture for all individuals in Australia.

5. Discussion – Broader Impacts of Feelings of Social Exclusion

The concerns of broader African Australians have been substantiated in a report conducted by the *Australian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission* in 2010 titled '*In Our Own Words - African Australians: A Review of Human Rights and Social Inclusion Issues*',[xvi] which involved a series of community consultations involving African communities across Australia. The consultations concluded that many African Australians lost their loved ones to war. Resettling in Australia has therefore been a struggle as they strive to learn English, continue with an education path (not necessarily having been exposed to formal schooling in the past) and go on to find employment in which they are told they need "Australian experience." Battling negative stereotypes, prejudice, racism and discrimination were said to be the key factors undermining their potential for equal rights as equal citizens in Australia (AHRC, 2010). In addition, the vast majority of the 2500 African Australians who participated in the project said that 'having a 'visibly different' appearance did impact upon their everyday experiences' (AHRC, 2010: 12).

In this research summary, the experiences described such as the deaths of my friends are likened to high incidences of Aboriginal deaths in custody in Australia (Brunton, 1993; Kelaher, Ferdinand & Paradies, 2015) or the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement in the U.S.[xvii] Racial profiling, experiences of racism and mental health concerns are given as one reason why young people from these communities may feel "at a loss" or disadvantaged in society (Ferdinand, Paradies & Kelaher, 2015; Paradies, Ben,

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Gee et al, 2015; Khan, 2010). This research summary does not seek to get into all of the reasons why these young black deaths occurred specifically. Instead, it goes into detail using young voices detailing why some young People of Colour feel like they do not always fit into Australian society and the debilitating effects this has as a result.

The associated health impacts of discrimination have been documented in a study titled *Mental Health Impacts of Racial Discrimination in Australian Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: a Cross-sectional Survey w*hereby data was collected from 1,139 Australians regarding types of racial discrimination experienced, settings for these incidents, response mechanisms and psychological distress as measured by the Kessler 6 (K6) Psychological Distress Scale. The results showed that 'age, education, religion, gender, visibility and rurality were all significantly associated with differences in the frequency of experiencing racial discrimination' (Ferdinand, Paradies & Kelaher, 2015). The study results indicated that 'poorer mental health was associated with the volume of discrimination experienced, rather than the type of experience. However, the impact of experiencing discrimination in some settings was shown to be particularly associated with high or very high psychological distress' (Ferdinand, Paradies & Kelaher, 2015).

One only has to watch the news to see the results of actions taken by disenfranchised young people from various cultural backgrounds (reported predominantly to be of South-Sudanese and Pacific Islander descent) to be publicly brawling and causing havoc on the night of the *Moomba Festival* in Melbourne on 12th March, 2016. In an article titled *"Our safety betrayed by ugly cover up of refugee program"* (Bolt, 2016:1), sensationalist journalists such as Andrew Bolt writing for the *Herald Sun* seek to use this incident to cause fear and division amongst the mainstream of Australia.

Joumanah el Matrah from the *Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights* however dispels such notions when speaking about minority ethnic and religious groups in Australia at a recent *Red Cross National Practitioners Forum* hosted in Melbourne on 9th March 2016 focusing on 'Advancing social cohesion: cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in Australian communities.' Matrah can be paraphrased in saying that *"it is not human diversity that creates conflict. It is inequality... The expulsion of people in society occurs due to the fact that they are seen as different by other people."*

Khan & Pederson (2010), comment on the notion of prejudice and the function of attitudes towards perceived out-groups in society. It is suggested that for attitude change to occur, 'people must perceive that the attitude they hold is no longer serving its function' (Katz cited in Khan & Pederson, 2010: 117).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The data such as mentioned in the *VIC Health* research suggests that a high percentage of Victorians feel wary of those with noticeably darker skin in the Australian context.[xviii] One key recommendation from *VicHealth* was that 'there is a specific need to better understand and address the negative attitudes held by some people towards people from refugee, Middle Eastern and African backgrounds and well as those of the Islamic faith' (VICHealth, 2014: 12).

We have looked at how some African diaspora communities and other diverse groups from refugee backgrounds came to be in Australia and have heard accounts of what it is like for this community after settling in Australia.

As suggested, some members of this community have identified that it is somewhat difficult to experience a feeling of 'fitting in' in Australia (difficult to feel 'socially included') due to having noticeably darker skin colour than the majority of Australians. As a result, this experience has had implications for the certain lifestyle they are then able to lead. It has been suggested that this feeling is due to African youth being described recently as 'problematic, unable to integrate and potentially a major threat to social cohesion in Australia' (Hobday cited in Mansouri & Skrbis, 2013: 5).

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The participants in this research report believe that Australia has a long way to go in ensuring that ALL Australians no matter what culture or race feel included in Australian society. This is an important reflection from the multicultural community at a time when 'Australia continues to have active permanent and temporary migration programs… which are likely to continue into the future to meet foreseeable economic and social objectives' (Access and Equity Inquiry Panel, 2012: 24).

Migrants and former refugees speaking through this research, particularly those with noticeably darker skin (such as those that came from South Sudan) highlighted the barriers they have been facing. Other participants involved did not necessarily come from such backgrounds however had strong interactions with these communities and may have also experienced the feeling of being excluded due to their lifestyle choices for example (the choice to hang with minority groups may be one of them).

In her research, Henry-Waring concludes that

> 'to ensure an ongoing and open dialogue, there need to be better forms of communication, training and education for all sectors of the community, about migrants and refugees and host communities. This means working with a wider and more diverse concept of community, social capital and social cohesion. It means that what is required is a critical review and engagement of governments, media and other key institutions. This may also necessarily demand the proper resourcing of targeted and other initiatives for migrants and refugees, especially those most excluded. And finally, further research is called for, to focus on the links between policy and practice' (Henry-Waring, 2011: 10).

I would have to agree with a resounding yes as this statement summarises the key recommendations from this research study. I sincerely hope that this body of research that I have conducted contributes to this important process in some way!!

Notes:

[i] For the purposes of this research summary, I am primarily only commenting of the experiences of those from South Sudan who arguably are a community of whom have the darkest skin in Africa. This is my opinion. See online discussion 'Where in Africa has the darkest people?' for other's opinions http://au.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20101126112000AAr8w2A .
As of 2008, the Australian Bureau of Statistics Population Census reported that there are an estimate of 24, 796 Sudanese residents in Australia (as a result of the influx of refugees since 1992 and especially since 2006) with a strong concentration living in metropolitan areas such as Sydney and Melbourne. The South Sudanese are the fourth largest population of those persons born in Southern and Eastern African nations with those from South Africa leading the way (136,201 residents in 2008), followed by Zimbabwe (27,369 residents in 2008) and then Mauritius (23,379 residents in 2008)(AHRC, 2009: 19-20, 23, 57).
[ii] The organisation name '*Footprints Enterprises Inc*.' is used interchangeably with the shortened version '*Footprints*' or '*Footprints Fam*.'
Footprints' was developed in order to 'create spaces to bring about social change through the creative arts.' We believe that a young person's story is important to them and if they choose to express it, the guise of art offers an opportunity for this story to be told in a way that crosses human barriers of understanding.
Footprints' seeks to support young people's exploration of their identity through the use of creative arts in a supportive, likeminded community. By using the tool of creative expression as a bridge we hope to inspire and educate - addressing racial tensions in Australia.
- Grounded Project http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tp9p58X9_5c, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQMdDQFc9fk
- Screening of Warchild – fundraiser to send Aluong Majok to Sudanese Summit in Nairobi
- Emmanuel Jal tour http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNotjGCPXhk
- Gua camp
- Ubuntu stage http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=K11Q24aiTsE http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T970vMWTbaA&feature=related

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-       Ashiki Africa http://vimeo.com/38077909
-       Lions and Luminaries http://vimeo.com/38136795
-       We Want Peace Australia http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lRt_zS3g-cE

[iii] For example, see reports on Ethiopian community member Michael Atakelt's death:
http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/coroner-tells-police-to-reinvestigate-death-20130215-2eia2.html
http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/fresh-appeal-over-body-in-the-river-20130408-2hg5h.html
http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/family-of-drowned-ethiopian-man-question-police-investigation-20131129-2yh60.html.

[iv] 'The term **black people** is an everyday English-language phrase, often used in socially-based systems of racial classification or of ethnicity to describe persons who are defined as belonging to a "black" ethnicity in their particular country, typically having a degree of Sub-Saharan African ancestry, or who are perceived to be dark-skinned relative to other "racial groups".

Different societies, such as Australia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States and South Africa apply differing criteria regarding who is classified as "black", and these criteria have also varied over time. In some countries, social variables affect classification as much as skin-color, and the social criteria for "blackness" vary. For example, in North America the term *black people* is not necessarily an indicator of skin color or ethnic origin but is more of a socially-based racial classification related to being African American, with a family history related to institutionalized slavery. In South Africa, mixed-race people are not considered to be "black", and in other regions, such as Australia and Melanesia, the term "black" has been applied to, and used by, populations with a very different history.' see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_people.

[v] Also 'Dark-skinned populations inhabiting South Asia, Africa, Melanesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia all live in some of the areas with the highest UV radiation in the world, and have evolved very dark skin pigmentations as protection from the harmful sun rays... The Aborigines of Australia, as with all humans, are descendants of African migrants, and their ancestors may have been among the first major groups to leave Africa around 50,000 years ago. Despite early migrations, genetic evidence has pointed out that the indigenous peoples of Australia are genetically very dissimilar to the dark-skinned populations of Africa and that they are more closely related to Eurasian populations.

The term black initially has been applied as a reference to the skin pigmentation of the Aborigines of Australia; today it has been embraced by Aboriginal activists as a term for shared culture and identity, regardless of skin colour.' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_skin

For commentary on the varying experiences of Aboriginals in Australia with varying pigment colour of skin see: https://theconversation.com/white-face-some-notes-from-a-fair-skinned-aboriginal-26222.

[vi] 'A socially inclusive society is defined as one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. Social exclusion is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into the community' (Cappo cited in VIC Health, 2005: 1).

[vii] See http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/.

[viii] 'Young people from Sudan were the largest group of Humanitarian youth entrants in Victoria in 2006/07 (25%)' with 'Melbourne being the primary destinations for Humanitarian arrivals in Victoria. In 2006/07, 25.2% of all Humanitarian youth entrants settled in the City of Greater Dandenong followed by 9% in Wyndham, 8.9% in Brimbank and 8.7% in Hume. Of the regional settlement areas, Greater Shepparton (4%), Mildura (2.2%) and Swan Hill (1.8%) settled the greatest numbers of young people on humanitarian visas....' (CMY. 2007: 1-2). Between 2002 – 2007, almost 2,200 South Sudanese young people settled in Victoria (CMY, 2007: 1).

'Young people from Sudan, Burma, Afghanistan and Iraq represent the largest components of the Humanitarian program for the age group 13-25, accounting for 75% of the total intake in 2006/07'... With regard to the top 10 countries of birth for youth entrants, [there has been] a steady drop in the number of Sudanese young people arriving since 2004/05, and a regional shift in the intake away from Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia) towards Southeast Asia (Burma, Thailand). In 2006/07, 37.5% of Humanitarian youth entrants to Victoria were from Africa, 32.5% were from the Middle East, 29.8% were from Southeast and Southern Asia, and 0.2% were from Europe' (CMY, 2007: 1). For an update on the current Humanitarian Intake in Australia see www.refugeecouncil.org.au where trends have changed towards hosting primarily Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHM's) from Afghanistan (2014).

[ix] 'Auto-ethnographic methodology' - 'aligns with activist research by capturing the process of praxis (Freire, 1970/1993), rooted in critical theory and pedagogy. Also, as a methodology, it allows collaborating researchers and writers to more accurately represent the tempo (Bourdieu, 1977), intimacy (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), uncertainty, and complexity of relationships.... Further, critical co-constructed auto-ethnography generates

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opportunities for solidarity among marginalized groups as well as across difference, inspiring those in spaces of privilege to be allies in social justice work' (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012: 147).

[x] This is my opinion. See online discussion 'Where in Africa has the darkest people?' for other's opinions http://au.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20101126112000AAr8w2A.

[xi] See: http://www.greaterdandenong.com/.
See also: "Project D" *You Tube* video where the producer interviewed residents to explain how they felt about living in multicultural Dandenong - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIdVSUZ5UMY.

[xii] For an example of perceived stereotypes of particular cultural groups in Melbourne Australia see: S.W.A.G. – South-East Working Against Generalisations: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PehNpN1x1ao

[xiii] This participant used *The Social Studio* http://www.thesocialstudio.org as an example of a place where she believed People of Colour can adequately represent themselves through creative expression ie. In fashion and in hospitality whereby: 'The Social Studio is a fashion label, shop and café that celebrates the style and skills of diverse cultures in Australia.

[xiv] See also: *Ipsos McKay* report where the notion of fitting in and belonging was also explored whereby 'migrants appeared to be very sensitive about whether their friendships with Australians were, in fact, genuine or merely polite. Certainly, in social contexts, they expected to encounter prejudice and were very pleased and relieved when it was either mild or absent' (Ipsos Eureka Social Research Institute, 2011: 101).

[xv] See: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Team-Dark-Chocolate-TDC/1441580526115777 .

[xvi] 'While this project is not the first to draw attention to the urgent challenges facing African Australians, it does – for the first time – consider everyday experiences from the viewpoint of African Australians, from a national perspective and within a human rights context' (AHRC, 2010: 5).

[xvii] My extended thesis comments on: Black Identity & African American Culture; Young People of Colour Who Have Had Negative Experiences With Police - America Contrast; Racism or Prejudice Against Blacks & New Racism #blacklivesmatter movement.

[xviii] 'The State Government of Victoria made a statement about the potential for racial and religious discrimination in 2009 which was somewhat unprecedented when it came to acknowledging the R word:
'While Victoria is proud of its record in combating discrimination, we need to be vigilant and continue to work against all forms of discrimination, racism and vilification.
Racial and religious discrimination or vilification towards people from CALD backgrounds can limit their access to education, employment and housing and affect their health. There is a significant correlation between discrimination and disadvantage.
There are clear benefits to reducing discrimination and considerable costs if this is not achieved. Discrimination in employment and in other areas of public life limits people's human rights, works against social and economic participation, contributes to disadvantage and is contrary to Victoria's values of fairness and opportunity.
The Victorian Government has a clear commitment to a fairer society that is inclusive, embraces diversity and promotes civic and economic participation. It recognises that tackling discrimination and racism is an essential pre-cursor to community cohesion' (State Government of Victoria, 2009: 20).

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