Negotiating Changing Identities: Exploring Ethnic Identity in Children of Migrant and Refugee

Backgrounds

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Abstract

Ethnic identity is recognised as an individual's identification with an ethnic group. Maintaining one's ethnic identity can mediate challenging experiences associated with settlement, such as education, discrimination, and psychological well-being. Ethnic identity studies have focused on second generation adolescent and adult's exploration and commitment to their ethnic group. Few studies have explored children of migrant and refugee backgrounds' conceptualisation of ethnic identity. This study investigated the saliency of ethnic identity in children aged 5 – 12 years and whether children's conceptualisation indicated exploration and commitment to their ethnic group as well. Using inductive thematic analysis, secondary interview extracts of 36 children from 15 countries were analysed. Participants were recently settled migrant and refugee background children, enrolled in Intensive English Language Programs across three metropolitan schools in South Australia. Six positive markers of place were identified as: identifying with a country of origin; locating family to country; here and there: co-ethnic friends; sugary memories of food; drawing upon heritage knowledge; and the physical profiles of place. Findings indicate children's ethnic identity is both salient and reflective of elements of exploration and commitment. Findings also tentatively suggest the incorporation of these salient markers of place into programs aimed at developing children's ethnic identity

Declaration

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Tamina S. Islam

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

In 2018, 29% of Australia's population were migrants born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2019). The process of migrating to another country, as a migrant or refugee background person is rife with challenges – experienced by individuals of all ages. Much like their adolescent and adult counterparts, migrant and refugee background children experience a range of challenges associated with migration and resettlement including: the negative effects of perceived discrimination (see Beiser & Hou, 2016; Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, Cabral, 2008), poorer psychological well-being from migration experience (i.e. Alati, Najman, Shuttlewood, Williams, & Bor, 2003; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012), and challenges associated with schooling and education (i.e. Cole, 1998; Graham, Minhas, & Paxton, 2016; and Matthews, 2008). While this research provides a picture of the challenges that children may experience upon resettlement, very little research has explored a facet of their experience which may positively impact all these elements: namely, that of ethnic identity. Indeed, the vast majority of research relating to ethnic identity has focused solely on adolescents with refugee or migrant backgrounds, or ethnic minorities within their countries of birth (i.e. Else-Quest & Morse, 2014; Howes & Hammett, 2016; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Sabatier, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2015). As such, this study aimed to explore ethnic identity from the perspective of children (aged five to twelve years) in order to investigate understandings of ethnic identity in migrant and refugee background children.

1.2 Key Terminology

1.2.1 Social, cultural and racial identity. An identified challenge of studying ethnic identity is the lack of an agreed upon definition of ethnic identity – as the understanding of ethnic identity has varied with different definitions used by researchers (Phinney, 1990). Most commonly, researchers identified ethnic identity as an aspect of one's broader social identity as proposed by the social identity theory (SIT) (Sala, Dandy, & Rapley, 2010). SIT proposes an individual's identity is acquired from firstly, an awareness of their membership to a social group and secondly, the subjective significance of the social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through SIT, ethnic identity is understood as one's membership to their ethnic group. The Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG) characterises an ethnic group as sharing ancestry, history, cultural practices, geographic region, language and religious practices (ABS, 2017).

Culture is typically defined as a social and subjective experience, connected to social norms, values and beliefs (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Despite cultures role in influencing ethnic identity – the two terms have been used interchangeably in studies (i.e. Raman, 2006; Schwartz, Birman, Benet-Martinez & Unger, 2016; and Song, 1997).

Similarly, ethnic and racial identity have been used interchangeably, as some researchers view them as similar constructs (i.e Umana-Taylor et al., 2014; Byrd, 2012; Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). While there are many definitions of race and racial identity and some overlap between racial and ethnic identity, racial identity is largely concerned with the perceived differences of social distance between socio-cultural groups (Quintana, 1998; 2007).

1.2.2 Defining ethnic identity. The definition of ethnic identity used in this study is by Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder (2001) who conceptualised ethnic identity as one's self

identification and sense of belonging, shared values and attitudes towards one's own ethnic

group. Phinney (1996) views ethnic identity as a continuous factor – whereby individuals lie

somewhere on a continuum of weak to strong ethnic group identification. Consequently, ethnic

identity is a multifaceted construct (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Phinney &

Ong, 2007) – meaning there are several factors which influence one's ethnic identity. Such

factors or ethnic identity markers include the maintenance of traditions, religion, language, ties to

family, and place of birth (Phinney et al., 2001; Asghari-Fard & Hossain, 2017).

Phinney (1989) also developed a general model of ethnic identity development based on

a normative sample of 91 American born (Mexican, Central American, Japanese, Chinese,

Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, and African American) adolescents between the ages of 15 – 17

years. The model outlines four stages of ethnic identity development, each stage corresponding

to varying degrees of exploration and commitment to one's ethnic group. The four stages are:

diffuse – where there is no awareness of one's ethnicity or ethnic group; foreclosed – little or no

exploration but positive or negative experiences from socialisation are found; moratorium –

evidence of exploration of one's ethnic group, with some confusion about its meaning; and

achieved – understanding one's belonging to an ethnic group. (Phinney, 1989).

1.2.3 Classifying the first and second generations. Another important distinction to

make regarding ethnic identity research is in relation to immigrant generation (Rumbaut, 2004).

First generation immigrants refer to those who are recent migrants and have experienced living

in their country of origin and born outside of the country they have migrated to (Liddell,

Nickerson, Sartor, Ivancic, & Bryant, 2016; Rumbaut, 2004) whereas second generation, or more

commonly known as the 'children of immigrants' are born in the country their parents migrated

to (Anderson, 2012; Berry & Sabatier, 2011; Rumbaut, 2004). As such, the experiences in

relation to learning and practicing cultural customs are different between these two generational groups.

  1.2.4 Defining migrants and refugees. This study explores ethnic identity in children with refugee and migrant backgrounds. The term 'refugee' refers to migration which is linked to forced displacement due to persecution, war and violence (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019), while the term 'migrant' refers to those who migrate to another country voluntarily. While there are differences in experiences between the two groups (and indeed, within them), this study treats them as one homogenous group as previous research suggest that migrant background children have "refugee like" experiences (Matthews, 2008).

1.3 Literature Review

  1.3.1 Second generation: adolescents and adults. The research to do with ethnic identity has been broad. It has included exploring the relationship between ethnic identity as a positive moderator of psychological wellbeing (Zdrenka, Yogeeswaran, Stronge, & Sibley, 2015; Nguyen, Wong, Juang, and Park, 2015) and decreasing the negative impacts of perceived discrimination (i.e. Umana-Taylor, Wong, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2011; Mossakowski, 2003). Another focus on second generation background adolescents is heritage socialisation practices, specifically heritage language use which strongly corresponds to one's identification with their ethnicity (Guardado & Becker, 2014; Oh & Fuligni, 2010). As well as these findings, understanding ethnic identity and the constructs which influence its' development is an integral component of ethnic identity research. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of ethnic identity in adolescents and adults is related to individual's exploration and commitment to their ethnic identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

1.2.1.1 Exploration of one's ethnic identity. Exploration is an important element of ethnic identity as it is the process individuals acquire the information needed to commit to their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992). Syed and Azmitia (2008) found exploration occurs after individual become aware of their ethnicity. They suggested awareness transpires through individual's observation of differences and awareness of their connections to their ethnicity. Following this, Syed et al., (2013), investigated the exploration of ethnic identity in 3,637 ethnic minority college students. They found 'exploration' is characterised by ethnic identity 'search'- the process of questioning one's ethnic group affiliations; and 'participation' –associating meaning to their belonging to an ethnic group through active learning about their ethnicity. While these identify the processes of 'exploration', Berry and Sabatier (2011) discussed the role of language maintenance, participation in ethnic social networks, and taking part in ethnic social practices such as reading, media and food as features of exploration. These features are also representative of ethnic behaviours, which influence and represent one's involvement with an ethnic group (Roberts et al., 1999). The salience of ethnic identity is also imperative to exploration. If ethnic identity is not salient in an individual, then little exploration is needed (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006).

1.2.1.2 Commitment to one's ethnic identity. Commitment to one's ethnic group membership includes self-identification/labelling and evaluation of in-group attitudes and values and beliefs (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Roberts et al. (1999) identified affirmations, sense of belonging, and positive feelings towards one's ethnic identity. The process of self-identification focuses on the type of labels ethnic background individuals prefer to ascribe to themselves. Kiang and Witkow (2018) investigated label preferences in 180 American Asian adolescents in years 9 and 10 of high school; finding individuals preferred using a heritage (birthplace of

parents), hyphenated (birthplace of parents and America), or pan-ethnic label (racialised labels such as "Asian"), suggesting individuals were strongly committed to their ethnic group. Interestingly, only a few ethnic background adolescents chose to identify as "American", however the study also noted choosing an "American" label increased with age. Similarly, heritage label use was correlated to the generation status of immigrant backgrounds as well as, ethnic identity was positively related to ethnic peers, ethnic affirmation, and heritage language (Kiang, 2008). Kiang and Fuligni (2009) found that ethnic identity affirmation corresponds to engagement with activities and parents' heritage followed by, friendships with co-ethnic peers and lowest affirmation with different ethnic peers.

      1.3.2 Second generation: children. The literature on children's ethnic identity has suggested ethnic identity negotiation is not salient during childhood (Phinney, 1989), with young children (aged 6 – 10 years) only able to identify their ethnicity but not understand why they do so (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Ocampo and Cota, 1990). However, recent studies have explored the relevance of ethnic identity in children – Marks, Szalacha, Lamarre, Boyd, & García, (2007) identified children of Cambodian, Dominican, and Portuguese backgrounds (aged 6 – 12 years) in the United States showing an awareness of their ethnicity – from both their parents' heritage and their American identity. Most notably however they found older children (average age 9.4 years) used more ethnic labels to describe themselves compared to their younger counterparts (average age 6.5 years), suggesting developmental age does impact ethnic identity awareness. Rogers et al., (2012) also suggested children of Chinese, Dominican, and Russian backgrounds associated meaning towards their ethnicity through their use of heritage language and the birthplace of their parents'. The study indicated children understood their ethnic identity through the knowledge they had of their ethnicity and their familial ties to their parents' country of origin.

In contrast children of Chinese backgrounds in Scotland (aged 8, 11, 14) sought national labels which did not reflect their parents' country of origin, however they nonetheless reported feeling both Chinese and British/Scottish (Dai, Williams, & McGregor, 2018). Another interesting finding by Dai et al., (2018) was the influence of social context on children's identifications, for example in a "Chinese context" such as eating food – children's Chinese aspect of their ethnic identity was stronger. Similar to findings from adult and adolescent studies, the importance of ethnic language is also important to children. In a mixed methods study conducted on 25 Latin American children (aged 5 – 12 years), Arredondo, Rosado, & Satterfield (2016) found children associated pride in their ethnic language use, as it signified their ability to converse with diverse groups of people. The researchers also noted children frequently discussed extended family members in relation to their understanding of their parents' ethnic group. Thus, ethnic identity understanding in second generation immigrant background children arises from their parents' country of origin, heritage language use and subsequent social ties to people who speak the same language, and contextual elements such as food.

Furthermore, researchers have also suggested the importance of understanding ethnic identity in children is integral as it forms the foundations of ethnic identity exploration later in adolescence and adulthood (Rogers et al., 2012); as children's conceptualization of ethnic identity transitions from concrete to more abstract understandings of what it means to belong with an ethnic group (Costigan, Su, & Hua, 2009).

1.3.3 Migrants and refugees' experiences of ethnic identity. It is important to note that the literature suggests differences between second generation and first generation migrant children. As Marks et al., (2007) found - ethnicity in second generation children is developed through familial ties, rather than through personal experiences. In addition to this, Lui (2015)

investigated individual's ethnic identity through semi-structured interviews with 35 first and second generation Chinese immigrant adults (aged 18 – 56) in Australia, some of which had migrated to Australia during childhood. Key findings indicated second generation immigrant background children used hyphenated labels such as "Chinese-Australian" or "Australian-Chinese" whereas first generation immigrants preferred to use a single heritage label "Chinese" to describe themselves. When asked to provide reasons for their self-identifications, Liu (2015) noted immigrants associated the 'Australian' aspect of identity with citizenship and years of residence in Australia; whereas the 'Chinese' aspect of ethnic identity is derived from beliefs, values, and familial connections. Similar self-identification findings were found by Feliciano and Rumbaut (2019) showed migrants who arrived as children preferred to make hyphenated labels to identify themselves, and ethnic labels were influenced by heritage language skills, family heritage, and religious identifications. Thus, it is imperative to investigate the experiences of first generation migrants and refugees.

Overall, research concerning ethnic identity in first generation migrant and refugees is not as prevalent as in second generation immigrant studies. While substantially less research has occurred with this group, it has largely been concentrated on refugee experiences. For example, in 64 Sudanese-Australian refugee youth in years 8 – 12 in high school, Hatoss and Sheely (2009) identified ethnic language was important for expressing their identity and maintaining their social networks. A similar qualitative study with 19 unaccompanied Sudanese refugee minors in the United States (aged 18 – 26 at the time of interviewing) found their connection to Sudan was maintained through family living there, experiences and memories of suffering, and religious faith (Qin et al., 2015). Interestingly the researchers also noted, while a strong association to one's ethnic group is imperative, their association to the country they have

migrated and settled in, is also important for their ethnic identity development (Hatoss & Sheely, 2009; Qin et al., 2015).

      1.3.3.1 Migrant and refugee background children. There is even less research on the experiences of migrant and refugee *children.* Studies have differed in methodology and research aims, with few specifically exploring ethnic identity. In a recent study by Moskal (2015) with 41 Polish migrant children (ages 5 – 17 years) in Scotland, used a grounded theory approach aimed to investigate how children speak about 'place'. The findings emphasized children's ability to develop a sense of belonging to their families and other people from their ethnic group in their social network. Another aspect of ethnic identity includes religious affiliations. Isik-Ercan (2015) investigated religious identity of 15 Turkish-American children aged 7 – 13 years, while the focus on religious identity, the researcher observed how children's accounts of their religious experiences influenced their overall ethnic identity of being Turkish-American, which supports previous findings on the role of religion in identity (Birman, Pirsky, and Chan, 2010; Davis & Kiang, 2016; Stuart & Ward, 2011).

      Interestingly there has been further research in practice and programs relating to how to positively influence migrant and refugee children's ethnic identity experiences. Marsh (2017) explored the role musical activities and play, in the negotiation of identity of refugee and migrant children in Australia. She suggests musical play supports the maintenance of ethnic practices as well as adopting new cultural practices (Marsh & Dieckmann, 2017). Similarly, previous drama workshops with migrant background youth discussed by Rousseau et al., (2005) are creative outlets for youth to express their personal experiences in a safe environment. While these have looked at creative outlets for identity negotiation, Nwosu and Barnes (2014) explored whole school approaches emphasising multiculturalism in young refugees' ethnic identity development.

They suggested educational environments which encourage and promote ethnic diversity through ethnically diverse school personnel, activities and academic curriculum, positively influence ethnic identity development.

1.4 Research Aims

Provided the varied conceptualisations of ethnic identity in children, the research aim of this study was to explore whether ethnic identity is salient for children of first generation migrant and refugee backgrounds, aged five to twelve years old in South Australia. If so, to what extent do children's construction of their ethnic identity demonstrate commitment and exploration of one's identification to their ethnic group.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 The Broader Study

This current study is a component of a broader project which investigated the educational experiences of children with migrant and refugee backgrounds, within Intensive English Language Programs (IELP), including children's wellbeing, ethnic identity and social inclusion (see Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2015). IELP classes focus on developing English literacy skills and are designed for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children who have recently migrated to Australia (i.e. within the past 3 months) (see Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2014; Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2016). The project was undertaken by researchers from The University of Adelaide to explore the effectiveness of IELP in preparing migrant and refugee children to transition to mainstream school classes, following 12 – 18 months in these classes (Due et al.,

2015). Ethics was received from the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee as well as from the Department of Education and Child Development.

Participants in the broader study were recruited from three metropolitan schools within Adelaide, South Australia with IELPs. Letters were sent home of children enrolled in IELP classes, informing families of the study's purpose and nature. Consent was provided by parents/ or caregivers who returned the form back to school. The study began with a total of N = 63 participants, between the ages of 5 – 13 years (M = 7.4yrs); of these 48 were migrant and 15 refugee children from 22 countries of origin.

Children were then interviewed whilst enrolled in the IELP (having lived in Australia for 3 – 9 months) and interviewed again following their transition to mainstream classes (12 – 15 months in Australia). As per a participatory research design, interviewers built rapport with the children and used a variety of methodologies effective for conducting research with children (see Due et al., 2014). This design allowed for children to be active participants in the study (Einarsdottir, 2007). Notably, children's responses were sparse, literal and lacked the detail and depth that is normally associated with qualitative data. This is however the reality when conducting research with children of this age category (Irwin & Johnson, 2005).

Interview questions relevant to this study were those based on a modified version of Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised (MIEM-R) (see Gifford, Bakopanos, Kaplan, & Correa-Velez, 2007). This measure is widely used (Phinney & Ong, 2007) as it was developed to focus on the aspects of ethnic identity generalisable across different ethnic groups and is also appropriate for use between different immigrant generational statuses (Yap et al., 2015). Questions were "What country are you from?"; "Do you have a clear sense of being from (*use descriptor used by student*)?"; "What does it mean to you to be from?"; "Do you like

meeting and getting to know people from different backgrounds to your own?"; "Are you happy

to be (*use descriptor used by student*)?"; "Do you often spend time with children from different

backgrounds to you?", and; "Do you try to become friends with children from different

backgrounds?". Questions were based on the MEIM-R with revisions by Gifford et al., (2007)

and developed in conjunction with staff in the Department for Education and Child

Development. Interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes in total and were transcribed verbatim.

2.2 The Current Study

The current study used data from the original project that was relevant to ethnic identity -

that is, answers given by children in relation to the question based on the MIEM-R (Gifford et

al., 2007).

From the original data pool of N = 63 participants, extracts from N = 36 participants (19

female and 17 male) composed the data set for this study. These extracts were deductively

collated by Researcher B, the primary researcher of the broader study. The 36 children came

from 15 countries: Bangladesh, China, Columbia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua

New Guinea, the Philippines, Russia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Venezuela, Vietnam, and

Zambia. Children were aged between 5 - 12 years of age (*M = 7.77, SD = 1.76*). Seven of the

children had refugee backgrounds, while 29 children were from migrant backgrounds. Both pre-

transition and post-transition interview extracts were available for 6 participants; while 15

children's extracts were from their pre-transition interview and another 15 children's were from

their post-transition interviews. Participants are referred to by pseudonyms in the analysis and in

adherence to participant confidentiality further details will not be included.

Data analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2013) approach to inductive thematic analysis (TA). This approach codes at the content level of the data and was coupled with a critical realist perspective. The critical realist perspective views participants meanings and experiences to be directly expressed through their language (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While this approach focuses on the level of text, contextual elements such as the location of interviews and age of participants were also considered due their potential influence on children's responses.

One of the other benefits of TA and consequently a quality of qualitative research in general, is the recognition and emphasis of the active role of the researcher on developing themes (Tracy, 2010). The analysis was conducted by Researcher A who identifies as the child of immigrants. While there are differences between the experiences of ethnic identity negotiation between first generation migrants and that of children of immigrants, this may have influenced the identification of themes, which was conducted manually.

The six-step approach as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2013) first began with familiarisation with the data. Initial codes were then developed by coding the entire data set multiple times. Following this, the initial codes were compared to the full dataset of this study and grouped into eleven codes; for each category, supporting extracts were collated. Candidate themes and sub-themes were identified by collating similar groups to represent one unified idea by Researcher B which were agreed upon by both Researchers A and C. This resulted in six candidate themes and twelve sub-themes. Researcher A then revised these candidate themes and their structures, resulting in several sub-themes being merged as they underlined similar ideas. This resulted in six themes and six sub-themes.

Chapter Three: Analysis

3.1 Overview of Themes

Using inductive TA six themes related to the salient features of ethnic identity in children were identified. Children expressed aspects of their ethnic identity through: identifying a country of origin; locating family in countries; here and there: co-ethnic friends; sugary memories of food; drawing upon heritage knowledge; and the physical profiles of place.

3.2 Themes Salient to Children's Ethnic Identity

3.2.1 Identifying a country of origin. In interviews, when asked where they came from, children responded with their country of birth or country they had recently migrated to Australia from. Commonly children offered direct responses to the question, such as "Indonesia" (█████,
8); "Vietnam" (██ 9); "Iraq" (████ 9); "Korea" (J█████ 5); and "Nepal" (█████ 7). While this exhibited young children's ability to identify themselves to a country of origin, it is noteworthy that children identified only one country of origin. Additionally, children expressed varying degrees of uncertainty when asked whether their identification with a country included Australia:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: Where do you come from?

████   Russia

Interviewer: And do you think you are from Australia as well?

████:   Just from Russia

████, *migrant girl, 7 years old*

Post-transition

Interviewer: Can you tell me where you come from?

██████ :   China

Interviewer: And do you think you come from Australia too?

██████   No. What does that mean?

██████, *migrant boy, 6 years old*

Post-transition

Interviewer: Where do you come from?

██████   Philippines!

Interviewer: And do you think you also come from Australia

██████   Not sure

██████, *migrant girl, 8 years old*

██ responds with an outright refusal to identify Australia and in doing so, she reiterates her identification with Russia. Similarly, ██████ responds "no" to coming from Australia, however he asks for clarification about the question, suggesting his confusion is about the literal meaning of what it means to come from Australia as well as China. In contrast to both ██████ and ██████████ hesitates to identify Australia alongside the Philippines. This suggests there is variations in children's understanding of the question being asked. Notwithstanding, children's choices to not identify as coming from Australia is also important as it signifies they do not view themselves as coming from Australia.

This is in comparison to children who expressed more complex migration histories, i.e. living in multiple countries prior to moving to Australia. These children identified dual country identifications – viewing themselves as coming from two countries:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: So can you tell me where you come from?

████   Iraq – no Syria, Syria. Iraq and Syria

Interviewer: So you have lived in Iraq and Syria?

████   Yeah
Interviewer: Do you like being from Iraq?

████:   Nah. I like Syria. Syria is Iraq. Syria, I didn't like it. Cos all the
              time fight fight fight fight

████ *refugee boy, 6 years old*

As can be seen, Amir first only recognised Iraq, however he quickly included Syria to reflect he had lived there as well. While this suggests the influence of previous migration experiences on self-identifications, his understanding of Iraq and Syria as two separate countries is questionable (i.e. "Syria is Iraq"). A similar situation is presented by ████:

Post-transition

Interviewer: Can you tell me where you come from?

████:   From Venezuela and America

████ *migrant boy, 9 years old*

Although ▇▇▇▇ distinctly identified as coming from both "Venezuela and America", it is unclear whether he is referring to America the country, or South America, the continent. Therefore, while children may respond as "coming from" two countries, they do not necessarily reflect children's identification with both countries.

In addition to this, another element of these identifications is the limited meaning associated to children's responses. Regardless of whether children identified one or two countries, their responses reflected a literal understanding of what it means to come from a country. Attempts were made by some children, to demonstrate the underlying differences between their country of origin and Australia:

Pre-transition

Interviewer:	So this is probably a hard question – does it mean anything to you to be Syrian?
▇▇▇▇	Yes there is
Interviewer:	Can you tell me about that?
▇▇▇▇	Ummm like in Syria is like – they – they behave different sometimes. They don't – like – just different.

▇▇▇▇ *refugee girl, 8 years old*

▇▇▇▇ discerns there is meaning associated to be Syrian, more than simply identifying Syria as a country of origin. She perceives the meaning through the way Syrian people behave, accentuating that they are indeed different. However, ▇▇▇▇ struggles to articulate these differences any further:

Post-transition

Interviewer: And last time – being from Syria makes you have certain

qualities. Do you think that still?

████   It depends how like the people – act- in your country. And then

you have to be like them. So

Interviewer: And what sort of things if you are from Syria?

████   Hmmm not sure

████ *refugee girl, 8 years old*

████ expresses people's behaviour is reflective of where they live. While this indicates ████ is able to perceive and understand there are differences, it also highlights her struggle to articulate the finer details associated to being from Syria.

Overall, migrant and refugee background children oriented to making country of origin identifications to countries they had lived in and hesitated to identify Australia as another place they come from. While children expressed varying degrees of confusion in identifying two countries of origin, there were some children noting behaviours suggesting more complexity.

3.2.2 Locating family to place. Children assigned positive associations to their country of origin through family members residing there. 'Locating family to place' is comprised of the positive association children make to their country of origin through family residing there and the recreational activities children recalled doing with their family.

3.2.2.1 Association of family to country. When talking about why they 'liked' their country of origin, children commonly referenced their family still living there as a major factor. There seemed to be no distinction between age or migrant and refugee status of children

regarding the importance of family. Responses to the question of why children liked being from their country of origin were often short such as: "my family is there" (████ Pakistan, refugee, 12); "yes. Because my family" (██ Vietnam, migrant, 9); or "I have my family there" (██████ Philippines, migrant, 8). However, children also made more direct links between their family and country of origin, emphasising children's desire to be with family:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: And do you like being from Russia?

████████   Yeah

Interviewer: What about living in Australia now? Do you like that?

████████   Yeah but I want to go back to Russia. For my family.

████████ *migrant boy, 10 years old*

████████ response is interesting; although he 'likes' Australia, he nonetheless wishes to return to his family in Russia. This highlights family as a means to which children develop positive association to their country of origin. Similarly, children emphasised their connections to extended family:

Post-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about being from Pakistan?

████████   There are lots of our own friends and our own Uncles and
                   Aunties

████████ *refugee girl, 10 years old*

█████ expression of "our own" positively impacts her association to being from Pakistan as it suggests she identifies herself with people in Pakistan. Another interesting response was made by a child who directly compared their family in Australia and Family in India:

Post-transition

Interviewer: What about family?

█████   Yep. It is different here. I have my dad here. And I have my

                    Granddad in India. I have my mum here and my Grandmum in

                    India.

████ *India migrant boy, 5 years old*

█████ comparison conveys his attempt to understand the presence of his family in both Australia and India; indicating family as a bridge between a country of origin and Australia.

3.2.2.2 Memories of family and fun. 'Association of family to country' highlighted how children oriented to family in their discussion of their country of origin and Australia. 'Memories of family and fun' accentuates how children form positive relations to their family, thus further developing the connection children establish with their country of origin. For example, █████ and █████ both discussed playing with cousins and siblings in response to questions about why they oriented towards their identified countries of origin:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [Zambia]?

████   Seeing my Grandma and playing with my cousins and my

                        brother

████ *refugee boy, 10 years old (Zambia)*

Post-transition

Interviewer: And tell me about Pakistan. Do you like being from Pakistan?

████   Yes! I like the most Pakistan.

Interviewer: You like it the most? What do you like about it?

████   Playing with my friends. And my cousins. Because I have a lot

                    of cousins.

Interviewer: Anything else you like about being from Pakistan?

████   Going to my Grandpa and Grandma's house!

████ *migrant girl, 6 years old (Pakistan)*

Both ████ and ████ included going to or being able to see their grandparents as an

activity particular to their country of origin. Children expressed positive relationships to their

grandparents. For example, at his pre-transition interview, ████ (India, migrant, 6 years old)

responded "I want to go to my grandma and grandpas house and watch some television. But I

like watching cartoons there", and post-transition "I like my grandpa and grandma. Because they

can buy us some snacks. They can buy us food". Here, it is evident that attachment to countries

of origin through family members last extended time periods – with ████ interviewed in his

post-transition interview about nine months after he came to Australia. Attachment to country is

supported by being able to maintain contact with family after migration - "my brother thinks

about me every day. He rings me" (█████ China, migrant boy, 6 years old). Thus, the positive

association children develop between identifying their country of origin and family is continuous

through their memories and maintaining contact to family in their country of origin.

3.2.3 Here and there: co-ethnic friends. Children identified friends of the same

ethnicity and discussed connections to their country of origin and Australia through the

friendships they develop in these countries. Children positively associated friends in their

country of origin as well as co-ethnic friends in Australia as positive facilitators of identifying

with a country.

3.2.3.1 Friends in one's country of origin. As with 'association of family to country'

(section 3.2.2.1), a number of children also discussed friends as a contributing factor for their

association to their country of origin: "play with my friends" (█████ Korea, 6), and "cos I have

my friends there" (█████ Sri Lanka, 9). An interesting and important insight regarding friends,

was the number of friends a child identifies in each country:

Post-transition

Interviewer: And do you like being from India?

█████   I like it. In India I have more friends than here

Interviewer: What about living in Australia?

█████   I have two friends in Australia. I can't remember how in India. I

                  have lots. And all Sunday we pray to God in a temple because –

                  and there I had lots of Indian friends.

█████ *migrant boy, 8 years old*

█████ expresses he has friends in both countries and highlights the number of friends he

has in each country. He emphasises he has many "more friends" in India and as a result

positively associates with coming from India. █████ also alluded to participating in religious

activities with his friends in India, further indicating the role of friends in supporting ethnic

identity markers such as religion.

Another interesting facet of friends is the use of ethnic labels. █████ used "Indian

friends" to position his friends as being from India – distinguishing friends through such a label

suggests children perceive a difference between friends in different countries. This was also

evident through ██ who distinguished his friends by heritage labels:

Post-transition

Interviewer:	What do you like about [China]?
██	Chinese food. And the Chinese toys. And the China places. And
	my Chinese friends.
Interviewer:	And what about living in Australia now? Do you like that?
██	Yes
Interviewer:	How much?
██	A little bit
Interviewer:	What do you like?
██	My house. And my Australian friends. And my cousins

██ *migrant boy, 7 years old*

Bo relates his "Chinese friends" as to why he 'likes' China and similarly when asked about Australia he responded with his "Australian friends". These labels not only indicate children's observed differences inherent to each country respectively, but also the notion children are aware friends can live and 'be from' different countries.

3.2.3.2 Co-ethnic friends in Australia. The friends children had made in Australia were also considered factors for why children positively associated living in Australia. Several salient features of having friends in Australia were discussed by children, one of which was forming friendships with individuals of the same country of origin (i.e. co-ethnic friends):

Pre-transition

Interviewer: And what about living in Australia now? Do you like that?

███████   Mostly

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

███████   Going to visit some friends and having a sleep over

Interviewer: Great! Who are your friends?

███████   I have forgotten their names

Interviewer: How did you meet them?

███████   They are from my same country. My dad has their phone
                 number

███████ *Zambia, refugee boy, 10 years old*

The role of co-ethnic friends as presented by children, is to associate friends from one's country of origin as a positive marker of living in Australia. Similarly, to the friends identified in

their home country, co-ethnic friends exist as an active connection to children's country of

origin. This is important as it demonstrates how children maintain an active association to their

country of origin, post-migration to Australia through co-ethnic friends. A contributing factor to

this is the role of language in facilitating the formation of co-ethnic friendships. Children

highlighted heritage language use in forming friendships:

> *Post-transition*
>
> Interviewer: What do you like about [living in Australia]?
>
> ███████   Because I have some friends who speak Russian here.
>
> ███████ *Russian, migrant girl, 7 years old*

███ indicates the shared language of Russian amongst co-ethnic friends is a facilitator

allowing children to maintain the connection to their country of origin. Another aspect of making

friends in Australia was highlighted by ███████ that it can take time to form friends post-

migration:

> *Post-transition*
>
> Interviewer: What about living in Australia now? Do you like that?
>
> ███████   Yes. Cos we have lots of friends here now. But my friends in
>
>   Pakistan are cousins.
>
> Interviewer: And do you ever talk to them on the phone? Or the computer?
>
> ███████   Computer. And the phone too.
>
> ███████ *Pakistan, migrant girl, 6 years old*

███ also compares her friends in Australia to her cousins in Pakistan, signifying the role friends play as an alternative to family. It's also interesting to note the active maintenance of contact with friends overseas. Thus, co-ethnic friends in Australia assist the facilitation of a positive connection to both country of origin and Australia.

3.2.4 Sugary memories of food. 'Sugary memories of food' was constructed as a positive experience associated with both children's country of origin and Australia. A number of facets within this theme indicate the various ways children emphasise and apply their memories and experiences of food in relation to country. This is superficially depicted through children's labelling of foods using their ethnic label:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [Korea]?

████   Ummmm I like Korean food.

████ *migrant girl, 10 years old*

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [India]?

████   I like drawing. And food. And popcorns

Interviewer: What about apart from the food?

████   Ummmmmm I like Indian lollies

███ migrant girl, age 7

These ethnic labels are used to associate food to one's specific country of origin. This is indicative of food as important to children and a possible marker of place – specific foods are found in different countries. Aside from ethnic labels, children also variably assigned meaning to food and its association to their country of origin. Some children expressed this through food related activities in their home country:

Post-transition

Interviewer:	Do you like being from Pakistan?
▮▮▮	Yes
Interviewer:	What do you like about it?
▮▮▮	Because the ice cream man is coming and we save money in our old country and then we can get the ice cream man to stop and then get some ice cream.

▮▮▮ *migrant girl, 6 years old*

▮▮▮ exemplifies her experience of saving money for and buying ice-cream as a positive memory associated with Pakistan. Another interesting response was from Salman who expressed a positive association to his country of origin through family related food experiences:

Post-transition

Interviewer:	What do you like about it?
▮▮▮	I like my Grandpa and Grandma. Because they can buy us some snacks. They can buy us food

███████ *migrant boy 6 years old*

Here, the focus isn't on the specific type of food, but rather the central association of food and family which is tied back to ██████ country of origin India. Similarly, the experience of food was salient in ████████ responses to Australia as well:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

█████████   Hmmm – chewing gum. Watermelon.

Interviewer: What else?

█████████   Berry and watermelon chewing gum

███████ *migrant boy 6 years old*

However, there is a distinction in their responses associated with India and Australia. ██████ associates food as an experience in relation to his family in India, whereas his construction of food in Australia simply reflects the positive experience of food. Similar responses shared by other children highlight the positive experience of food:

Post-transition

Interviewer: And what about Australia?

██████   I like the beach and popcorn and fairy floss!

█████ *Korea, migrant girl, 6 years old*

Post-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [Korea]?

██████   Chocolate. And toast

Interviewer: So you like the food?

██████   Yes.

Interviewer: What about living in Australia now?

██████   Ummm yes.

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

██████   Watermelon!

Interviewer: You like food! Is there anything other than food?

██████   Ahhhh…. Eggs!

██████ *Korea, Migrant girl, 5 years old*

Both ████ and ████ underline the positive experience of food and its association to Australia, and country of origin for ████ Through these responses, it is evident there is variation in how children conceptualise food to associate it with place. Despite this, food is nonetheless constructed as a positive and memorable experience for children; used to strengthen children's active connection to a country – whether it be their country of origin or Australia.

3.2.5 Drawing upon heritage knowledge. Children discussed aspects of their heritage knowledge such as language, stories, and experiences which they had either learned or had been

informed of through the media or family. These aspects of heritage knowledge related to

children's country of origin continue to be salient in children through lasting memories.

   3.2.5.1 Heritage language Use. Heritage language was a facilitator of social interaction

between children and their friends – as seen briefly in 'here and there: co-ethnic friends'

(sections 3.2.4). Children expressed their ability to converse in and understand their heritage

language as a key reason for their attachment to their country of origin. Despite the responses

varying in how children described their experiences of language, they nonetheless underlined

children's assertion that they understand their heritage language:

  Pre-transition

  Interviewer: What do you like about [China]?

  ███████ Firstly I can understand all the things people say. And ummmm

        my gran and my friend live in China

  ███████ *China, 8 Years old*

  The importance of language as constructed by ███████ is the ability to verbally

communicate and understand what is being conveyed in social interactions. Another aspect of

heritage language use is pride derived from children's language abilities:

  Post-transition

  Interviewer: Do you like being from Syria?

  ███████ Yeah

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

████████   It's a hard language and nobody knows it. Not lots of people

know it

Interviewer: And you do?

████████   Yeah

████ *migrant girl, 11 years old*

████ emphasises the difficult nature of communicating in her heritage language, and her ability to do so when so few people can, forms her positive association to Syria. The association between heritage language and country of origin is also reflected by ████ who explicitly links language to Korea:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [Korean]?

████████   I can speak Korean. And play with my friends.

████ *migrant girl, 6 years old*

This further highlights heritage language abilities are salient to children. Another facet of language is the observed shift in using one dominant language to another:

Post-transition

Interviewer: Can you tell me where you come from?

████   China

Interviewer: And do you think that you come from Australia as well?

███████   Huh?

Interviewer: Do you think you come from Australia as well or just from

    china and live in Australia?

███████   No I come from China. And so I have two languages now.

    Sometimes I forgot China because I learn too much English

███████ *migrant boy, 6 years old*

███████ response highlights both his knowledge of Chinese and English. What this suggests is children use ethnic identity markers such as language to identify different places, i.e. the Chinese language is used in China and English in Australia. Despite the shift in language use towards English, it is interesting ███ only identifies as coming from China.

3.2.5.2 Information, experiences, and emotions. Children expressed a diverse range of stories and experiences to which they derived feelings about their country of origin or Australia to. Despite the variability in experiences, children illustrated both positive and negative associations to places based on country specific information and individual experiences. The first of these is the awareness of stories connected to children's country of origin:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [India]?

███████   Because there are some famous people. So characters. Because

    some people came to our country and they hit us and tell us

    what to do. But some famous characters they help us

Interviewer: So what characters?

██████   I don't know in English. I can tell you in our languages

Interviewer: So you like being from India because some special and famous

people are from India?

██████   Yes

██████ *migrant girl 8 years old*

██████ expresses a positive association to coming from India and her reason for it is constructed by drawing a connection to "famous people". This association may also be indicative of pride; noting here the use of "our" and "us" which reinforces the ██████ association to people in India.

While a positive story can inform a positive perception of one's country of origin, negative stories can lead to a negative perception of one's country of origin:

Post-transition

Interviewer: And do you like being from Bangladesh?

██████   *NO*

Interviewer: Why not?

██████   Because some people are mean and they take other people's

blood and sell it. And they take their heart and sell it and kill

them and that is in Bangladesh. My mum told me that.

██████ *Migrant boy, 8 years old*

As well as a positive perception with the awareness of negative aspects of their country of origin:

Pre-transition

Interviewer:	Do you like being from Russia?
▮▮▮▮	Yes – I like Russia but I don't like some people in Russia like our president. I hate the president
Interviewer:	Do you follow the news and stuff?
▮▮▮▮	Yeah we have internet news and stuff. But now I don't because the computer is broken.
Interviewer:	What about Australia? Do you like living in Australia?
▮▮▮▮	….In Russia we have like – my school is here and my grandparents are here and from school go to my Grandmum because if we go home they would kill me – just phht everyone would die….

▮▮▮▮ *Russia, migrant girl, 9 years old*

Both ▮▮▮▮ and ▮▮▮▮ respectively expressed negative perceptions of people from their country of origin. The interesting distinction between the two responses is ▮▮▮▮ separates her negative perception of a person from her country of origin, which still allows her to form a positive preference towards coming from Russia. As ▮▮▮▮ indicates, his mother played an important role in sharing this story which is insightful to how children may become aware of stories, consequently informing perceptions and feelings towards their country of origin.

Nonetheless, children express an understanding of the possible negative features of their country of origin. Such features were primarily evident in refugee children's experiences, many of which expressed there was 'fighting' in their country of origin. This is a notable divergence in experiences between migrant and refugee children; migrant children rely on stories and news to inform their feelings whereas, refugee children use their lived experiences to do so. For example:

Pre-transition

Interviewer:	Do you like being from Iraq?
▮▮▮▮	Maybe
Interviewer:	What do you like about it?
▮▮▮▮	Nothing
Interviewer:	What about Australia?
▮▮▮▮	Yes because there is no fighting. In my country people fight. And there is no storm. When there are storms my eyes can't see and I can't hear anything. I don't like it. No storms in Australia.

▮▮▮▮ *Iraq, refugee boy 9 years old*

▮▮▮▮ accentuates the lack of fighting in Australia as to why he likes living Australia compared to Iraq. A contributing aspect of this may be the relief from fighting provided in Australia. This is reflected in children's responses highlighting the positive association to living in Australia:

Pre-transition

Interviewer:	What about living in Australia now?
▮▮▮▮	A lot

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

Hania: Living in Australia is easier

███████ *Syria, refugee girl, 8 years old*

██████ expresses the ease of living in Australia as a positive marker of place. While the associations between living in Australia are derived through children's experiences, it is important to note children were able to express their feelings in a simpler manner:

Post-transition

Interviewer: What about living in Australia now do you like that?

████████   Yep

Interviewer: What do you like that?

████████   I am happy here.

███████ *Venezuela, migrant, 9*

3.2.6 The physical profiles of place. The physical environment embodies observable environmental characteristics that children use as a marker of place, to reason why they like either their country of origin or Australia. Three defining profiles of place made by children were cleanliness, city size, and geographical features:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: Do you like being from China?

██████   No because too much dirt. And every day I see cleaners. And

              clean clean clean. And then they put it all around again. And it

              never gets clean!!!

██████ *migrant boy, 6 years old*

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [living in Australia]?

██████   It is bigger and cleaner.

██████ *migrant girl, 11 years old, Syria*

Here, the lack of perceived cleanliness by ██████ created a negative association to China. ██████ on the other hand cited cleanliness in Australia as to why she likes living in Australia. It is also interesting to note ██████ response also highlights city size, where she alluded to Australia being "bigger". This contrasts with ██████ response towards why he liked living in China:

Pre-transition

Interviewer: What do you like about [China]?

██████   Firstly I can understand all the things people say. And ummmm

              my gran and my friend live in China

Interviewer: Yep ok

██████   And and mmmm there is lots of high buildings

██████ *migrant boy, 8 years old*

This suggests children observe and prefer to live in larger cities. Consequently, it also highlights the city size differences of children's countries of origin and how that impacts their association to Australia – i.e. coming from a larger to smaller city in the case of ████████ and coming from a smaller to larger city as in the case of ███████

Another feature of the physical profiles of place were geographical features associated with place:

Post-transition

Interviewer:	And what do you think about [Nepal]?
██████	The mountains
Interviewer:	What about living in Australia?
██████	The safety and the environment

██████ *migrant boy 7 years old*

██████ response highlights "the mountains" in Nepal as a salient marker of place, that is, he associates Nepal with geographic landmarks. This further supports children's use of physical markers of place to describe and understand the environment of their country of origin. Similarly, █████ references "the environment" of Australia as a positive marker of place. Interestingly, █████ also associates Australia with "safety", a distinctive feature of place, especially compared to his use of geographic features to describe Nepal. This accentuates, that while children profile a place from its physical characteristics, they can also associate place to more complex attributes.

Chapter Four: Discussion

4.1 Overview of Findings

This study aimed to understand ethnic identity in migrant and refugee background children, through first distinguishing whether ethnic identity is salient in children, and if so, to what extent do children express their ethnic identities in terms of exploration and commitment. Using thematic analysis, the identified markers of place were salient aspects of ethnic identity for children of migrant and refugee backgrounds. Such aspects included children's ability to identify a country of origin, and then actively reference their family, friends, food, language use, experiences, and the physical environment as attributable markers of either their country of origin or Australia.

The identified markers were also reflective to some extent of the notions of exploration and commitment - two crucial elements which govern the understanding of ethnic identity in adolescent and adult individuals. Commitment to one's ethnic identity was identifiable through identifying a country of origin as well as the physical profiles of place. Exploration of one's ethnic identity was demonstrated through children's communication of family, co-ethnic friends, food, language, and their individual experiences. Subsequently, the findings of this study were also reflective of Phinney's (1989) model of ethnic identity development – as conceptualised by the model, children showed an awareness of the features of their ethnic identity and expressed degrees of both positive and negative evaluations of their country of origin.

There were no differences in how migrant and refugee background children discussed factors of ethnic identity, notably however when discussing their countries of origin: migrant background children mentioned stories; whereas refugee background children referred to their

awareness of violence and conflict. There was some variation in the level of detail and complexity children discussed which may be due to children's ages.

Children in this study consistently identified their country of origin. This is an integral component of ethnic identity understanding, as self-identification is considered an expression of commitment to one's ethnic identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The findings of this study support previous literature where first generation migrants and refugees prefer to use their country of origin or heritage label to identify themselves (Kiang, 2008; Masuoka, 2006). Interestingly, in this study children of migrant and refugee backgrounds did not identify with Australia. First generation adult immigrant literature suggests this might be due to the limited period of residency in Australia (Lui, 2015). Notably however, children's responses of identifying only their country of origin and not Australia as well, reflected essentialist understandings – i.e. children expressed literal understanding of the questions asked. As well as this, it was exemplified in the current study that children observe and understand differences between countries but lack the ability to communicate these differences in detail. Similar expressions of essentialist understandings and inability to articulate observations were found by Rogers et al. (2012), to which the researchers attributed to the ongoing development of abstract thinking capabilities and language skills in children. An aspect of self-identifications which hasn't previously been identified in the literature is the impact of migration experiences on identifying a country of origin. Although children's responses expressed confusion regarding the distinction between countries, children exhibited flexibility in their thinking in cases were children identified multiple countries of origin; suggesting migration experiences can influence children's country of origin identification from identifying one country to two.

Children explored their ethnic identity through associating family to their country of origin. Previous studies have also noted first generation individual's connections to their country of origin through their family residing there and also highlighted the role of family as essential to constructing their identity (Moskal, 2015; Ramsden & Ridge, 2013; Ruting, 2012). This study's findings also indicated children defined their connections to family through lasting memories of playing and spending time with family. Another finding highlights the role of maintaining contact with family to support children's connection to family in their country of origin.

An interesting finding in this study was children's association to country was related to the number of friends they had in their country of origin or Australia. The children in this study reported friendships with co-ethnic peers in Australia, and previous studies have indicated that co-ethnic friendships assist in maintaining one's affiliation to their ethnic group (Hatoss & Sheely, 2009; Moskal, 2015) as well as develop a positive association to Australia. Interestingly, children in this study spoke less about cross-ethnic friends, i.e. friends not from the same ethnic group, which previous research has indicated cross ethnic friends to be important in developing a positive association to their country of settlement (Mok, Morris, Benet-Martínez & Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, 2007). Children also indicated the role of friends in Australia to substitute for family, namely cousins. The importance of this is it highlights how children develop their social connectedness to people through friendships (Ramsden & Ridge, 2013).

Food is a well-established cultural practice which is a positive marker of ethnic identity. Previous research shows food facilitates the maintenance and development of one's ethnic identity (Nukaga, 2008; Sala, Dandy and Rapley, 2009; Weller & Turkon, 2014). This is supported by the findings of this study, where food was a marker of place for both children's country of origin and Australia. However, little research has investigated the association between

food and ethnic identity in children. In this study children used heritage labels to discuss food in

their country of origin. The use of such labels suggests children distinguish types of food, and

associate food to a specific country of origin. Children interestingly associated their country of

origin and Australia with non-specific foods such as snacks and confectionary. It could very well

be children express food as a positive association to Australia purely for their enjoyment of

snacks. Although this may seem irrelevant to one's ethnic identity, children in fact use food to

explore their association to both their country of origin and Australia.

      Migrant and refugee background children explicitly expressed their ability to use their

heritage language, which is an ethnic identity marker (Phinney et al., 2001). This facet of ethnic

identity is well represented within the literature, which identifies heritage language as an

important factor in maintaining a closeness with individual's social networks comprised of

family and co-ethnic friends (Hatoss & Sheely, 2012) as well as self-identifying with one's

country of origin (Asghari-Fard & Hossain, 2017). The current findings support this and suggest

children's emphasis on understanding their heritage language is a key factor as to why children

develop co-ethnic friends. Interestingly, children in this study focused on their heritage language

abilities, which is possibly due to children focusing on their capabilities rather than deficiencies

as well as heritage language being a source of pride (Arredondo et al., 2016). Children in this

study identified language as a marker of place and their exploration of their ethnic identity

through language was emphasised through the shift in heritage language use towards English.

Children also expressed heritage knowledge through information and individual experiences.

Children evaluated their country of origin and Australia through stories they had been informed

of by their families. Specifically, negative evaluations of country of origin were derived from

negative stories, and awareness of violence and conflict. Subsequently, positive evaluations of

Australia were associated to happiness and a sense of relief from conflict. Thus, children actively explored their ethnic identity through their heritage knowledge which resulted in children evaluating living in Australia and their country of origin.

Children's association between the physical characteristics of the environment and place was both interesting and unexpected. While there is some research on individual's attachment to places (see Hashemnezhad, Heidari, & Hoseini, 2013) these are not explicitly related to understanding ethnic identity. Children within this study expressed preferences to places which were cleaner and larger in size, they also identified country specific geographical features. Hence, it is suggested children explore their environment and evaluate their country of origin and Australia based off these physical features. Children's choices to identify the physical characteristics of place is in contrast to the other identified markers of place, which focused more on children's connections to people, cultural practices, and heritage knowledge. However, children identifying these physical features and evaluating the country the features are associated with suggests this is a important marker of place for children.

4.2 Strengths and Implications

The current study addressed the lack of children's voices in the literature in relation to how children discuss their ethnic identity. By focusing on children's perspectives, features of ethnic identity most salient to children were identified within the study. This was partially supported by the adoption of a critical realist perspective which analysed the data at the level of text thus identifying salient features of ethnic identity in children. Consequently, by using a participatory approach, children were actively engaged in the study, rather than being studied. The study also specifically focused on understanding ethnic identity of migrant and refugee

background children, especially as little research has taken place for first generation immigrant children.

There are several implications based on the findings of this study. In relation to existing theoretical frameworks of understanding ethnic identity, refugee and migrant background children expressed markers of ethnic identity which reflect exploration and commitment paradigms of ethnic identity. Hence, the existing framework of understanding ethnic identity, although oriented towards adolescent populations, is relevant in understanding ethnic identity in first generation children as well. Thus, despite previous conceptualisations of ethnic identity in children (i.e. Knight et al., 1990; Phinney, 1989), this study suggests understanding ethnic identity in children is relevant.

Although the findings of this study are tentative, they identify the salient markers of ethnic identity for children. The important aspect of these markers is they contribute to maintaining first generation migrant and refugee background children's connection to their country of origin as well as developing a positive connection to Australia. As such, there is capacity for these identified markers to be incorporated into programs and practices in schools and affiliated institutions aiming to assist recent migrants and refugees maintain and further develop their ethnic identity. While previous literature has evaluated programs' effectiveness in maintaining ethnic identity (i.e Marsh, 2017; Nwosu & Barnes, 2014; Rousseau et al., 2005), the findings of this study indicate aspects of ethnic identity to consider incorporating into programs and practices. These aspects act as positive facilitators for both children's country of origin and Australia. For example, despite living away from many of their extended family, children's recollection of experiences and memories associated to their family has a lasting impact on their association to their country of origin. As does continuing contact with family in their country of

origin, in doing so strengthens children's ties to their country of origin. Similarly, developing co-ethnic friendships acts as an active connection to children's country of origin as well as develop positive association to Australia. Additionally, food is a positive experience and associates to both country of origin and Australia. Heritage language is associated to one's country of origin. Discussion of children's experiences can derive positive or negative associations to place as can the physical characteristics of place.

4.3 Challenges and Limitations

Although research with children is imperative to understanding their conceptualisation of ethnic identity, it was also the main challenge of this paper. Children's responses, as noted throughout the analysis, were often basic and literal responses to the questions asked. The impact of this resulted in limited ability to draw implicit conclusions from what the children had shared. Another aspect of this reflects the lack of contextual information supporting children's responses. Children's responses were often sparse in detail and at times lacked coherence, which made it difficult to draw inferences about how their descriptions related to their concept of ethnic identity. As well as this, children at times identified experiences which were reflective of common school experiences, such as going to school, playing, friends, and writing etc; thus, the context of school, where the interviews were conducted, may account for such responses. For example, regarding heritage language use, it is important to be aware children at the time of interviews were either enrolled within the IELP classes or had recently transitioned out; children may be more inclined to speak about their ethnic language as they were still developing their English literacy skills – a focus of their classes.

Furthermore, at times it was difficult to discern the meaning of what children were conveying due to contradictory or incomplete statements (Einarsdottir, 2007). Understanding children's perspectives can be difficult and the risk of interpreting children's data in a way that is inconsistent with children's intended meanings is plausible (Due et al., 2014) – which can inherently alter how children's experiences are perceived (Waller & Bitou, 2011). Whilst this was a challenge, it is necessary for children to participate in research to better understand how they negotiate challenges regarding psychosocial adjustment and what they perceive as beneficial to maintaining and developing their ethnic identity.

Several limitations were identified in this study. Firstly, migrant and refugee children were studied together. While migrant and refugee background children's responses reflected their different experiences, this did not impact their conceptualisation of ethnic identity. However, there was an unequal representation of extracts from refugee and migrant background participants (see section 2.2). As a result, the findings may be more representative of migrant background children's experiences. Similarly, by studying ethnic identity across fifteen separate ethnic groups may have introduced variability into children's responses, thus making it increasingly difficult to draw generalisable conclusions. For example, differences in children's lifestyle preferences, environmental perceptions, and heritage knowledge were influenced by children's prior experiences in their country of origin. Another potential influence on the analysis may be the age range. Studying children between the ages of 5 – 12 years may also introduce variability in the findings as it is a relatively large age range. There was noticeable variation in children's associated meanings to the identified markers such as, what it means to be from a country.

An additional limitation was the construction of a theme around an interview question. This is in relation to the theme 'identifying with a country of origin' based on the question asking children "where do you come from?". Developing a theme from a question is considered to overlook thematic patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The implications of this are findings lack original and meaningful insight from the child. Although this is a limitation of the study, this theme is still relevant and necessary to understanding children's ethnic identity as it demonstrates children's ability to self-identify a country of origin, which is inherently indicative of children's commitment to the countries influencing their ethnic identity.

4.4 Future Directions

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations are suggested. Firstly, further studies using a participatory design with children is necessary to support whether the identified markers of place are similarly expressed in other child samples. While this is challenging, children's perspectives contribute to the knowledge base of understanding ethnic identity and the best informants of what children orient to, are children. As well as this, future studies should consider the compatibility of studying multiple ethnic groups together. Researchers should be aware of differences between ethnic groups, which depending on the countries can be large or small. In regards to studying migrant and refugee children together, studies should aim to recruit appropriate samples of both groups to allow for equal representation of their experiences; or investigate ethnic identity separately for migrants and refugee cohorts. This can reduce the variation between children's responses and improve the transferability of findings. Similarly, researchers should aim to collect more contextual information from children and/or their families. It is necessary to keep in mind ethnic identity is context dependent. Thus,

whilst children's experiences in their country of origin is vital, other contextual information may help researchers understand children's perspective better, i.e. being aware of children's migration history could help understand dual country identifications. Furthermore, contextual information aides in drawing conclusions from that data and ensuring children's intended meaning is identified. As well as this, multiple sources of information and greater context consequently supports greater credibility of the research findings (Tracy, 2010).

4.5 Conclusion

This study offered insights into migrant and refugee background children's conceptualization of ethnic identity. This qualitative study identified ethnic identity is indeed salient in children aged 5 – 12 years. Children attempted to express differences between living in Australia and their country of origin. As well as this, children relied on their experiences of their country of origin to establish these differences. In doing so children identified features of their ethnic identity which were correspondingly also markers of place. Using a critical realist approach to thematic analysis, it was identified: locating family to country; co-ethnic friends; sugary memories of food; heritage knowledge, and physical profiles of place was used to facilitate positive connections to children's country of origin as well as Australia. These were also demonstrative of children's exploration of their ethnic identity. Commitment was evident through children's self-identifications, which further supports the notion the processes of ethnic identity development in children is similar to adolescents and adults. The implications of this highlight potential areas to focus on in the development of programs in maintain and developing ethnic identity in migrant and refugee background children. Such areas as identified in this study include: maintaining the connection to family, making friends in Australia, using food to build positive experiences, and understanding the role of heritage language and children's experiences.

Although this study is limited in its scope to address how to use these markers in practice, it provides the basis for future research to build upon these salient features of children's ethnic identity. The one main challenge highlighted in this paper is doing research with children. Although it is difficult, it is necessary to focus on children's perspectives of ethnic identity to design and implement effective programs for children of migrant and refugee backgrounds.

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