

The discursive construction of ‘good parenting’ in Australia’s statutory child protection system: Impacts on First Nations families & ways to disrupt the discourse

Christy Fernance

Bachelor of Social Work Honours

The University of Sydney

Abstract

Indigenous children’s overrepresentation within Australia’s child protection system indicates the need for a critical and structurally-based understanding of the factors which contribute to disproportionate rates of child removal for First Nations families. A systematic literature review suggests Attachment Theory, the international human rights framework and neoliberal ‘risk’ management as contributing to the discursive reproduction of racist and colonial norms which have the impact of devaluing Indigenous childrearing practices and overlooking structural disadvantage. Subsequently, the article applies a discourse analysis to problematise how Australia’s child protection system exists as a symbolic panopticon reinforcing settler-colonial pedagogy, regulation, surveillance and legitimisation over Indigenous peoples through Western discourses of ‘good parenting’. In turn, the supporting and funding of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, the reconstructing of child protection assessment and care plans, as well as decolonising individual practice are posited as potential strategies to disrupt racist and colonial discourses in favour of Indigenous parenting knowledges.

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Keywords

First Nations peoples, Australia, child protection, discourse, parenting, social work, community control

Introduction

‘The Stolen Generations’ refers to the period between 1910 to 1970 in Australia, where an estimated 100,000 First Nations children were forcibly removed from their families through private or legislated mechanisms (Haebich, 2015; Funston & Herring, 2016). The historic periods of ‘protection’, ‘segregation’ and ‘assimilation’ saw forced child removal legislated with the intent of dissolving the Indigenous population into the settler colony (Blackstock et al., 2020; Haebich, 2015; Funston & Herring, 2016; Robinson, 2013).

The 1997 *Bringing them Home Report* was a catalyst for policy implementation and reform focused on reconciliation and not repeating the genocidal atrocities of Australia’s Stolen Generations (Haebich, 2015). However, twenty-five years on from the release of this landmark report, First Nations children continue to be vastly overrepresented in all jurisdictions of Australia’s child protection system (Ciftci, 2022; Davis, 2019; Krakouer, Wise & Connolly, 2018; Mendes et al., 2021). Notably, as of 2021, the number of Indigenous children in out-of-home-care [OOHC] was eleven times the rate for non-Indigenous children, a figure higher than that of the Stolen Generations (Mendes et al., 2021).

In the Australian state of NSW, Section 13 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988 (NSW)* contains the cornerstone Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle [ATSICPP]. The ATSICPP provides 1) a general order of placement for First Nations children, prioritising kinship placements with family or community members (NSW Department of Communities and Justice [DCJ], 2019), and 2) centres on five elements

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– prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care [SNAICC], 2022). The development of the ATSI CPP was largely the result of enduring, concerted, and collaborative action by First Nations peoples to address the disproportionate representation, and culturally unsafe placement of Indigenous children in OOHC (SNAICC, 2013). Importantly, the core elements of the ATSI CPP are recognised in international human rights conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] (SNAICC, 2013).

However, despite the enshrinement of the ATSI CPP, the 2019 NSW Government commissioned ‘*Independent Review of Aboriginal Children and Young people in OOHC in NSW*’ [Family is Culture Report], exposed a lack of understanding of the five principles, and pervasive non-compliance with the general order of placement (Davis, 2019). For instance, the Family is Culture Report found that 63.5 per cent of Aboriginal children who entered OOHC in NSW between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016, were first placed with a non-Indigenous carer (Davis, 2019). Such figures reflect the enduring failure of settler-colonial governance, structures, and systems to address Indigenous children’s overrepresentation in the child protection system, eliciting the need for a critical understanding of the factors which contribute to disproportionate rates of child removal for First Nations families.

This article seeks to contextualise Indigenous child removal within the broader context of Australia’s settler-colonial state. There is scholarly consensus that the contemporary child protection discourse in Australia is troublingly racialised and fused with the logic of neoliberal settler-colonialism. It is argued that this underpins legislation, policy, and practice that is ideologically inept to recognise and reconcile the ways in which First Nations people’s realities are intersectionally shaped by power relations, social constructions of race, and structurally created disadvantage (Stevens, 2008; Krakouer, Wise & Connolly, 2018; Haebich, 2015; Ciftci, 2022). Within a neoliberal landscape of risk, the manifestation of structural disadvantage as individual poverty becomes interpreted and racialised as substantiated child abuse and neglect (Funston & Herring, 2016; Collings et al., 2018). At the same time, Indigenous

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childrearing practices are judged by statutory child protection bodies according to Western-constructed norms of ‘good parenting’ which systematically overlook the right to, and importance of ‘living in culture’ for Indigenous children (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022; Newtown, 2020).

It will be argued that these discursive power dynamics suggest the ways in which Indigenous child removal remains an integral instrument of Australia’s settler-colonial nation-building, whereby the settler-colony is an enduring structure masked under the fallacy of a post-colonial nation (Haebich, 2015; Kovach, 2009). However, as Choate & Lindstrom (2022) note:

Cultural genocide has been very damaging, but it has not been successful in eliminating the intergenerational transmission of healthy, culturally determined parenting practices. Indigenous ways of child-rearing remain relevant in the lives of Indigenous nations and should not be thought of as remnants of forgotten history. (p.70)

Within this broader context, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions: How do racist and colonial discourses of ‘good parenting’ shape the statutory child protection system? What are the implications of these discourses for First Nations families? How can social workers disrupt the discursive reproduction of these ideas?

Research Scope

The lens of discourse provides an important conceptual framework through which to elucidate a systemic response to Indigenous children’s overrepresentation in the child protection system. The capacity to steer research away from the dominant positivist paradigm that conceptualises the ‘problem’ of overrepresentation in terms of statistical significance and risk, and instead toward the unsettling of structural power dynamics, will be a pivotal aspect of decolonising Australia’s child protection system. Discourses are historically and socially contingent rather than autonomous agents, thus problematising dominant discourses can reveal the more ‘intimate dimensions’ of settler-colonisation, including institutions of pedagogy, regulation,

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surveillance and legitimisation (Maxwell, 2014). This paper will locate Australia's child protection system as an institution in which discursive reproduction occurs through these covert dimensions of the settler-colonial state. The research questions enable a critical interrogation of the ways in which the child protection system imposes racialised normative values of parenting whilst sustaining the logic of assimilation underpinning the contemporary form of settler-colonialism in Australia.

Positionality

I write this paper identifying as a White settler and as a soon-to-be graduate social worker. I acknowledge the role of the social work profession in the Stolen Generations and the continued overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child protection system. I also acknowledge that my educational career has been informed by Western knowledge hegemonies which enduringly perpetuate epistemic violence.

For over 60,000 years First Nations peoples continue to raise their children in culture and on Country despite the settler-colonial government's ongoing attempts to further dispossession from culture, Country and children. I recognise and am committed to decolonising my practice by deconstructing my worldview, and contributing to decolonising research which both names and disrupts cycles of systemic violence.

Importantly, critical awareness of discursive power underpins social work's capacity to challenge Western hegemony whilst supporting the burgeoning of Indigenous knowledges and worldviews (Kovach, 2009). Within this paper, a decolonising aim will be endeavoured for through refuting the notion of social workers, and social agents more broadly, as carriers of racist and colonial discourse, and interrogating the ways in which discursive reproduction can be disrupted at practice and policy levels.

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Systematic Literature Review

The methodological approach chosen to answer the research questions was a systematic literature review. Accordingly, this section comprises a systematic literature review of twenty peer-reviewed articles spanning the disciplines of social work, sociology, psychiatry, public health, history, human rights, law, and socio-legal studies. Much of the literature reviewed was concerned with the Australian context; however, several articles were situated within a Canadian perspective which is useful for locating Australia within broader international dimensions of settler-colonialism.

The findings of the systematic literature review can be categorised into three key themes– a critical interrogation of Attachment Theory; an understanding of human rights as socially and historically contingent and; the interpretation of structural disadvantage as psychosocial risk. These themes underscore the juncture of historical and contemporary debates regarding the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in Australia’s statutory child protection system.

A cultural critique of Attachment Theory

Developed by John Bowlby following World War II, Attachment Theory [AT] has come to monopolise international thought regarding family structures and child development (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022). AT is rooted in the notion that children need ‘secure’ attachments with primary carers for survival reasons (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022). It is suggested that from these primary attachments, children’s internal understanding of relationships and safety can expand into other social relationships as they develop, ultimately yielding a successful entrance into adulthood (Choate & Lindstrom, 2022).

AT has been critiqued for its gendered effects which responsabilises mothers, but it also has the intersectional effect of invisibilising Indigenous fathers – bolstering the narrative of the ‘absent Indigenous father’, which has enduringly been utilised by the settler-colonial state to reinforce Western social norms regarding gendered familial roles (Prehn et al., 2022; Haskins, 2003). Accordingly, the literature also posits that AT is misapplied across cultures as it is inherently

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underpinned by Western norms of dyadic relationships and a nuclear family structure (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022; Choate & Lindstrom, 2022). In this sense, Choate & Tortorelli (2022, p. 8770) argue that “the continued application of a westernised understanding of the way that Attachment Theory is to be applied to Indigenous peoples extends colonial intervention”. Choate & Tortorelli (2022), Choate & Lindstrom (2022) and Choate et al. (2020) do not deny the presence of an important relational network for child development, however they explore the notion that attachment is a culturally specific phenomena that cannot be universalised. Thus, the objectivity of AT is critiqued as a form of judgment which assumes a correct standard of parenting that can be both observed subjectively and compared back to the objective standard (Choate & Lindstrom, 2022). In this sense, the acontextual application of AT within child protection practice becomes a discursive mechanism through which to judge the capacity of Indigenous parents and kin to care for their children, according to Western standards which deny the existence and legitimacy of Indigenous ‘attachment’ patterns and childrearing practices (Long & Sephton, 2011; Choate & Lindstrom, 2022).

When AT is critically contextualised, Choate et al. (2020) identify that ‘disorganised’ attachment correlates with stressors caused by socioeconomic disadvantage such as poverty, isolation and racism. Furthermore, they note the influence of AT in determining decisions regarding placement and restoration, in that the argument of developed attachment with carers is utilised to justify extended or permanent placement in OOHC (Choate et al., 2020). This individualistic misapplication of AT does not consider collectivism and culture as a primary factor in parenting for Indigenous peoples and the important ways that Indigenous childrearing practices serve to “socialise children for trust in multiple relationships, cultural and social contexts” (Choate et al. 2020, p.35).

Human rights as socially & historically contingent

There is a growing literature that argues that the homogenising universality of human rights means their application can obscure the specificity, richness and diversity of Indigenous ontologies and cultures (Blackstock et al., 2020; Cuevas-Parra, 2022; Payne, 2018; Long &

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Sephton, 2011). Cuevas-Parra (2022) and Payne (2018) argue that human rights are socially and historically contingent. Cuevas-Parra (2022, p.11) sustains that the intersection of identity with inequalities make rights more challenging to realise, whilst Payne (2018, p.148) argues that their dialectical nature serves to paradoxically challenge *and* sustain dominant power structures through the non-requirement of a metaphysical existence or justification. In alignment, Long & Sephton (2011) note that the inherent subjectivity of human rights in their institutional interpretation, renders them susceptible to the legitimization of cultural bias.

Accordingly, Western approaches to child protection policy and practice are argued to be contrary to the rights of Indigenous peoples (Choate et al., 2020). Payne (2018) suggests that the dominant construction of rights within the United Nations framework expresses relevance to parents' rights only in terms of the extent to which they negatively impact on children's rights. In this sense, there is widespread interpretation of the right to practice Indigenous childrearing as merely 'deficient' parenting which impedes on Indigenous children's access to the rights of 'security' and 'stability' (Payne, 2018). Long & Sephton (2011) add analysis to this argument within the child protection system in positing that, akin to the definition of rights themselves, "definitions of neglect are more subjective, malleable and culturally particular" (p.100). In this sense, the institutional interpretation of Indigenous children's rights directly legitimates cultural bias against Indigenous parents (Long & Sephton, 2011). With specific regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], Leckey et al. (2022) state that the statutory child protection system adopts an individualised conception of Article 3, the 'best interests of the child', "...one that casts separating First Nations children from their families as natural, necessary and legitimate, rather than coercive and destructive" (p.561).

However, it is important to note that the knowledge of First Nations peoples continues to underscore the notion that for Indigenous children, security, stability, belonging and thriving stems from permanence with culture, family, and kin (Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak [QATSICPP], 2018; Prehn et al., 2022;). Choate & Lindstrom (2022) articulate that this more broadly encompasses a "step away from the notion that colonial

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society is justified in determining what an Indigenous child needs to one where the child, the caregiving system and the Indigenous community to which the child belongs is able to step into that space” (p. 75). This complements Payne’s (2018) argument that the subjective interpretation, as well as the social and historical contingency of human rights can serve to *challenge* dominant power structures, instead of reinforcing them.

Structural *disadvantage* interpreted as psychosocial risk

Given the neoliberal landscape of risk that characterises Australia’s contemporary child protection system, the literature argues that child protection practices and workers are “unable to distinguish a failure of human services... from parental neglect” (Collings et al. 2018, p.172; Funston & Herring, 2016). Accordingly, the interpretation of Indigenous childrearing practices by statutory child protection bodies is argued to be a process of judgement that is racialised and ignorant to the enduring effects of First Nations people’s structural disadvantage (Collings et al., 2018; Maxwell, 2014; Ainsworth, 2023; Funston & Herring, 2016). In this sense, colonial responsibility for structural disadvantage, inequitable or underfunded services, and culturally unsafe interventions is systematically deferred to Western-constructed deficiencies of Indigenous peoples (Collings et al., 2018; Funston & Herring, 2016; Weaver & Congress, 2009). Robinson (2013) frames this process as underpinned by the settler-colonial government’s construction of the family as an institution that could be exploited to entrench the racial norms of the colonial state into the private sphere. Ainsworth (2023) identifies this process within the NSW Department of Communities and Justice’s contemporary Care Plan model, which provides the only occasion for evidence about a family’s social circumstances to be delivered to the Court – “The rest of the Care Plan is about parental psychological dysfunction” (p.397).

The ramifications of this process on Indigenous families are multifaceted. Wise & Corrales (2023) discuss the ways in which expectant Indigenous mothers may protectively conceal experiences of poverty, violence, homelessness, and substance use when engaging in antenatal care. They posit that case workers tend to misinterpret such structural disadvantage as

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psychosocial risk, which then forms the grounds for making an unborn child report (Wise & Corrales, 2023). This understanding is situated within a broader acknowledgment that antenatal services have historically and enduringly been significant sites of child removal (Chamberlain et al., 2023). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Collings et al. (2018) with Indigenous parents with an intellectual disability, only four out of 45 participants succeeded in having a child previously removed restored to their care. In this sense, there is a clear association between the child protection system's interpretation of structural, intersectional disadvantage and the substantiation of neglect (Collings et al., 2018).

Whilst the system response to many psychosocial risk factors is increasingly transitioning away from criminalisation and toward the bounds of public health, a study by Newton (2020) found that Indigenous parents perceived a relationship between help-seeking and subsequent child removal. This indicates that the child protection system tends to promote an individualistic and risk-averse aetiology to Indigenous peoples structural disadvantage which can have the wider impact of deterring Indigenous parents from seeking help to address psychosocial disadvantages in the first place (Newton, 2020).

Discussion

Whilst the reviewed literature expounds a critical perspective on the complex relationship between historical and contemporary processes of Indigenous child removal, there remains a broader gap in mainstream literature regarding the voices of First Nations people's themselves, both as knowledge holders within research, and as guiding Indigenous-led and decolonising solutions.

The literature review clarified the more 'intimate dimensions' of settler-colonisation within the child protection system (Maxwell, 2014). In alignment with Ainsworth (2023), there is a clear inclination of child protection services to surveil, investigate, and substantiate suspected cases of child abuse or neglect within Indigenous families, which problematically mystifies human rights and takes precedence over genuine family support and resource finding that aims to address structural disadvantage. Furthermore, the discursive hegemony of Western parenting

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norms, particularly through AT, embodies a form of epistemic injustice, whereby Indigenous peoples experience subjugation specifically in their capacity as knowers and holders of intergenerationally transmitted and culturally-informed childrearing practices (Leckey et al., 2022).

Discourse Analysis: the notion of ‘good parenting’

Drawing on the findings from the systematic literature review reveals discursive practices that shape Australia’s child protection system. In particular, this section sets out to interrogate how the umbrella discourse of ‘good parenting’ within child protection policy and practice is entwined with settler-colonial institutions of pedagogy, regulation, surveillance, and legitimisation (Maxwell, 2014). In response, a critical and culturally expansive discourse of parenting is explored and posited to support critical policy and practice recommendations in the child protection space.

Discourse was most popularly theorised by Michel Foucault who proposed the existence of a discrete realm of discursive practices, a “conceptual terrain” within which knowledge construction and reproduction occurs (hook 2001, p.522). Examining this terrain exposes the insidious ways in which language, knowledge, and power interact so as that the effect of “discursive practices is to make it virtually impossible to think outside of them...” (hook 2001, p.522; Tew, 2006). hook (2001, p. 522) further states, “...to be outside of them is, by definition, to be mad, to be beyond comprehension and therefore reason”.

The lens of discourse enables an understanding of the statutory child protection system as an integral institution of discursive practice, creating a symbolic panopticon (Taylor, 2014) which is underpinned by the ‘expert’ gaze of professional case workers and the law, and has the capacity to strategically situate Indigenous families between the public and private spheres. As demonstrated broadly within the literature review, the multidimensional discursive practices which bolster Western norms of ‘good parenting’ within the child protection system serve to legitimise racialised child protection substantiation claims and delegitimise Indigenous childrearing practices. These processes align with Foucault’s notion of ‘disciplinary power’

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which functions to make social agents regulate or discipline their own behaviour (Taylor, 2014). Accordingly, and in alignment with hook's (2001) understanding of the impossibility to be situated outside discourses, the literature explicitly highlights processes of Indigenous parent's self-regulation in response to the threat of child removal (Newton, 2020; Collings et al., 2018; Wise & Corrales, 2023). This process is central to the notion of a symbolic panopticon as a "...magnificent machine not only for subjection but also for self-subjection" (Taylor 2014, p.34).

However, as Taylor (2014) notes, Foucault envisioned discourse as "...both an instrument and an effect of power, but also... a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (p.18). hook (2001) sustains this argument, emphasising the effect of discourse to both "constrain and *enable* [emphasis added] writing, speaking and thinking" (p.523). As such, there is significant value in the capacity for research and practice to empower alternative and Indigenous-grounded knowledges in the space of parenting and child protection.

Accordingly, in transforming the parenting discourse to become a point of resistance (Taylor, 2014), Choate & Tortorelli (2022) highlight the significance of the capacity for First Nations peoples to assess and respond to child welfare within their own knowledge system and ways of knowing. In this way, the notion of 'good parenting' is situated as subjective to the culture in which a child is being raised (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022).

With regards to AT, Choate et al. (2020) discuss the semantic content of the word 'attachment', finding that Canada's Indigenous people did not have a translatable word for 'attachment' within their language systems. Rather, the notion of 'all my relations' was spoken to conceptualise the collective belonging and relatedness within an Indigenous worldview (Choate et al., 2020). Relatedly, in a study conducted by Long & Sephton (2011), Australian Indigenous parents resisted the child protection system's negative perception of co-sleeping and extended households, highlighting these as positive parenting techniques and "important tools for children's socialisation with kin and community and the development of their social

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and family responsibilities” (p.105). Such cultural understandings are “critical to Indigenous children and connect logically with Indigenous parenting” (Prehn et al. 2022, p.360).

More broadly, Chamberlain et al. (2023) note that cultural ways of knowing and doing foster safety for Indigenous children within an Indigenous worldview. Accordingly, exploring Indigenous discourses of parenting creates space to value a cultural parenting approach consisting of multiple attachments, caregivers and identity connections (Choate et al., 2020) whilst focusing on providing necessary support to address social and structural disadvantage (Chamberlain et al., 2023; Prehn et al., 2022). Long & Sephton (2011) support this shift further in noting that culturally specific child-rearing practices are fundamental to human rights understandings of the ‘best interests of the child’, whilst Choate & Lindstrom (2022) state:

In the absence of judgment, there is a space which separates the two [parenting] styles but allows them to exist successfully together. (p.73).

Recommendations: disrupting racist and colonial discourses

The systematic literature review and discourse analysis indicates that current assessments of ‘good’ parenting need to be deconstructed and rethought to recognise culturally specific pathways to adulthood (Choate & Lindstrom, 2022). Evidently, as Choate et al. (2020) note Western norms “should not be used as a way to assess the family, whether through attachment or other forms of assessment that rely upon Eurocentric definitions of family and childrearing” (p.36). In alignment, there are three key policy and practice level strategies which will be suggested as ways to disrupt racist and colonial discourses of parenting in Australia’s child protection system.

Policy

At the policy level, supporting and funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations [ACCOs] to manage their own family support systems will create service responses rooted in Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing (Choate et al., 2020). Importantly, ACCOs hold power to transcend the ‘victim/survivor’ dichotomy which bounds Indigenous childrearing

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within a deficit perspective, and instead enables transition to the positions of ‘persister’, ‘overcomer’, and ultimately, ‘thrivor’ which imbue strength in Indigenous childrearing practices (Choate et al., 2020; Choate & Lindstrom, 2022). Accordingly, ACCO’s can provide a culturally safe space in which the development and valuing of Indigenous childrearing practices can be fostered and respected (Long & Sephton, 2011), one where child protection interventions are reframed under a *therapeutic model* of care rather than as ‘risk management’ which furthers assimilative intentions (Chamberlain et al., 2023).

Secondly, the modifying of assessment mechanisms and the DCJ Care Plan model will also be an important conduit of holistic change which supports Indigenous childrearing practices whilst responding to structural disadvantage. As demonstrated by Ainsworth (2023), the parental deficit model of child protection is limited in scope and perpetuates racist discourse that sustains Indigenous disadvantage and compounds this with child removal. In turn, the inclusion of social circumstances throughout child protection interventions, as well as implementing mechanisms of case worker accountability to family support and resource finding, will create a more holistic and culturally responsive assessment and care model (Ainsworth, 2023).

Practice

At the practice level, social workers commitment to decolonising their worldviews and practice is a core part of holistically responding to the complexity and nuance of Indigenous children’s overrepresentation in the child protection system. This can involve critical awareness of the use of dominant evidence-based practice theories, such as AT. Applying a critical cultural lens to AT is an individual level process which can ensure more culturally responsive practice that attends to culturally-specific understandings of relationality and the ‘best interest of the child’ (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022; Choate & Lindstrom, 2022).

Furthermore, a Critical Social Work [CSW] lens enables the condemning of racist discourses embedded in dominant Western theories, approaches and institutions that erroneously correlate ‘negative’ attachment with individualistic risk factors, rather than conceptualising the strengths

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of Indigenous cultural *relationality* that is hindered by systemic barriers and structural disadvantage (Maxwell, 2014). Such CSW approaches advocate for ensuring cultural safety, responsiveness and collaboration in order to further mitigate practitioner's racial biases that hinder meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples (Wise & Corrales, 2023).

In implementing these practice recommendations, Herring et al. (2013) importantly suggest three steps for non-Indigenous practitioners to implement into their personal, practice, and organisational experiences, all of which align with this CSW lens. 'Becoming informed', 'taking a stance', and 'reaching out' are argued to "ensure equity of access and sensitisation of services for Aboriginal people" (Herring et al. 2013, p.112). The distinctive yet interdependent nature of the three stages implores individual practitioners to do the groundwork of understanding the historical contingencies of injustice and committing to a moral stance which recognises the enduring legacies of settler-colonialism (Herring et al., 2013). This groundwork can better ensure service design, delivery and practice which is reflective of, and responsive to, the diverse needs of Indigenous communities. Within the context of this paper, these practice recommendations can celebrate Indigenous parenting practices and worldviews whilst building connections between Indigenous families and crucial supports.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has contextualised Indigenous children's overrepresentation in the child protection system as a form of discursive power within Australia's settler-colonial state. It has been argued that the contemporary child protection discourse is systematically racialised and conflated with the individualised and deficit logic of neoliberal settler colonialism, which employs discursive practices that legitimise racialised child protection substantiation claims on the basis of a Western discourse of 'good parenting' which delegitimises Indigenous childrearing practices. A review of the critical literature has identified Attachment Theory, human rights, and psychosocial risk as important key dimensions of dominant discursive practices which must be critically interrogated in practice. The policy and practice recommendations suggested in this paper more broadly enable a new discursive framing of

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child protection to emerge (Maxwell, 2014), one which values the intergenerational transmission of healthy, culturally determined Indigenous parenting knowledge and practices (Choate & Lindstrom, 2022).

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