INDIGENOUS RESEARCH INTO MAINSTREAM AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

Shifting the Lens

LORRAINE MULLER

ROUTLEDGE

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH INTO MAINSTREAM AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

Informed by original ground-breaking research, this book "shifts the lens" of study, identifying how Indigenous Australian values and principles have influenced and contributed to an evolving non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. Based on the Indigenous principle of respect, Muller presents a solid research framework to break down the barriers of social differences in a culturally safe space.

The text offers an insight into the cultural aspects of modern Australian society that contributed to its globally acclaimed handling of the current coronavirus pandemic. During the preparation for dealing with the pandemic, Muller's research was validated as the world witnessed the Australian culture undergoing major change, shifting away from the original colonialist culture based on individuality and social stratification, to a community collective-based culture. It will be a valuable read for scholars in the area of community and allied health, humanities, social policy, social sciences and political studies. People seeking alternative lifestyles, a decolonised future and social change will also find this book useful.

Lorraine Muller is an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the College Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University, Australia. She is Indigenous Australian and her areas of expertise are Indigenous Australian knowledges and practices, and non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture having extensively studied the values and principles that construct both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian cultural identities.

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Shifting the Lens

Lorraine Muller

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NOTE ON AUTHOR

Lorraine Muller is an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the College Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University; Adjunct Research Fellow, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, University of Queensland; Adjunct Professor, Jawun Research Centre, Central Queensland University; Adjunct Professor, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

Lorraine is Indigenous Australian and the first person to graduate with two PhDs from James Cook University.

Her second doctoral study shifted the research lens to explore non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture and sought to address questions and issues raised in her first PhD that documented the theory that informs Indigenous Australians in the helping professions.

Her areas of expertise are Indigenous Australian knowledges and practices, and non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture having extensively studied the values and principles that construct both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian cultural identities. Lorraine identifies the Indigenous understanding of respect as central to being able to sensitively broach difficult subjects in her research endeavours. Lorraine's work, grounded in a decolonisation framework, is contributing to curriculum development and improving frontline service delivery. Her research and publications have been well received by peers and are recognised at national and international levels.

Recent publications:

(2020) Muller, L., "A Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work: Connecting Indigenous knowledge to practice". Winner

of Educational Publishing Awards Australia 2015: 'Scholarly Resource' category. Routledge.

Book Chapters:

(2023) Muller, L. Decolonisation for social work practice: Preparing to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) peoples. In J. Maidment, R. Egan, R. Tudor, & S. Nipperess (Eds.), Practice Skills for Social Work & Welfare (4 ed.): Routledge.

(2022) Muller, L., Burton, H., & Ludwig, S. Culture and Identity: Building Intercultural Respect. In W. Edmondson & R. Williams (Eds.), Burdaburda Balayi Health Professionals and Indigenous Health: Working at the Interface.

(2023) Decolonisation: More than a trendy word.

Two PhDs:

(**2017**) Muller, L., *Shifting the Lens: Indigenous research into mainstream Australian culture*. PhD Thesis. JCU Library.

(**2010**) Muller, L., *Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory*. PhD Thesis. JCU library.

FOREWORD

For so many good years, I have enjoyed a special friendship with Lorraine, so it is felicitous that she has asked me to write these few words to introduce her second book Shifting the Lens arising from her second PhD.

I became her unofficial mentor by default, having first come to know her as a parent of four clever children, all of whom I taught over my years at Cardwell State School in North Queensland.

Lorraine, being what she called a "Year 9 Dropout", was keenly interested in her children's education, always with pertinent suggestions to teachers for improvements to help good learning experiences for both pupils and teachers, so my comment one day that she train to be "one of us" was apt.

When, a few years later she rang to say she had enrolled at university I was delighted but not surprised. That she gave to me the role of mentor was a compliment and one that has afforded us rewarding reciprocal learning through her first degree and on to a doctorate and then to this amazing achievement of a second PhD and a second published book.

My role as a reader of Lorraine's scripts was an easy, enjoyable and educational one. I became a casual sounding board away from academia so she was able to write in her own style away from the formal mainstream academic approach that she sees as alien to Indigenous learning.

Lorraine views "hands-off" editing as vital for Indigenous authors so their real voices can be heard. To this end, my input was little more than proofreading and talking through the script to affirm that the real sense came through in the words Lorraine, as the student/researcher had chosen.

Following the book from her first doctorate documenting Indigenous knowledge, this book shifts the lens on to non-indigenous mainstream ways of working/thinking. So I became under the lens myself, an unofficial key

informant providing writing and editing and occasional explanatory validation on points Lorraine was thinking through.

It has been an altogether rewarding and educational time for me. Thank you Lorraine, for your dedication and perseverance in your work and your lasting friendship and respect for me.

By Kath Hinchley

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I acknowledge and pay respect to Country.

I give my respect to the First Nations' Elders past, Elders present, and Elders of the future.

I undertake to speak respectfully and responsibly about the knowledge gained on this Country.

The Elders of the future are the primary motivation for my work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks are owed to the wonderful people who openly shared their knowledge, and reflected deeply on what it meant for them to be part of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture. Respect and thanks are due to those members of the Expert Panel from my first research who proposed this Shifting the Lens study. It was at their insistence that we needed to focus an Indigenous research lens onto non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture.

My beloved husband Rob has my greatest thanks for his love, encouragement and support through this long research journey, for a second time. Special thanks for their unwavering belief in me go to our adult children Kathleen, Darren, Lisa and Rita and our grandchildren. My grandchildren may have had an impression that writing theses is what grandmothers do.

Kath Hinchley, friend, colleague, mentor – finder of errant grammatical issues and sneaky typos – is deserving of special recognition, thanks, great respect and my deepest gratitude. Words cannot thank Kath enough. Kath has been an amazing teacher, helping me go from high-school-drop-out English to academic dissertations.

I thank Professor Sarah Larkins and Professor Jenni Judd, for being brave enough to be supervisors in my second doctorate. I appreciate their patience, encouragement and unwavering support as I delved into the uncharted territory of my research. For her careful indexing of this book, I thank Mary Russell.

Thanks also go to James Cook University, College of Medicine and Dentistry, who supported me in doing a second doctorate.

OVERVIEW

Mainstream culture is positioned, in research and literature, as the normal by which all others are viewed and studied. Indigenous Australians have long been the focus of research that is designed by and for members of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian society. Before this research, no one has considered that Indigenous Australians might have questions about certain aspects and protocols of non-Indigenous mainstream culture that are not clear. This study shifts the research lens to explore the values and principles of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture from an Indigenous perspective.

Through its foundation in my previous study, the need for research into mainstream Australian culture that was designed by and for Indigenous Australians was first identified (Muller, 2010). This new research is initiated by Indigenous Australian people for the primary benefit of Indigenous peoples. It contributes a greater understanding of mainstream Australian culture and addresses an element that is missing from literature and current tertiary curricula. For example, cross-cultural programmes and courses are available to assist non-Indigenous people develop an understanding of Indigenous Australians, yet there are no such resources to assist Indigenous people to understand mainstream non-Indigenous society.

Decolonisation formed the theoretical framework for this research. Centred within the third stage of "Healing and Forgiveness: Reclaiming Wellbeing and Harmony" (Muller, 2020, pp. 60, 217–218), it used a qualitative Indigenous research method grounded on respect. Participants of this study were professionals or students from a variety of disciplines in the helping professions who self-identified as belonging to mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture. Recruitment was Australia-wide and had a selective focus

aimed at reducing or excluding participants who expressed explicit racism. Conversation-promoting questions were provided to prospective participants and assisted in the enlistment of generous people who were prepared to look deep within themselves and their worldview to assist my inquiry. People shared their knowledge, either with individual interviews or by being a member of either of the two focus groups.

In many areas, participants found it challenging to explain what it meant to belong to mainstream Australian culture because they rarely had to reflect on it in the depth I asked of them. Exploring the similarities and differences between their own culture and theory and Indigenous Australian culture and theory, using an Indigenous model of circular learning, provided opportunities for the mutual learning that fulfilled one of the stated aims of this research.

Discussed in a culturally safe environment, some of the intricacies of what it means to be a member of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture were identified. Issues such as non-Indigenous individualism, use of time, family and relationship with Elders emerged where there are differences but also some similarities. The meaning of respect was another significant point of difference. For non-Indigenous Australians, a person should respect the law, whereas for Indigenous Australians, respect is law.

While yarning about respect and exploring Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding of it, an exciting new framework for non-Indigenous people engaging with decolonisation emerged. This proved useful in building greater inter-cultural understanding, especially in the focus groups. This research has demonstrated that fair-minded non-Indigenous mainstream peoples are interested in working to build a better relationship with Indigenous Australians. However, the current cross-cultural training processes do not nurture all of this goodwill because some people leave unfulfilled and unsure of how to progress. This study identifies a new and additional aspect of building on that goodwill and develops inter-cultural respect.

Reversing the research lens to focus on mainstream Australian culture, from an Indigenous point of inquiry, is timely as the wider Australian society is asked to consider the implications of Australia's Referendum Council's 2017, historic "*Uluru Statement from the Heart*". Recent usage of the Yolngu word "Makarrata" and talk of treaties indicates that this research is well positioned to contribute to the promotion of harmony and well-being between coloniser and colonised peoples, based on respect.

PREAMBLE

Shifting the Lens is an Indigenous research project; the research question was identified by Indigenous Australians; it was conducted using Indigenous research methodology, by an Indigenous Australian. Non-Indigenous Australian culture is never defined; it is taken as the norm by which others are viewed. This research aims to examine the tacit knowledge inherent in mainstream Australian culture. Before engaging with this document, I would like to clarify who I refer to as an Indigenous Australian.

Defining "Indigenous"

> In this book, Indigenous Australians are not named specifically; non-Indigenous people are specifically named – they are the 'other'. Indigenous people, in a global sense, is used to refer to the original peoples of a country as appropriate. Where relevant, I may identify a person as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander, or by specific relatedness to Country, for I am very cautious in my use of cultural adjectives. Where I do use the term 'Indigenous', I make it clear that I mean Indigenous Australian, and I am referring to people who identify themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or a mixture of both.
>
> *(Muller, 2020, p. 14)*

I also use "First Nations" to refer to the original peoples of Australia and other countries.

Settler and coloniser are used interchangeably to describe migrants who do not identify as and are not considered to be Indigenous Australian. New settlers are also part of the ongoing colonisation of Australia; however, they may not necessarily be considered, or consider themselves, as mainstream Australian.

1

INTRODUCTION

Geographically isolated mainstream Australian culture has made a distinct shift away from the settler-colonialist culture it was founded on. Significant Indigenous thinkers, academics, activists and philosophers, peacemakers, knowledge sharers and outspoken social commentators have nudged, rationalised, demanded and demonstrated to bring about change. Initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provide a glimpse into this emerging unique Australian culture and how it differs from its origins as a British colony. This book offers a glimpse of this nascent Australian culture.

Culture is not static. A society's culture evolves and adapts as its members' experiences and understanding of the world develop and change while retaining discrete attributes that set them apart as an identifiable and distinct group of people. It is more than the artistic display of a culture expressed in ways such as art, song and dance. Born belonging into a select peoples, members are enculturated into such things as the values, beliefs and social norms of their cultural group. Cultures are dynamic, as time, technology, experiences and world events occur and influence how people relate to others and the world. In the modern nation now known as Australia, such adaption and evolution of culture is evident.

Australia has two major cultures: the original Indigenous Australian culture that has survived and thrived for over 60,000 years; it is the oldest continual living culture in the world. Second is that of the dominant mainstream non-Indigenous culture that began relatively recently. When the British newcomers invaded and established colonies beginning in 1788, they forcefully imposed their home country's Eurocentric culture. Based on the ideology of colonisation, concepts such as social stratification, capitalism, individualism and patriarchy were normalised and "began the process whereby whiteness

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became institutionalised" (Moreton-Robinson, 2020, p. xxi). As new migrants settle in Australia, they will often work to become acculturated into the mainstream culture, resulting in what Indigenous academic Dr. Chelsea Watego refers to as a culture "colonial settlerism" (2021, p. xiii).

The introduced British-based legal and education structures normalised the Eurocentric worldview of the colonisers whereby their culture is centred as the "normal" by which any different people are designated as "other". Coloniser culture require no prefixes. In academia, "normal" Eurocentric research lens rarely focused on the culture of Western researchers; instead, the inquiring gaze fell on those relegated as "other", such as Indigenous peoples, different nationalities, minority and those deemed lower class. Change has occurred slowly as internationally Indigenous peoples gained skills in the colonialist education systems. Indigenous peoples began initiating insider research, where the focus and outcome were determined and enacted by their own peoples. This book has its foundations in such "insider" research.

This new research story entailed drawing on knowledge, from both my earlier project and the works of others. As a starting point, the foundational research on which the study is grounded affirms that Indigenous Australian Social-Health theory is a significant body of knowledge that runs parallel to Western knowledge. This knowledge operates independently of, but selectively informed by, Western academic knowledge.

History of This Research Project

Shifting the Lens, researching mainstream Australian culture, began to crystallise for me while documenting the theory that informs Indigenous Australians in the helping professions. This story of research draws on, and follows on from, my earlier story of recovering Indigenous Australian knowledge and the *Healing and Forgiveness* process (Muller, 2020, pp. 206–232) that emerged from that study.

Stories and history are an integral aspect of Indigenous Australian Social-Health theory. Narratives are an essential aspect of our way of teaching and learning. The foundational research for this book began with stories of rediscovery and recovery and rejuvenating Indigenous Australian knowledge, first with a story from Oodgeroo, followed by a Snake story from a "Clever[1]man". It is a research story of Healing and Reclaiming Wellbeing through retrieving our knowledge. The *Shifting the Lens* project, exploring non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture from an Indigenous perspective, is a new story conceived during the discussions centred in the *Healing and Forgiveness: Reclaiming Wellbeing* stage of decolonisation (Muller, 2020). Given its heritage, the parent story is entwined within, but different from this new one.

As in the initial study, this is Indigenist research set within a framework of Decolonisation. The non-Indigenous people who shared their knowledge

in this study actively participated in the personal and political process of Decolonisation. This is a research story of Decolonisation where interested non-Indigenous colleagues shared their knowledge about mainstream culture with us, Indigenous Australians.

Conducted by an Indigenous researcher, this is research initiated by Indigenous people, for the primary benefit of Indigenous people. Here the research lens is turned onto non-Indigenous mainstream Australians who were asked respectfully to share knowledge about their culture and worldview on the same topics asked of Indigenous Australians in the first study. Some of the additional issues identified that my Indigenous leaders and colleagues sought clarification on were individualism, respect for their Elders'[2] wisdom and their seeming dissociation from Country – the inability to hear Country.

Opening a New Research Story

Research is always about us: "*we are called upon to explain our culture and knowledge base to help the mainstream in their dealings with us*" (Research conversation in Muller, 2010, p. 266).

Cultural awareness programmes, us sharing our knowledge, developed for the purpose of reducing racism have had limited success in forging greater understanding and respect with non-Indigenous Australians (M. Grant et al., 2009; Medical Deans - AIDA, 2012). Aspirational intent to develop greater cultural competence in our universities, by Universities Australia, is a positive step; however, mainstream Australian culture remains unexplained as the assumed cultural norm (McDermott & Sjoberg, 2012). Indigenous academic, Professor Jeannie Herbert (2003, p. 60) explains that education in Australia is inequitable because it has not provided Indigenous children with "an education that enabled them to interpret the cultural codes of the educational programs in which they participated". In an attempt to gain equity, dismantle racism and foster intercultural respect (Muller, Burton, & Ludwig, 2022), we have participated in trying to share our culture. Intercultural respect is more than "mutual respect", which is really a form of "mutual self-congratulation" applicable only to close groups of similar peoples (Vásquez-Fernández et al., 2021, p. 144). Now mainstream Australians are being asked respectfully to share their culture so that we can gain some understanding of the unspoken cultural codes that have eluded us.

As the late Puggy Hunter was quoted in the parent research, "every-time we share knowledge, non-Indigenous people become the experts, – we are just informants" (Muller, 2020, p. 127). While another person, of considerable academic standing, noted, it is "as though this knowledge was considered 'terra nullius' – used to further non-Indigenous colleagues' professional standing" (ibid). In all the research focusing on us, no one has bothered to

ask if we had any questions, or whether there were things about mainstream culture that we want explained (Muller, 2010, p. 162).

Reversing the research lens, as this project does, where we – Indigenous Australians – are the researchers and mainstream Australians the researched is timely. Zeldenryk, Miller, and Gray (2009, p. 5) assert that "Rather than focusing on researching 'others', it is vital for the rehabilitation science professions to reflect on our own worldviews, which influence not only how we view health and wellbeing, but also affect how we interact with and judge our Indigenous clients". For all the good intentions and desperate need identified by Zeldenryk et al. (2009), the focus remains on the needs of mainstream Australians. Indigenous Australians are commonly the focus of research, and mainstream Australians are the researchers.

Universities Australia (2011a, 2011b) have stated their intent to embed Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum to foster cultural competency in non-Indigenous graduates and to be supportive of Indigenous students and staff. However, while there is a push to enable Indigenous Australian students to achieve greater success in tertiary education, these students continue to have a higher dropout rate than mainstream Australians, particularly in the first year of study (Edwards & McMillan, 2015; Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, 2011; West, Usher, & Foster, 2010). This book aims to grow understanding and provide some remediation of two of the many issues that impact on the high attrition rates of Indigenous students: culture shock and institutional racism (Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000).

Education is promoted as the key to addressing the social and health issues that create the gap between Indigenous Australians and mainstream Australians. Warren Snowdon MP, while Federal Minister for Indigenous Health, identified that "initiatives to grow and support the Indigenous health workforce and improve the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health … are vital to efforts to reduce Indigenous disadvantage" (2010, p. ix). However, education in Australia is based on Western knowledge, values and protocols; it is assimilationist, as a student's success is reliant on them being adept in the cultural traditions and knowledge of non-Indigenous mainstream Australians (Ford, 2005; Sonn et al., 2000; Walton et al., 2016; Williams, 2011).

Paradies and Cunningham note that "those Indigenous people who most strongly identify with their culture are at the greatest risk of experiencing racism" (2009, p. 570), and this may indicate that those who are more able to assimilate and can conform to mainstream Australian culture experience less racism. People with degree qualifications and higher household incomes also reported greater frequency of interpersonal racism, which could contribute to the lack of parity in Indigenous employment in tertiary education institutions (Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, 2011; Paradies & Cunningham, 2009, p. 561).

Overwhelming reliance on Eurocentric culture is a subtle form of racism as there tends to be a general assumption that "education" refers only to Western education – ignoring the "extensive, formalised educational practices still prevalent in Indigenous communities" (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2007, p. 136). The Eurocentric education system has been "heavily implicated in the process of dispossession and cultural genocide" (Boughton, 2000, p. 14). Failure to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum can lead to continued disengagement and/or rejection of mainstream education with direct ramifications for the number of Indigenous workers in the health field. Statistics and reports, such as the Universities Australia "Indigenous Strategies 2022–25" report (2022) highlight the negative impact racism and structural barriers continue to have on the enrolment and completion of Indigenous Australian student and staff satisfaction and employment opportunities. Strategies that can act to address these socially constructed barriers are discussed later in greater detail under the theme of Decolonisation. Education is a feature of the Rediscovery and Recovery stage of decolonisation, including the rediscovering of our knowledges (Laenui, 2000; Muller, 2020).

While cross-cultural programmes and courses are available to assist non-Indigenous people gain an understanding of Indigenous Australians, there are no such resources to assist in understanding mainstream non-Indigenous society. When the need for courses to explain mainstream Australian culture was raised by Indigenous knowledge holders during the initial study, the first aim was to address this identified void in the literature for use in education facilities curricula. Resulting training resources developed from this new research were specifically intended to help our students and workers gain a greater understanding of mainstream culture and protocols to enhance working relationships between these two cultural groups.

Focus of the Research Lens

Self-identification as a member of, and being accepted as, non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture was the criterion for participation in this research. This is similar to the legal definition of Aboriginality used in Australia.

Owing to its perceived "normality" by its members, this group rarely, if ever, had to reflect on their understanding of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture in the depth asked of them. Many found it difficult to put concepts into words and expand on what they considered normal. Their generosity in being so open and reflective is deserving of our respect and gratitude.

Adopting a circular learning process people in the interviews and focus groups had the opportunity to learn while they shared their knowledge. This shared-knowledge inquiry reflected respect and generated greater understanding of context and what information was being sought in the interviews.

Giving examples and sharing knowledge gained in the foundation research on how Indigenous Australians explained their culture to lead into each question topic, non-Indigenous people were asked to share their understanding on how they conceptualise: their culture and theories supporting it; the similarities and differences between their own culture and theory and Indigenous Australian culture and theory; and if they could see any opportunities for mutual learning that can occur as part of the process of this research.

The Narrator

My experiences encountered when inverting the research lens to explore certain aspects of mainstream culture are incorporated as narrator of this story. The challenges encountered in conducting respectful and culturally safe research across cultures are very different from the difficulties I grappled with while translating our orally held Social-Health theory into academically valid text. When examining mainstream Australian culture, while maintaining and demonstrating a best-practice Indigenous research methodology, I assume that I encountered issues like those experienced by mainstream Australian researchers studying us.

At the start of this research story, I was conscious of the need to suppress feelings of discomfort at the idea that the standards and norms of writing a doctoral thesis are positioned firmly in the Western worldview and accept that permission is required to work from an Indigenous framework. I also acknowledge that the power imbalance inherent between mainstream Australians and Indigenous Australians is part of the fabric of colonised Australian society that is hard to escape. Given this power imbalance, I doubt if this research would have been taken seriously if I had not already gained a doctorate documenting Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory.

Beginning the Story

Beginning this research, I was conscious of the many instances where family, friends and allegiances transcend and unite any cultural divide especially as Indigenous and non-Indigenous family, friendships and history are irreversibly entwined. Personally, I hold many people within the focus community in the highest esteem and keeping this at the forefront of my mind helped ensure this study was grounded in respect.

Continuing the Story

Some stories stand alone, to be retold without alteration to carry oral knowledge through the aeons. Other stories continue to evolve. Some stories, like

this one that identify there is an emerging uniquely Australian culture, are more akin to a chapter in a larger book.

When this specific study had ended, the global COVID-19 pandemic offered a snapshot that highlighted how a new uniquely Australian culture is in the process of evolving. Although there is still a long way to go, it is clear that some of the coloniser ideology of the settler culture is changing.

In the following chapters, selected aspects of the foundational research path taken in documenting Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory are presented where they relate to this new study. Chapter 2 lays the foundation for what is already known. The method of inquiry used in this research is discussed in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4, decolonisation is identified as being relevant to the colonised and coloniser communities, as the ideology of colonisation afflicts both. Colonisation is discussed to set the context for decolonisation as a framework for research and as a possible research method. A major finding from the preceding study sits within the discussion on the six stages of decolonisation, the newly identified stage of Healing and Reclaiming Wellbeing (Muller, 2010). This current research emerged from the Healing and Reclaiming Wellbeing stage.

The following three chapters outline the knowledge shared with me for this study. In Chapter 5, the voices of those who shared their knowledge explain the internal processes of what it is like to be part of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. Chapter 6 explores the external relationships of how this culture is enacted. How the interactive dynamics of mainstream Australian culture in focus group settings informs intercultural decolonisation adds further dimension in Chapter 7. Practical applications for interacting with non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture feature in Chapter 8. Evidence of a nascent, uniquely Australian culture is discussed in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 combines known and new knowledge and highlights possible new pathways for the future. Having laid down the background to this work introduced in Chapter 1, in the following chapter I now turn to reviewing the current state of the literature in the field.

Notes

1 A Clever man, or Cleverman, could be described as a specialist knowledge holder, a spiritual and or physical guide.

2 I capitalise Elders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as this is considered respectful from an Indigenous perspective.

2

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Who Are "We and Us"?

Acclaimed Australian poet Oodgeroo (1993) wrote about her process of recovering knowledge, research, in *Paperbark Tree*. After gathering remnants of knowledge, charcoal, Oodgeroo sat, contemplated, and then she wrote.

> *So she sat for many years,*
> *marking the paperbark with the stories of the long-lost tribes,*
> *until she had used up all the charred remnants she had gathered*
> *and her bag was empty.*
> *In this way she recalled the stories of the old Dreamtime,*
> *and through them entered into the old life of the tribes*
> (Oodgeroo, 1993, pp. 80–82)

Using an Aboriginal Australian way of storying, Oodgeroo's poem sets out a valid research methodology of first gathering knowledge, and analysing the knowledge before her. After she had sat with the gathered knowledge, identifying themes, patterns and storylines, Oodgeroo put to paper this rediscovered and recovered knowledge. Western education research method is also based on rediscovering and recovering past knowledge by reviewing what has been written on the topic before identifying issues for further investigation and then seeking new knowledge.

Laying Foundations: Searching For What Is Known

In this chapter, I explore the literature surrounding what it means to be a member of mainstream Australian culture and explore the notion of culture and how belonging to a particular culture contributes to identity creation. By

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adopting a circular learning process, some of the information in this chapter is returned to in following chapters, layering further knowledge on to this base knowledge.

In-depth examination of how its members describe or conceptualise mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture and theory, the principles and values that inform their practice, rarely features in the literature. Some insight is provided by a critical analysis of literature relating to the intersection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture that is centred on cross-cultural training. Most of the information found was nestled within literature on the cultural interface, written by members of mainstream culture. However, where literature was crafted by and for members of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, Indigenous Australian culture is often homogenised and oversimplified.

Indigenous Australian culture, although hugely diverse, has an overarching meta-theory, made up of shared values and principles and worldview as outlined in my foundational research (Muller, 2020). Regional and local culture and customs build on this meta-theory to form the rich diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures. This previous research identified a need to document non-Indigenous mainstream metaphysics and theory, and uncover certain aspects of non-Indigenous culture that are not articulated; the assumed, or tacit, knowledge that has not surfaced to be named.

Critical Whiteness Theory

> The writer-knower as subject is racially invisible, while the Aboriginal as object is visible.
>
> *(Moreton-Robinson, 2004, p. 81)*

Critical whiteness theory offers a useful and thought provoking understanding of the way in which colonised peoples had their cultural identities racialised into a black-white racial binary that positions "white" as the dominant "normality" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). White privilege is critically analysed using critical whiteness theory to demonstrate the vast structural advantages, often invisible to them, bestowed on those belonging to the dominant "white" race/culture. It challenges the "taken-for-granted neutrality" and privileges of belonging to the mainstream "white" culture (Walter, Taylor, & Habibis, 2011, p. 7). Using the science of the time, race and a black-white dichotomy was constructed by Australia's colonisers. With a fixation on race and racialised identity, where racial purity was prized, the colonial government implemented policies focussed on breeding out the colour of Indigenous Australians – to "whiten" them (W. Anderson, 2005).

Deeply colonising social scripts have contributed to the ongoing racialised stratification and structural inequality in Australian society. Discussing

critical whiteness and white Eurocentric hegemony, McAllan (2011, p. 17) draws attention to "how the privilege and dominance of the imposed settler culture remains embedded in "Australia's" institutions and social practices" and explores how the resistance to self-examination of colonising and de-colonising processes acts to reinforce settler control of the social structure. As a result, critical whiteness theory can put into context how the social and cultural practices of settler/coloniser "white" British have shaped the normality of mainstream non-Indigenous Australia identity.

Critical whiteness analysis, combined with gender, class and race can be particularly useful, in gaining insight into the coloniser/settler and Indigenous divide. It can also help in understanding and discussing why, for example, a white, middle-class, male has extensive privilege in mainstream Australian society and acts as the ideal by which all others are defined.

Conversations about "whiteness" can be challenging. Our academics are being "directed not to make any white people uncomfortable ..." by "using the term white" (Bennett, Menzel, Prehn, & Gates, 2023, p. 5) Without in-depth study of critical whiteness theory, from its name one could easily assume that it precludes non-white, or not-quite-white, members of the dominant mainstream society. Critical whiteness theory helps explain past eugenic policies aimed at breeding out the colour of Indigenous Australians, and how fair-skinned Indigenous Australians could be positioned, but never fully accepted, as "white" based on skin tone. A cursory knowledge of critical whiteness theory can lead a reader to assume that people who do not fit neatly into the black or white category are invisible, and that the spotlight firmly positions "whites" as the dominant culture. Walter, Taylor, and Habibis (2011, p. 8) state that "a central tenet of Whiteness theory is the seeming universality of Whiteness, in societies such as Australia" yet this does not cater to the reality that, like Indigenous Australians, mainstream non-Indigenous Australian society is not homogenous.

For the above reasons, I use the words "mainstream" and "non-Indigenous" rather than the word "white" as favoured in critical whiteness theory. Further to this, not-white non-Indigenous settlers, particularly new settlers, are known to embrace the cultural norms of the dominant society to achieve a conditional acceptance as mainstream Australians (Muller, 2020). Although the dominant society in Australia is conceptualised as "white", Indigenous Australians' experience of racism enacted by not-white non-Indigenous Australians demonstrates that the binary concept of white or black is not realistic. Hence, my preference is to position this study in the context of the dichotomy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Having made that point, the black/white binary is difficult to avoid when discussing issues of racism, and surrounding notions of race and social stratification based on ascribed ethnicity and culture. Racism is a reality in the lives of many Australians.

Culture

A society's culture is understood to be the multifaceted collection of beliefs, knowledge, customs, attitudes and behaviours, that are learned, shared and inherited within its social groups and families (Indigenous Allied Health Australia & Cranney, 2015; Oxford Dictionary, 2009). Culture is fluid, not static; it is adaptive and able to be expressed in a multitude of ways. A distinct culture is based on shared attributes whereby its members are identified as distinct from other cultures. It is that "which makes us similar to some people, yet different from the majority of the people in the world" (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), 2009, p. 52). A person's culture informs the way they see and understand the world.

These identifiable attributes of a culture contribute to the formation of a person's notion of identity, of belonging to a particular group, along with other influences such as family, origin and even class. Observation and experience of a culture's values, assumptions, behaviours and actions are learned by its members and inform a social script of what is considered normal so that "one comes to recognise and know the social scripts of their own culture" (Meng, 2008, p. 137).

Defining Mainstream Culture

Mainstream culture commonly refers to the values, principles, worldview and characteristics shared, and considered normal and conventional, by the majority of people in a society. Numerically the dominant group in Australia it is the settler society – non-Indigenous society.

Exploring black-white relations in Australia, Maddison identified that terms such as "ordinary Australians" and "mainstream Australians" had become commonly used, but "exactly who is and who is not 'mainstream' is never very clear" (Maddison, 2011, p. 6). In her narrative of *Being Australian,* Elder (2007) recognised that despite multi-culturalism, to be "Australian" means to be white, Anglo-Australian. However, conditional acceptance as "Australian" of other ethnicities, can be gained providing they conform and behave according to the Anglo-Australian social norms while Indigenous Australians remain marginalised. "Mainstream", along with words such as "battler" can be used to mask structural inequities where some people would remain excluded regardless of aspiration or ability (Elder, 2007, p. 59).

Belongingness to mainstream Australian culture is reinforced in the Eurocentric educational institutions where it is presented as normal and others as different, not normal (Ford, 2005; Williams, 2011). Aboriginal Elder, academic and researcher Dr Linda Ford, notes that "schooling in Australia is reproductive of the cultural traditions of Anglo-Celtic Australians" used to assimilate our students into the mainstream culture (Ford, 2005, p. 25). Saturated

with non-Indigenous Eurocentric examples of culture, formal education does not explain the tacit values, assumption and world views that form the basis of this culture. Describing the hidden curriculum of cultural awareness teaching in medicine, Paul, Ewen and Jones (2014, p. 755) identify that it "is rarely, if ever, about the culture of the medical profession or clinician", it is about the "other". In Australia, it is the non-Indigenous mainstream (based on the first colonisers' British culture) that sets the culture those new settlers aspire to, and that Indigenous Australians are assumed to know and understand. Access to and awareness of the unwritten and unspoken cultural norms of non-Indigenous culture is missing.

Pressure to conform to mainstream "white" culture to gain some acceptance, requires Indigenous Australians to lose their culture and values. When Habibis, Taylor, Walter, and Elder (2016a) undertook research in conjunction with the Larrikia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, they provided a rare insight into how settler Australians and their mainstream institutions are viewed by Aboriginal people in Darwin. Although there were some aspects of white Australians that research respondents admired, such as "goal setting, education, hard work and self-discipline" other values of "individualism and materialism were perceived as problematic and damaging for people and communities" (2016b, p. 4).

Education: A Cultural Interface

Knowledge and fluency in mainstream Australian culture was an assumed attribute for students in the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP[1]) course. This caused cultural difficulties for a participant of the Social-Health study. There was an explicit expectation that university students of the program already possessed an "in-depth knowledge of the cultural, linguistic and family backgrounds of the children they and their colleagues will be teaching" (Smarter Schools National Partnerships, 2010, p. 7). Placements were in city schools where most of the children were from a mainstream non-Indigenous society, yet there no resources were available to assist trainee teachers gain an understanding of the nuances of the culture of the peoples they were working with – this knowledge was assumed.

Workers in the health and welfare sectors also encountered this assumed knowledge of mainstream culture and protocols. There are excellent resources, such as *Binan Goonj* (Eckermann et al., 2006) and more recently, *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice* (Dudgeon, Milroy, & Walker, 2014) available to assist non-Indigenous people understand and work more effectively to deliver more culturally appropriate services with Indigenous Australians. Such literature is the outcome of research where Indigenous Australians provide the data for the benefit of a primarily non-Indigenous audience. However,

explicit in this process is the normalisation and expectation that Indigenous people have to explain their ways to researchers, to provide the data – it is one-way knowledge sharing. While this knowledge can be valuable and relevant to the needs of Indigenous Australians, what is overlooked in this formal process of one-way giving of knowledge is that the "researched" may have questions about non-Indigenous ways they would like answered. There is little thought about reciprocity of knowledge.

When examining the barriers for Indigenous students in entering and completing tertiary studies, it is not picked up when respondents identify a need to know more about mainstream Australian culture.

> You're taking people from our culture, and you put them into this culture and expect them to do it. And it's just not happening. You see the people that are down because they can just not get into your culture. That's a problem and the university needs to look at that and maybe package their courses in a different sort of way, so that maybe these people can get a grip on it. … I know it's a hard thing to do … but somebody needs to start looking at it.
>
> *(cited in Adams et al., 2005, p. 483)*

This call, cited above, identifying a need for somebody to start looking at mainstream culture, was echoed in the Social-Health project (Muller, 2020) and prompted the work discussed in this book. Difficulty understanding mainstream non-Indigenous culture as a contributor to the drop-out rate from education and employment was a point not picked up by the Adams research team.

Attrition of Indigenous students in Australian universities remains concerning with less than 50% completion rate (Edwards & McMillan, 2015; Universities Australia, 2022). Investigating this attrition for nursing students, West, Usher and Foster (2010, p. 124) identified that in addition to issues such as isolation and unfamiliar environment, "culture shock, racist attitudes, stereotyping …" were factors, and the curriculum was not culturally sensitive.

Cultural sensitivity and greater inclusion of Indigenous knowledges are only part of addressing these attrition rates. Exploring approaches to supporting Indigenous Australian students in tertiary education the cultural interface between Indigenous and Western knowledges is a contested space, and an area that Indigenous learners must navigate and negotiate to succeed. Rather than focusing on the contestable differences between Indigenous and Western knowledges, Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata (2013b) advises it is the middle-ground at the cultural interface where gains in Indigenous tertiary success can be achieved.

At the cultural interface, the middle-ground, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have made a significant contribution towards greater

understanding of their culture. What is lacking at this cultural interface is corresponding information to help Indigenous health workers understand more about the mainstream culture of their colleagues (Australian Indigenous HealthInfonet, 2016). In a recent study of Indigenous early career researchers' experiences in Australian universities, the metaphorical themes used to classify experiences were unicorns – rare entities, cash cows – to access Indigenous specific funding, and performing monkeys – expected to do performative Indigenous roles for an audience (Locke, Trudgett, & Page, 2023). It is this shortfall in understanding mainstream Australian culture that prompted this study. It is not my intention to challenge the resources already in place, rather my purpose is to enhance and complement the cross-cultural training and knowledge that is currently being utilised. Below is a look at the contested space between Indigenous and mainstream non-Indigenous culture and what is meant by terms such as cross-cultural training and cultural competency.

Cross-cultural Training in Tertiary Education

Cross-cultural, cultural competency, cultural awareness, or similarly named training programs are now a common component of tertiary education and many workplaces. In her review of literature for Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, Grote (2008, pp. 11–12) identified four key components of cultural competency: awareness, security, safety and respect. Cultural awareness provides a basic understanding of Indigenous Australians history and culture. Cultural security focuses on the practice and delivery of services. Cultural safety incorporates cultural sensitivity and power imbalances. Cultural respect centres on the "recognition of the rights and traditions of Indigenous Australians" (Universities Australia, 2011b, p. 60). Personal reflection and consciousness of personal biases are considered to be part of Cultural Awareness programs (Grote, 2008). However, as Coffin, Drysdale, Hermeston, Sherwood, and Edwards (2008, p. 142) point out, these terms are often "inappropriately interchanged" and used with different definitions.

In the *Cultural Respect Framework 2016–2026* report, the Australian Health Minister's Advisory Council sets out a table to define the different meanings of cultural awareness, competency, capabilities, safety, responsiveness, security and respect (2016, p. 18). There appears to be little consistency with terminology however, because this report defines "cultural competency" as:

> A set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals to enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Whereas Universities Australia define cultural competency as:

> Student and staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Australian cultures, histories and contemporary realities and awareness of Indigenous protocols, combined with the proficiency to engage and work effectively in Indigenous contexts congruent to the expectations of Indigenous Australian peoples.
>
> *(2011a, p. 3)*

In a review of the literature, Universities Australia highlighted that in cultural competence the focus is on gaining understanding and appreciation of the culture of "the other", in this report the "others" are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Universities Australia, 2011b, pp. 37–39). Mainstream culture remains un-named; devoid of any identified need to have it examined or explained in any form. There is a vague indication that mainstream culture needs examination in the attainment of cultural competence. Cultural competence for an individual "includes the ability to critically reflect on one's own culture and professional paradigms in order to understand its cultural limitations and effect positive change" (Universities Australia, 2011a, p. 3). No suggestion is made or implied that aspects of mainstream culture may need to be explored and explained.

Discussing the nature of cross-cultural perspectives, Walter, Taylor, and Habibis (2011, p. 12) note that these focus on what the powerful can "learn and respect" about the less powerful, with scant regard for self-reflection about this power imbalance. Raven Sinclair (2004, p. 52), Indigenous Canadian academic, points out that cross-cultural studies for Aboriginal students "verges on the ludicrous" as the dominant culture is positioned as "normal" and this focus positions the students as belonging to the "other". So, in order to engage with the cross-cultural curriculum, Indigenous students must first "take a dominant subjective stance", pretend to be non-Indigenous, because there is no consideration that their work within a Westernised mainstream framework is cross-cultural. Indigenous students, and those who are on the sideline of mainstream culture are marginalised by the centring of mainstream culture as tacit, normal, knowledge requiring no explanation.

Regardless of the seemingly interchangeable names, such training remains "influenced by ethnocentric perspectives predominately normed on white, middle-class, highly educated" (Ide, O'Brien, & Beddoe, 2022, p. 7). Cross-cultural training, in varying forms, is now a common component of tertiary education and many workplaces, yet its focus remains on helping non-Indigenous people understand Indigenous Australians. Increasingly cross-cultural training is promoted to address the needs of Indigenous peoples as students and future clients. However, cross-cultural training does not "meet

the needs of Indigenous people," and there is a legitimate fear that such training can be used against us, and lead to "a new form of social control" that gives "… *whitefellas a licence to manage us better*" (M. Grant et al., 2009, p. 2). Cultural competency has been referred to as a new form of racism "that involves a shift away from racial exclusionary practices based on biology to those based on culture … without using racialist language" (Pon, 2009, p. 60). New racism is subtle and people "with higher cognitive ability are simply more sophisticated racists" (Peters, 2016, p. 5). Therefore, it appears smarter people can rationalise their prejudices and articulate these in more socially circumspect ways.

When Indigenous academics Fredericks and Bargallie (2016) delivered cross-cultural training from an Indigenous worldview they used a strengths-based model that incorporated history, race and colonisation as well as culture. Introducing the topics of racism and privilege was a courageous move, because such conversations rarely occur in non-Indigenous settings as they are considered subjects that were not to be talked about (Bennett et al., 2023). Overall, the one-day course was well reviewed, although Fredericks and Bargallie (p. 11) were a little surprised by a comment that it was too difficult and a suggestion that the course should be "dumbed down."

Changing attitudes of non-Indigenous Australians towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is difficult and attempts often face resistance as beliefs and behaviour are maintained by "the patterns of behaviour that surround them" (Gladman, Ryder, & Walters, 2015, p. 7). Resistance occurs because of the accepted opinion that people tend to conform to the attitudes of the people around them. These attitudes are predominantly shaped by the cultural norms of mainstream society.

Unintended Outcomes

Challenging cultural norms is not the only issue influencing the outcomes of cross-cultural training. Cultural competency training can have an unintended adverse impact of increasing racism where trainees learn essentialised "traits" for specific cultures (Lee & Farrell, 2006; Pon, 2009). Errors and racism can occur when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not conform to the attributes learned in the cultural competency training. Because they do not fit a perceived, or prescribed, "definition" of Indigenous Australian, their indigeneity may be challenged. Lee and Farrell (2006, p. 9) suggest that including a "more dynamic, interactive view of culture and communication" with greater "attention to important cues", instead of the common "trait-based cultural competency models" would improve outcomes of such training.

Cultural competency training can lead to entrenching stereotyping and a belief that a culture can be "reduced to a technical skill" to be learned

and assessed, similar to other academic coursework (Kleinman & Benson, 2006, p. 1673). Adopting such a stance that focuses on constructed notions of culture, ignores the diversity and dynamic nature of all cultures and can act as a back door to racism. Identifying a hidden curriculum behind cultural competency training, Paul et al. (2014, p. 755) noted that "cultural competency" has become a form of "institutional slang", and "culture" a slang for "different", thereby reinforcing the dominant culture as "normal". Along with the institutional slang, Indigenous Australian medical students reported subtle and overt discrimination as part of the hidden curriculum. These do not improve after graduation, as experiences of "bullying, racism and lateral violence" are common occurrences for Indigenous doctors (Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, 2017, p. 2).

Culture of No Culture

An institutional "culture of no culture" exists within medical education, hidden within the curriculum that acts to hinder cross-cultural teachings. Because it is based on evidence-based science, medical knowledge is perceived as being "real knowledge" and "not merely 'cultural' knowledge" (Taylor, 2003, pp. 556–557) thereby enabling the conceptualising of "culture" to only apply to patients. Medical education acts to reproduce this "culture of no culture" (Paul et al., 2014, p. 757) but it is not confined to the discipline of medicine. Jenkins (2015) highlights how people belonging to the dominant society rarely need to reflect on their own identity and this can enable the notion that theirs is also a "culture of no culture".

Culture/Colour Blindness

Cultural blindness reflects an inability to acknowledge or appreciate how "specific situations may be seen by individuals belonging to another culture due to a strict alignment with the viewpoints, outlooks, and morals of one's own society or culture" (Psychology Dictionary, 2022). Also referred to as "difference blindness" culture blindness is similar to the notion of a "culture of no culture", with believers claiming to treat everyone the same, ignoring any cultural differences that may exist (McBain-Rigg & Veitch, 2011, p. 72). Under the guise of equality, culture blindness can obscure specific attributes of people from a different cultural group, rendering their needs and identities invisible.

Asserting that "race and culture make no difference in how services are provided" is a characteristic of cultural blindness among healthcare workers and results in cultural differences being ignored in favour of the dominant cultural approach as noted by Nurse academic, Lujan (2009, p. 2). Treating everyone the same is not equality. It assumes a position where there is only

one culture, mainstream culture, and any variation from its values, principles, attitudes, behaviours and customs can lead to blaming individuals for not conforming. Such cultural blindness leads to forced assimilation.

An illusion of assimilation can result from cultural blindness, as demonstrated by research with a small sample of first-year special entry Indigenous students at a metropolitan Australian university. When examining reasons for attrition rates researchers Day and Nolde (2009, p. 12) concluded that the Indigenous students were no different from mainstream students, and confounded "the notion of Aboriginal students as being different". Noting that "participants appeared mainstream in every sense, except that they were supported by an indigenous centre, felt strong kinship bonds and belonging as a group" and were more average in issues and learning needs than expected, they (p. 13) did not define or explain what they mean by "mainstream", or what exactly they had expected. Noting the sample group of students were "experienced in cultural survival and assimilation skills" possibly because they had attended private secondary schools and only had one Indigenous parent Day and Nolde (p. 22) overlooked the many examples of Indigenous identity and experiences discussed. Because of their assumption the student's success was due to their being assimilated into mainstream culture, Day and Nolde demonstrate how cultural blindness can impact research.

Colour blindness and cultural blindness are centred on claims of equality, however this stance ignores the social inequalities that exist in society (McAllan, 2011). This can then enable structural mainstreaming of services by claiming some form of homogeneity in the learning needs of Indigenous students with fellow students who require different educational support. As a political strategy, the careful evasion of race and the history of racism, inequality and social marginalisation of Indigenous Australians can effectively be attributed to individual or community failures; it is a blame-the-victim tactic. Clearly, "with such ideological manoeuvring, racial stratification thus becomes recast as meritocracy" (McAllan, 2011, p. 3). Such subtle change in language can cultivate a sophisticated, covert, form of racism that is harder to discern because it is not openly talked about or documented.

Even with good intentions, cross-cultural awareness can have unintended consequences. Health service delivery can be curtailed if workers become "trapped in the gap" (Kowal, 2016b) because of fears they might be breaching cultural protocols and/or promoting assimilation curtailing health service delivery. Aboriginal activist, Noel Pearson (2004) suggests that the words "culturally appropriate" can be used as an alibi for the delivery of lesser services and lower expectations for Indigenous Australians.

Cross-cultural training programs are understood to be positive and well intentioned initiatives designed to build greater understanding and rapport between differing cultures, but there are flaws in the practice and delivery. However, despite the difficulties encountered with engaging with

cross-cultural processes, they do present opportunities for positive change as discussed further in Chapter 7.

Pervasive Racism

Racism is one of the central tenets of the ideology of colonisation as it enabled the sins of dispossession to be hidden under a veneer of righteousness. Insidiously embedded into mainstream Australian culture, racism often goes unnoticed in its subtle forms. Learning about this research, a white male South African medical specialist volunteered an informal interview, explaining the ways anti-discrimination discourses could be bypassed in sophisticated racism. This was insider knowledge because his heritage and status meant some colleagues assumed that he was accepting of racism. This informant was disturbed to hear overt racism expressed in certain groups, and managers state that, even though well qualified, certain people would not get employed in positions because they were Indigenous Australian. Racism is a tool used by colonisers to justify colonisation. Therefore, it is not surprising that racism is common in Australian society and that this sophisticated racism forms part of mainstream cultural norms.

There is a paucity of training programs for Australian Indigenous people, particularly in addressing resilience to racism.

> Over the last few years there has been a critical appraisal of the effectiveness of cross-cultural training. However, in its current form this training remains focused on non-Indigenous people and this in itself may be discriminatory. There is enough experience now to begin to design programs that focus on the needs of Indigenous students and staff.
>
> *(M. Grant et al., 2009, p. 7)*

However, the focus of the Bulletproofing project Grant and colleagues initiated, cited above, was to help people develop better strategies for coping with racism and not on challenging racism. It placed the onus on victims not perpetrators of racism.

Terry Ngarritjan Kessaris (2006, p. 349) explained how racism is so deeply entrenched that "nice, decent, regular" non-Indigenous mainstream Australians, "routinely participate in everyday acts of casual racism" and it is so normalised that they do not recognise it. Such endemic racism acts to reinforce the dominant culture of mainstream Australians. It is clear that "we live in a society that is racist (or to put it another way, which privileges some races over others) and it is practically impossible not to pick up some racist thinking as a result" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012, p. 21). An action research project based on an online survey of over one thousand Australians identified that an alarming percentage of non-Indigenous

Australians hold racist views against Indigenous Australians (TNS Social Research: beyondblue, 2014). This study demonstrated clearly that racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people is somewhat normalised in Australian culture.

When racism appears as a topic in the media, such as the numerous incidents of racial abuse, on and off the field, experienced by Aboriginal football sportsman Adam Goodes in 2014 and 2015, much of the social commentary blamed the sufferer of racism, rather than the perpetrators. Insisting all people are the same, allows subtler forms of racism to be denied. Equality, when used to demand sameness "is a more insidious form of racism" because it hides behind a moral principle that few are prepared to dispute (Hamilton, 2015).

After shocking footage of Indigenous children being brutally treated in a juvenile detention centre was televised (ABC, 2016) some people expressed outrage on mainstream and social media, while others spewed racial stereotypes and victim-blame. Further inflaming the scandal, a national newspaper published an overtly racist cartoon that, when public objections erupted the cartoonist claimed to be the victim of persecution. The twisted logic surrounding race and racism in Australian society is a point of jokes and satire as demonstrated in the statement: "*White Australians will advise non-white Australians as soon as they start being racist*" (The Shovel, 2015).

Belonging to the dominant culture in Australia has, among other benefits, an apparent right to dictate the terms of entry, marginalisation and/or exclusion from its ranks. Non-Indigenous mainstream Australians adopt a "definitional privilege" that "accrues to those who have the power to name the world" (Young, 2004, p. 112) and assume a right to determine, bestow or remove the identity of Indigenous Australians.

Identity Control: An Instrument of Colonisation

> Being Aboriginal has nothing to do with the colour of your skin or the shape of your nose. It is a spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart. It is a unique feeling that may be difficult for non-Aboriginal people to understand.
>
> *Linda Burney*[2] *(NSW Department of Education and Training, 2002, p. 7)*

Part way through this study I received confronting and challenging advice, that I write independent of my Aboriginality. This well-meaning counsel implied it was possible for me to write as though I were cultureless, rendering my identity invisible.

Previously I have explained that I am not black enough to be black, and not white enough to be white – I am not quite white (Muller, 2020, p. 1). Writing independent of my Indigeneity would mean writing "white". Eurocentric

based scholars omitting the role culture has in their research are heavily critiqued for working from the assumption that their culture is universal and needs no explanation because it is "normal". Adopting a cultureless writing stance, working on a precept of research free from the cultural understanding of the author, would put me at odds with best-practice qualitative and Indigenous research methodologies. Considering that mainstream, non-Indigenous culture is the focus of my research, writing "white" would place me in an untenable position. After deep reflection, and varied failed attempts I have come to accept that writing from a mainstream non-Indigenous, "white", perspective is not realistic or attainable for me as it would be akin to my attempting to write genderless on topics relating to gender issues; denying my identity as a woman, wife, mother and grandmother.

The innocence behind the instruction to write in a way that made my indigeneity invisible, added clarity to why this research is so necessary. It compelled me to explore more deeply, and explain more thoroughly, how identity can be fluid, but Indigenous identity remains contested territory – able to be bestowed or denied at any time. It is on the spectrum of controls that also grant conditional whiteness. Unfortunately, I am not alone in such identity challenges. Despite an accepted three-part definition of Aboriginality developed in the early 1980s and adopted by government departments to determine any entitlements or benefits, Indigeneity remains a contested issue.

The legal definition of Aboriginality is:

> An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he [or she] lives.
>
> *(Australian Law Reform Commission, 2016, p. 36.14–36.15)*

Application of the above definition, especially when requiring written confirmation of Aboriginality from an Aboriginal organisation, can become complex, contested and even absurd as the requirement for community recognition is applied (Nakata, 2013a).

Along with local politics, past government policies of child removal have made this a complex and sometimes-contested issue. Based on eugenics, these assimilationist policies had a clear intent to "breed out the colour" of Indigenous Australians and to raise the stolen children as "white". These policies created complexity of identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose history was blurred by having connections severed or distorted: those who are too white to be black, and too black to be white (Bamblett, 2010, p. 19, 42). Exploring and re-establishing identity is crucial to being able to identify oneself as per protocol, so it is not surprising that identity

was a central topic in the dissertations of Indigenous Australian academics such as Esme Bamblett, Bindi Bennett, Bronwyn Carlson and Stephanie Gilbert (2010, 2015, 2011, 2012).

Theorising on the complex, fluid and inter-related nature of the issues of Indigenous identity, is not solely an Australian issue as contributors to the edited book, *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Identity* discuss (Harris, Nakata, & Carlson, 2013). Cree academics, Hart and Rowe (2014) tell of Canada's moves to control and curtail the identity of its First Nations peoples. Lakota academic, Weaver (2014, 2015) explains similar political strategies and legislation adopted in an attempt for the coloniser society to assimilate, diminish and terminate the identity of America's first peoples.

Colonial definitions, using arbitrary notions of "blood quantum" have been used to measure Native American identity (Weaver, 2015, p. 12). Indigenous knowledge blogger, Rachel Cocker Hopkins (2016) challenges the American mandated proof of Native Identity, "CDIB (Certificate Degree of Indian Blood)" arguing that the "fractional identities" created by using percentage of blood "are a colonial structure with the express goal of perpetuating racial inferiority and Indigenous erasure" and are designed to extinguish Indigenous identity through intermarriage. When imposed by a colonial power, such classification of identity is "a violent act" (Kowal, 2016a, p. 19).

Australian Professor of Race Relations, Yin Paradies (2016, p. 85) notes "the question of whom is 'allowed' to be indigenous is a central concern of modern-day settler-colonialism": it is an international contemporary academic topic. Rationing of indigeneity, by excluding those considered "too white", is a colonial goal often expressed and increasingly being taken up by Indigenous peoples and communities. Skin colour is linked to issues of legitimacy, it "is tied in with ideas of who is an insider and who is an outsider; ideas about how we define us and them" (Weaver, 2015, p. 1). From a political stance, fair-skinned Indigenous people refusing to be "white" are "refusing the goals of the assimilation era and celebrating its failure" (Kowal & Paradies, 2017, p. 9). It is an act that challenges "whiteness" as a universally coveted cultural status while ensuring the social reproduction of Indigenous culture.

Colonial categories used arbitrarily to determine who is or is not Indigenous, have resulted in colonised people using the same tactics against their own peoples in acts of lateral violence (Bennett, 2014). Lateral violence has been referred to as "internalised colonialism" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011, p. 52) and can be a "result of disadvantage, discrimination and oppression," where people who are consistently oppressed and powerless to express anger to the oppressors, turn their ire on those who are closest to them.

In a speech lauded as one of the great speeches of our times, Indigenous journalist Stan Grant (2015) stated that "The Australian dream is rooted

in racism. It is the very foundation of the dream. It is there at the birth of the nation." However, along with accolades Grant's speech drew negative commentary on social media that focused on his identity as an Indigenous Australian. Posters challenged his identity based on skin colour, percentage of Aboriginal blood and even work history. Individuals insisted that Stan was not Aboriginal – simply because they said so.

Indigenous and First peoples become "ghosts" of history because there is a failure to recognise their role as "agents of contemporary society and the modern world" as American Afro-Jewish philosopher Lewis R. Gordon explains (2013, p. 73). This denial of contemporary reality enables a logic that embraces a notion of unadulterated purity where the only "real" Indigenous peoples were in the past. Ghosts in this context reflect the "noble savage" idea of what a "real" Indigenous person is like. It feeds into the absurdity Rachel Cocker Hopkins (2016) notes, where "on one hand Native peoples are glamorised" and aspects of their culture and identity imitated and exploited, but on the other hand "we are victimised, or vilified. Where everyone wants to be Native but no one wants to be Native."

Acclaimed academic, Chelsea Bond (now Watego) talks about feelings of being categorised as inauthentic, and how she came to understand and strengthen her identity as an Aboriginal person (2005). This supports the views of a person who shared her knowledge with me in my foundation research, when she talked about her fair-skinned grandson identifying as Murri because "you identify as who you are safe with" (cited in Muller, 2020, p. 126). Historian Victoria Grieves (2014) identifies "culture as the basis of Aboriginal identity", especially "the intangible aspects of culture that are transmitted through families and kinship systems."

Indigenous identity is complex, often contested, and somewhat fluid. The case of a once acclaimed author Colin Johnson, also known as Mudrooroo provides an example of some of the issues discussed above. Mudrooroo's mentor Mary Durack, well-known non-Indigenous Australian author, ascribed Aboriginality onto Colin by asserting he was Aboriginal yet some time and fame later non-Indigenous detractors challenged this identity (Clark, 2004, pp. 63–64). The endorsing and dis-endorsing of Mudrooroo's identity were by non-Indigenous Australians, demonstrating the privilege and power wielded by those belonging to the colonialist mainstream non-Indigenous culture to determine who is or who is not Indigenous.

Former federal member of the Australian Parliament and minister in the conservative Howard government, Mal Brough, presents a different outlook on identity, as he has been ambiguous about his heritage. Although Mal Brough "did not identify himself as Indigenous, his sister did" according to Peter Costello who was Treasurer in the Howard government (Costello & Coleman, 2009, p. 215). In a 2013 interview, Mal Brough refers to his Aboriginal ancestry and notes he "never sought to advertise

the fact, nor has he sought to camouflage it" (Bryant, 2013, p. 6). Recalling that the three-part definition of Aboriginality is based on descent, self-identification and community acceptance, cases like Mal Brough's raise interesting complexities.

Cases outlined in the *Kinship and Identity: Legal definitions of Aboriginality* (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2016) document identify some of the issues related to determining who is or is not Indigenous Australian. In section 36.20 is a ruling on the case of a 17-year-old boy's death in custody, who was ruled to be Aboriginal although he did not self-identify, and was therefore not recognised by the Aboriginal community. Identity is a complex issue.

Non-Indigenous Mainstream Australian Identity

Non-Indigenous identity does not come under the same level of scrutiny as Indigenous people endure, although there are a few examples of complexity and self-identification documented on the topic. For example, John Howard, a previous conservative Australian Prime Minister, sought to establish his view of Australian identity based on Anglo-Celtic ethnicity, fundamental Christianity, neo-liberal entrepreneurship and a coloniser version of history (Johnson, 2007). This view was widely contested by some, and strongly endorsed by other Australians.

Mainstream non-Indigenous identity is not static, and can be complex. Controversial ultra-conservative media identity, Andrew Bolt, gained notoriety for being found guilty of contravening section 18 (c) of the Racial Discrimination Act in 2009 (Quinn, 2011). The Federal Court of Australia found that Bolt had implied certain lighter-skinned Aboriginal people only identified as Indigenous Australians to gain benefit because, in his mind, they had multiple identities open to them. Moving ahead to 2014, Andrew Bolt, who often avows his pride in being Australian, wrote that because of his heritage, in football, his heart and support is for Holland. Born and bred in Australia, Andrew Bolt explained that as a young man he went to his parent's homeland, Holland, and "found there an unconditional love and acceptance" and that "the ties of blood at times overwhelm" him (Bolt, 2014).

'Non-Indigenous' Australian is a term taken as offensive by some who are not Indigenous Australians. Searching for an appropriate respectful name to use for Australians who are not Indigenous and who identify as belonging to mainstream society it became clear that this focus culture did not use one identifying name. Semantics and objections were raised against words such as "settler", "coloniser", "non-Indigenous" or "mainstream" Australian. Participants who shared their knowledge with me went along with being referred to as non-Indigenous mainstream Australian.

Culture Shock

> *"From the inside, a culture is 'felt' as normative, not deviant. It is European culture which is different for an Aboriginal person"* explains esteemed Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton.
>
> *(2003, p. 121)*

Culture shock is a recognised issue for people who move to live and/or work in a culture vastly different from their own, and can present "physical and psychological changes" because of adapting to the new environment (Eckermann et al., 2006, p. 105). Culture shock has been related to the high turnover in employment and the quality of service delivery of (mostly non-Indigenous) health professionals who move to remote, predominantly Indigenous, communities (Muecke, Lenthall, & Lindeman, 2011).

Stephen Muecke and associates (2011, p. 3) describe four stages of culture shock as the "honeymoon, rejection, beginning resolution, and effective functioning", whereas Eckermann and colleagues (2006, p. 106) name these stages as the "honeymoon, crisis, recovery, adjustment" stages. Experiencing culture shock can, however, be a positive learning experience if people are able to work effectively through the crisis/rejection stage to the adjustment stage and achieve *cultural adaptation* (Eckermann et al., 2006; Muecke et al., 2011).

Rather than culture shock, Auer and Carson (2010, p. 10) discuss levels of an individual's "place attachment" and how it relates to retention of medical doctors in remote locations, suggesting that GPs tend to "adjust rather than adapt" to their new location. Although not named, my assumption is that the health professionals are non-Indigenous and not from the new location's culture. Adjusting to living in a new place and community infers that they do not have to shed their sense of identity or reject their attachment to another place, to be able to work effectively in the new "place".

Place attachment and the ensuing discomfort of separation can lead to what is commonly referred to as homesickness. Homesickness is described as a mini-grief, by Stroebe, Schut and Nauta (2015) as they identify the impact that leaving the familiar and moving to unfamiliar surrounds can have on the physical and psychological well-being of people. The mini-grief caused by homesickness and the shock of functioning within another culture, as well as ways of coping with distress caused by cultural incongruity, particularly for mainstream workers moving into Indigenous or ethnically different communities, is well documented.

Less well documented are the similar experiences of Indigenous community members moving into an unfamiliar social structure of mainstream communities where they are in the minority. Despite the need for resources

to understand mainstream Australian culture being clearly identified, action and resources on the topic are sparse. The need for resources to develop understanding of mainstream Australian culture does not get much clearer. Yet the response towards assisting students with the culture shock, dislocation from place attachment, and the mini-grief of homesickness, is less clear.

Building on What Is Known

Education in Australia is a continuation of assimilation. Shayne Williams (2011, p. 6) notes that the experience of academia can be stressful as "Indigenous students struggle in what is essentially a foreign system". It is clearly designed to be "assimilationist in nature … anchored with the Western worldview" (Williams, 2011, p. 9) and in order to succeed an Indigenous student must be able to become bi-cultural, fluent in mainstream culture, or be able to "pass" as mainstream Australian. Assessment and success are based on settler society's culture, on their version of history.

Many Indigenous students experience school as an extremely harsh and certainly not a welcoming environment (Foley, 2000) so engaging with education can be an act of resistance to assimilation where students achieve in spite of the Eurocentric focus, to further a particular goal. While gaining a university education is often a goal, the continuation of Eurocentric curricula and culture means that Indigenous Australians entering university can also experience culture shock (Sonn et al., 2000, p. 11).

Knowledge about the nuances of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture was generously shared to help fill what is clearly a missing aspect in cross-cultural, or intercultural understanding. This study will contribute to developing awareness and action to assist Indigenous Australian students and workers gain insight into the foreign culture that is non-Indigenous Australian culture. People who are not part of this mainstream culture may also appreciate the information in such training resources. Further to this, those who are born belonging to mainstream non-Indigenous culture may be interested in looking at their culture from a different perspective.

This chapter identified the need to shift the research lens, from the often researched Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to explore non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. Some of the what is known about the issues surrounding the need, what is missing, and factors that have contributed to the current situation.

Researching the mainstream culture of the coloniser society to answer questions posed by the colonised people is unique. Therefore, it requires a research method fit for purpose that will showcase elements of the

considerations and processes used to achieve a respectful intercultural research environment. The following chapter will highlight the unique ways in which Indigenous Australian values and principles inform this study so that it can be viewed in comparison to what a reader knows of their own culture.

Notes

1 "RATEP is a community-based Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education program" (James Cook University, 2016) where students can gain their teaching qualifications.
2 In 2016, Linda Burney is the first Aboriginal woman elected to the Federal House of Representatives and the first Aboriginal person to serve in the New South Wales Parliament.

3

OPPORTUNITIES AT THE CULTURAL INTERFACE [METHODOLOGY]

> Indigenist scholars now need to move … to those hard issues in research methodologies. We must now address some of the things that cause tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous views of scientific investigation.
>
> (Rigney, 2001, p. 10)

This book recounts one of those hard issues Rigney refers to, as it seeks to investigate an area of tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian views on culture. Difficulties arose early in this study as I sought a way of remaining respectful to the non-Indigenous Australian people while retaining the focus of this study as fulfilling a need initiated by us, Indigenous Australians. The methods used to prescribe and describe the process of creating knowledge, research, are resolutely linked to a researcher's world view which dictates what rules, principles and narratives are acceptable to use (Nakata, 2007; Overton & Ennis, 2006; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). Differing from mainstream research, this is "Indigenist research as pedagogy", a science of teaching and learning (Ford, 2005, pp. 193–203); reflecting our values and principles where mutuality is in a circular learning process of teaching and learning.

Dr Payi-Linda Ford, academic, researcher and an Elder of the Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu peoples from Kurrindju (Finniss River) Northern Territory, reinforced for me that Indigenist research is a political process and an emancipatory force. Dr Ford identified five core pedagogical principles, Narrative, Relationality, Discursiveness, Political Integrity and Indigenist Research, as the pedagogy used in her research (2005, p. 194). The Dinawaan[1] (Emu) workshops discussed later in this chapter and further in Chapter 7 as

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part of the focus groups, reflect the concept of research as a way of teaching and learning.

When creating knowledge, or sharing in a teaching-learning process it is respectful to identify who the intended beneficiaries are. If, as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2021) notes, research and science are not a benign set of absolute facts and can be weapons in the arsenal of the colonisers, research can assist in dismantling colonisation. Responding to an identified need to produce knowledge that is useful to Indigenous Australians this study uses a framework of decolonisation that challenges the ideology of colonisation (Laenui, 2000; Muller, 2020). Decolonisation, as discussed in Chapter 4, works on the premise that not only has colonisation imposed negative effects on colonised people but that its negative effects are also felt by people from the coloniser society.

Opportunities in Research Methodologies

Opportunities for shared learning are present in what Nakata, Nakata, and Chin (2008) identify as a contested space at the cultural interface between Indigenous and Western knowledges. While this interface is a space that must be negotiated by Indigenous Australians as they engage with mainstream institutions, it is also a liminal learning space for non-Indigenous allies.

While the explicit intention of the exercise discussed in this book is to create a resource for Indigenous Australian students and workers to understand mainstream culture better, it also enables the wider mainstream non-Indigenous Australian community, and new settlers, to gain a greater understanding of their culture.

Opportunities are also present for non-Indigenous new settlers to Australia, and international scholars to find some benefit from this research. Most non-Indigenous health practitioners and scholars who participated in sharing their culture thanked me for the opportunity, and stated they had benefited from participating in this study. This demonstrated the relevance of reciprocity in research.

Indigenous Research Methodology

Research is subjective, conducted and interpreted through the researcher's worldview; their values, principles and worldview are inextricably part of the work they do.

For the same reasons, qualitative research interviews must also be viewed with an understanding of the motivation of participants to share their knowledge, and the relevant filters they may use in what knowledge they share. It is wrong to assume that research is separate from personal and cultural values, and worldviews.

For this reason, I make it clear that Indigenous, or Indigenist, research methodology was used in this project to ensure cultural safety, recognition of intellectual ownership, sharing of information and it honours the concept that all people are equal (AIATSIS, 2020; Ford, 2005; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021; Worby & Rigney, 2002). The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2018) identify six values; *Spirit and Integrity, Reciprocity, Respect, Equity, Cultural Continuity, and Responsibility* as imperative for ethical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health research. Indigenous research methodology requires cultural safety, consensus, valuing of diversity, trust, respect, reciprocity, recognition of intellectual ownership, sharing of information and the honouring of the core concept, the "truth", the basic assumption, that all people are equal (Muller, 2020). Respect is a word that does not carry the same meaning across different cultures. These differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding of "respect" are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Although Indigenous research has been described as a relational theory/methodology, Cree academic Margaret Kovach (2010b, pp. 30–36) points out significant differences. Indigenous theory and methodologies have a decolonising aim and clear connection to Country [lands], and Indigenist research is cross-disciplinary research; it spans other disciplines at an ideological level, in much the same fashion as feminist research.

Indigenist research has been likened to action research as they both feature mutuality, the teacher as learner, and cyclical learning using a layered approach where the knowledge from earlier research conversations is incorporated in later interviews, building until no further new information is evident. Indigenous scholars can use comparative mainstream terminologies at times to help a wider audience get an understanding of Indigenous methods and theories as demonstrated here. Regardless of any similar-to name, Indigenous research methodologies are clearly based on Indigenous values, principles and worldview.

Professor Boni Robertson provides an example of Indigenous research methodology tagged as Action Research, where "it was important that everyone who took part in the research … were linked in a reciprocal process in which knowledge could be shared, explored, extended and documented" (Robertson, 2000, p. xxvii). Consensus "applied not only on the content but in the recommendations" of the final report (p. xxx).

Indigenous methodology differs from Action Research or Grounded Research because it is based on our knowledge systems (Kovach, 2021). Indigenous research also differs from Western research because we retain control and ownership in Indigenous research. Ownership and control over the research allows us to circumvent the ways in which "Indigenous scholars and native intellectuals are pressed to produce technical knowledge that conforms to Western standards of truth and validity" (Denzin, Lincoln, &

Tuhaiwai-Smith, 2008, p. 6). Indigenous research is a political process that centres our knowledge, our values and principles, and it is done for our benefit. It honours our knowledge, wisdom and culture and encapsulates the need for full consultation and consensus: it has the essential elements to ground a project in the philosophies, principles and protocols of Indigenous Australians (AIATSIS, 2020; Ford, 2005; Muller, 2020).

Responsibility of Knowledge

Respect and Spirituality are core values of the methodology used in this and the foundation research: but with knowledge comes responsibility (Muller, 2020). Knowledge and Responsibility are inseparable, and my responsibility to the knowledge shared by others entails certain obligations. Far from being onerous, these obligations are a rich and inspiring part of the research methodology for they ground research in appropriate and respectful process. Custodianship of knowledge is a philosophy centred on accumulated community experience and knowledge.

Separated from responsibility, knowledge can become individualised, and lead to distortion of knowledge: made up by the individual. Without responsibility, knowledge is at the least unaccountable and unconnected, and at the worst misleading and dangerous.

> When there is a breach between the … relationship between the human spirit and the natural life force …, when the link between the two is weakened, then a human being becomes a totally individuated self, a discrete entity whirling in space, completely free. Its freedom is a fearful freedom however, because a sense of deepest spiritual loneliness and alienation envelopes the individual.
>
> *(Graham, 2008, p. 186)*

Deliberate choice of using Indigenous citations gives recognition and respect. It is challenging to see significant Indigenous knowledge holders contributions overlooked in academic works and lesser non-Indigenous scholars cited instead. The choice and framing of language and the selection of which texts are cited are "often the clearest markers of the theoretical traditions of a writer" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021, p. 15). Recognition and respect of knowledge are imperative.

Stages of Research

This exploratory, qualitative study had three main stages. These are not stand-alone stages, as some stages interlocked or overlapped. The first stage was one of planning and consultation to establish the foundation

for the study. Consultation with stakeholders and the establishment of the expert panel occurred in this stage. Stage two involved collection of knowledge (the data) using interviews and focus groups. Stage three involved looking closely at the gathered information, gaining understanding and interpreting meaning from the research conversations and then sharing the knowledge learned.

Ethics

Differences were evident at the beginning when James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) granted ethics approval, with minimal comment. When compared to my previous ethics application for research with colleagues in the Indigenous community, with people of a similar social and educational standing, the non-Indigenous application was far easier because the HREC considered the focus of this study, educated non-Indigenous adults, carried minimal risks as any power imbalance, between myself as researcher and the people being researched, was not in my favour.

Actually I was at a far greater power disadvantage when putting the same questions to Indigenous Australian knowledge holders. Because in the Indigenous Australian Social-Health study I was a learner, a seeker of knowledge, enlisted to collect oral knowledge from learned people, and write it up under the guidance and scrutiny of community Elders, Leaders and knowledge holders.

Stage 1: Planning and Consultation

A primary responsibility inherent in seeking knowledge is firstly to become informed, to gain a solid grounding for further knowledge. to ensure the research remained focused and informed the relevant and peripheral literature aimed at explaining mainstream culture was reviewed regularly. Consultation with those members of the expert panel who proposed this research, to shift the research lens, was done to clarify the questions to ask non-Indigenous Australians about aspects of their culture.

Stage 2: Knowledge (Data) Collection and Analysis

Collecting knowledge in Stage 2 reinforced that while an individual's knowledge is respected and valued, there is a connectedness with the collective. There are common features and discrete attributes that set a group apart as an identifiable and distinct culture. Mary Graham explains that "a person finds their individuality within the group" (Graham, 2008, p. 182). Individual interviews and focus groups, in both the foundation study and this one, highlighted the richness of individuality within a cultural group.

Respect for an individual's knowledge is maintained by the strength of the collective through sharing and collaborating, ensuring knowledge transfer and integrity of knowledge. As knowledge is invested in an individual their responsibility increases, they are under an obligation to use it wisely and to give respect to those who have contributed to the learning. Referencing in academic works recognises the knowledge of others' knowledge. How that recognition and respect is given is relevant. The choice and framing of language and the selection of which texts are cited are "often the clearest markers of the theoretical traditions of a writer" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021, p. 15). This is why, where possible, I prefer to refer to participants as "people who share their knowledge".

Purposive sampling was used to enlist a core group of people with an ability to reflect on and articulate aspects of their cultural norms, and who self-identified as being part of mainstream Australian culture. This core group then passed on information through their networks. As with the foundation study prospective participants volunteered to be interviewed. The focus community were adults who work in the social, emotional (including Spiritual) and physical well-being fields, such as health, education, policymakers and students of these professions. A wide range of people and professions participated, thereby ensuring a wide cross-section of understanding on mainstream Australian culture was gained.

People who participated in this study were willing to share their knowledge in a positive and constructive manner. This did not exclude those whose attitudes were challenging and thought provoking for me, because these participants shared their thoughts and knowledge openly, with generosity and goodwill. Some of the people who agreed to share their knowledge in this study were highly committed and excited to be a part of this research. One person started their day two hours early and another took the afternoon off work to participate in the interview.

Accepting and embracing opportune and unexpected contributions from people outside of the formal and focus group is something that Indigenous methodology accommodates and values. Integrity and respect are important factors in the recruitment process, as some people may have found this study challenging or confronting. While most participants were allies, wanted to become allies, or to be seen as allies of Indigenous Australian peoples there was a surprising amount of honesty and generosity in the shared knowledge.

Keeping up to date with current events as part of my professional routine including reviewing news feeds of reputable internet sites, made me highly conscious of the limitations of accepting the small sample of participants as representative of mainstream Australian culture. To gain further insight, and balance, I began participating in some reputable publicly available online discussions, drawing on the views freely given by fellow posters who presented and/or identified themselves as mainstream Australians. Views expressed in

online-forums were insightful, with a degree of rawness that was not evident in my interviews – some comments were overtly racist while others reflected a coloniser's view of what it means to be non-Indigenous Australian.

Research Conversations

Honouring reciprocity and respect, interviews took the form of research conversations, research yarning. Research conversations used "research yarning", akin to semi-structured interviews where questions are asked in ways that are relaxed, interactive and with information gathering purpose (Lin, Green, & Bessarab, 2016, p. A). This "conversational approach" is consistent with an "Indigenous relational tradition" that enables people to share "their own contextualised story steeped within the complex relationships of their lives" (Kovach, Carriere, Montgomery, Barrett, & Gilles, 2015, p. 6). The conversational method, or yarning method, has specific features including "informality and flexibility … [it] is collaborative and dialogic" and commonly has a decolonising aim (Kovach, 2010a, p. 43). Yarning, valuing Aboriginal storytelling as research conversations reflects Indigenous learning methods and is a significant aspect of Indigenous research methodologies (Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2013).

On receipt of an expression of interest to participate, a list of conversation promoting questions with relevant examples relating to each, was provided to each person. By providing brief background and context before each question, responses were focussed and well formed. This ensured that people were able to understand the focus of inquiry, and make a fully informed decision before committing to participate, and avoided any possible feeling of entrapment. Providing background questions demonstrates respect and integrity to Indigenous Australian ways of doing, that of giving explicit examples (Muller, 2016, p. 99). Respect for the right of a person to withdraw is essential.

Each question began with an example to give context to the line of inquiry I was pursuing. For instance, an Indigenous definition of "respect" was provided so each interviewee had a base point on which to discuss their understanding of what "respect" meant to them. Questions were carefully considered and positioned to flow from one topic to another, while also enabling a circular return to an issue that added layers to earlier responses. Layering knowledge by way of storying, with each reiteration adding more depth through understanding is an Indigenous Australian method of teaching and learning perfected for transferring and building on orally held knowledge (Sveiby & Skuthorpe, 2006, pp. 40–71). In this way, discussion on history flowed onto the start of spirituality. With a basic notion of what it meant for Indigenous Australians, when spirituality was returned to later, leading onto discussions about Country, interviewees were more familiar with Indigenous understandings of spirituality.

Time and mortality were an issue for Delma, the first interviewee, who was aged and wanted to share her knowledge as soon as possible. Delma did not live to see the study completed however the generous, honest and in-depth knowledge shared in her interview formed a solid base for the following research yarning where each research conversation added to the refinement and/or clarification of the collective data. Using an iterative and inductive approach meant that preliminary interviews provided a starting point for later research conversations.

Identifying themes was easier than the foundation research because all participants followed the framework provided by the "conversation promoting questions". Their responses did not follow the circular linguistic style of Indigenous Australians. Although copies of the interview transcripts were offered and returned to the interviewees and focus-group members for approval, clarification or editing, few wanted them. This contrasted with the Indigenous Australians in the first study who all wanted to check their interview transcripts. Where people made contradictions during their interviews these responses were not edited, because it was not my "truth" to tell.

Dinawaan Workshops: Focus Groups

Invitations were sent out for an interactive, artistic and fun learning workshop where the findings from my earlier project, Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory would be presented in exchange for people sharing their knowledge of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture. Two focus groups were held in Townsville, (Australia). Attendees were university students, staff and industry workers. Further detail on the way the workshops helped establish a culturally safe space for a group research yarn are discussed in Chapter 7: Intercultural Decolonisation: in practice.

Stage 3: Sharing Knowledge

Reciprocal teaching/learning is part of respecting the responsibility of knowledge.

Writing this Indigenous research story, Stage 3, is integral to respecting the knowledge that was shared in this study; it is one of analysis, reflection and clarification so the information can become part of our collective knowledge. This sharing honours the notion that knowledge is a collective asset and it fulfils my responsibility for knowledge, respecting the protocols and values required for respectful research (Muller, 2020).

Adopting a layered approach akin to grounded theory research methods (Denzin, 2010), I began with a preliminary analysis of, and reflection on, each interview or focus group before progressing. In a similar recursive motion to that utilised in action research, I was able to share, where appropriate,

the collective knowledge gained in interviews/focus groups with subsequent participants. As each contributor's conversation was transcribed and sorted into themes, clarification was sought from within non-Indigenous mainstream Australian society. In addition to those directly involved, I shared ideas, insights and attributes gleaned in the study with interested people who asked. Admittedly, I was surprised at some concepts that appeared outlandish to me being unanimously supported by the focus culture.

Reflection on Cultural Differences in Methodology

Keeping in mind that the selection and application of a research methodology and the researcher's worldview are resolutely linked, early in the design stages, cultural differences began to show. Identifying and being conscious of these cultural differences can assist those working at the cultural interface. These differences presented an opportunity to consider the issues and learning prospects arising using an Indigenous research methodology when researching non-Indigenous peoples. Grasping the opportunity is not without difficulty as non-Indigenous scholar Heather Burton experienced while working to use an Indigenous informed methodology, because it required great effort and commitment for her to gain an understanding and work within a culture very different from her own (Muller et al., 2022, pp. 18–21).

In my earlier research with Indigenous Australians most of the participants insisted on their names being used in all publications (very few opted for anonymity) with an exception of sensitive aspects about spirituality. I was unsure if non-Indigenous mainstream Australian participants would similarly want their real names used in the dissemination of this study. Following Indigenous research methods, my preference was to cite the people interviewed, with their explicit permission, as their wisdom informed my work. I had planned to use discretion and respect by seeking clarification and the use of anonymity or omission of this knowledge if things were mentioned by a person that they may not have meant to share in an identifiable way (Wilson, 2008). In direct contrast, only a small number of people considered having their names published. As a result, I used fictitious names. This fits within the cultural practices of Western academia, and is one area of difference from the foundational research with all Indigenous people. Notable exceptions are Regan Forrest and Susan Gair, whose written contribution to the discussion on decolonisation is referenced appropriately, with their permission; elsewhere I have given them an alias.

Expert Panel

An "expert panel" was a significant aspect of the methodology used in the foundation study to provide me with wisdom, guidance and ongoing cultural

and spiritual support (Muller, 2020). The Expert Panel is not a panel of "Experts", it is the collective group of Indigenous knowledge holders that formed the expertise. Collectively this expert panel acted to confirm the validity of my study and to ensure that only cultural knowledge that was appropriate to share was included in my work.

The expert panel for this research was to consist of knowledgeable Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, however cultural differences soon emerged with minimal interest from the focus community. Key differences were the interest and commitment to the concept of membership on the expert panel in this research. Whereas Indigenous expert panel members expressed a sense of collective ownership, interest from non-Indigenous people in being panel members in this study was articulated as a desire to help, or for individual advancement and status. As a result, a smaller expert panel informed this study, consisting of my academic supervisors, and a few key people who provided guidance, expertise and insight into non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. While expert panel membership in the foundation study grew over time, expert panel membership in this research into non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture reduced over time.

Interview Preferences

Differences between interview preferences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches when yarning about their knowledges were clear and interesting. While I used a similar interview framework in both instances, in the foundation study Indigenous interviewees started at the first conversation promoting question, then addressed my queries in a circular fashion prompted by only a few of the actual conversation promoting questions. All of the questions were addressed, weaving answers in a circulatory way, even though I only specifically raised a few of the first and the last on the list. Transcribing and coding entailed teasing out multiple interconnected themes from each response. While this method provided rich and detailed information, it did make transcribing and making sense of the themes more difficult than the non-Indigenous approach.

In contrast, interviews with non-Indigenous research interviewees were decidedly consecutive, addressing each question sequentially. There was a definite preference for a structured approach, even when they said they preferred to jump around the topics. If people discussed a topic earlier in the conversation, they still insisted on giving some answer to the later question. Use of time, timeliness and expectation that the spoken word was sufficient meant there was ready acceptance of, or preference for, phone/skype interviews in this study. In comparison, in my earlier research with Indigenous Australians, almost all interviews were face-to-face due to the reliance on body language and connectedness.

An additional positive of interviewing non-Indigenous people was the ready acceptance of phone or internet interviews. This made the study easier in part because it greatly reduced issues of distance, time-zones, scheduling and travel constraints. Phone interviews enabled greater flexibility for people wanting to participate, and added a degree of anonymity, with responses possibly more direct than if they were face-to-face.

Research Yarning

Shifting the research lens to focus on non-Indigenous mainstream Australian peoples, using the same research yarning method, demonstrated that use of research conversations/yarning are equally relevant when working with non-Indigenous study participants. Feedback at the end of each interview was overwhelmingly positive, with people thanking me for interviewing them because they gained from the process.

Concluding this chapter with my reflection has enabled me to share some insight into the differences between Indigenous respondents in the initial study and non-Indigenous mainstream Australian respondents in this study.

It was evident that in this research, many participants were very open while others carefully constructed their answers. Restrained and carefully considered responses tended to give me what they assumed I wanted and in a way that portrayed themselves in a positive light. Recognising that depicting oneself positively is a very human trait, this highlights how research is subjective and can only offer a small insight into the understanding of an individual about an issue in the context of, often unspoken, biases, motives and political agenda.

Reflecting on how some of my participants' views challenged my thoughts, I gained insight into how it is possible for non-Indigenous researchers to unintentionally allow their cultural norms to affect their interpretations of information they have gathered from us.

Reflection on the research process, how it has changed perspectives, grown understanding and developed the author as a researcher and person, is a common aspect of Indigenous academic theses, and entirely appropriate for this study. Western centred academics have suggested that personal reflection by an author is inappropriate, and/or self-indulgent. Cree researcher, Shawn Wilson maintains "If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (2008, p. 135).

Note

1 Dinawaan, also spelled Dinawan.

4

DECOLONISATION, A FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

Decolonisation is the research framework that was used to explore the values and principles that inform non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture and Indigenous Australian culture. Adopting the same framework in the examination of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian cultures allows a demonstration of how colonisation and decolonisation relate in different ways so that the similarities, differences and influences of these two very different yet intertwined cultures can be uncovered. To set in context how decolonisation is used, first an outline of colonisation is needed. This chapter gives a brief overview of the ideology of colonisation, then the framework of decolonisation. Indigenous Australian Spirituality, and the geosophical sentience of Country, are introduced here in relation to connectedness and identity.

The discussion on colonisation and decolonisation is summarised from the more in-depth analysis and discussion contained in the parent research project, particularly Chapters 2, 3 and 9, *A Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work* (Muller, 2020). Decolonisation as a process of recovering and healing from colonisation follows the summary on colonisation and places the framework of decolonisation adopted in this study into context. Indigenous theory/methodologies have a decolonising aim (Kovach, 2010b), but decolonisation is not the only aspect that makes it unique; Indigenous research methodologies draw on the cultural knowledge of the relevant Indigenous community. As this book is based on Indigenous Australian knowledge, below is an overview of the research story of recovering our theory.

Overview of Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory

The story of recovering Indigenous Australian knowledge is the foundation for this study. It established that Indigenous Australians in the helping arena

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work from a academically sound theoretical base. This was originally oral knowledge and not readily available to draw on in non-Indigenous studies or workplaces. Yarning about theory with a group of social-health workers, as a collective, we identified the need to make this oral theory more easily accessible in a written form. It became the focus of my original research and subsequently, set the foundation for this research into non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture.

Starting the original story of research, I initially assumed that I would be documenting a practice theory instead of the meta-theory that was replete with practice examples. As the research took me on a circular learning path, I was guided and supported throughout because this was a community driven project that I was truly honoured to have entrusted to me. Wisdom was generously given by significant knowledge holders.

Snake Story of Recovery and Rediscovery of Knowledge

> If you cut the tail off a snake (keelback) its tail grows back but the scales have a slightly different pattern. Contemporary Indigenous culture/knowledge is like the newly grown tail. Colonisation and invasion 'cut the tail off' our culture, and. although wounded, the snake (culture and knowledge) survived, lying low while it regenerated its new tail that is the same as the old one, with a slightly different pattern. Our culture/knowledge is as vigorous as before, yet wiser and knowledgeable of its assailant and its ways.
>
> *(As explained by a "Clever" man, Muller, 2020, p. 15)*

Process is as important as the outcome when conducting Indigenous research and Aboriginal Grounded Research [AGR] (Fejo, 1994; King, 2005) provided a collaborative, respectful method of inquiry, with emphasis on proper processes. A central feature of AGR in the foundational Social-Health research was a large group of significant knowledge holders who collectively made up a guiding Expert Panel, and ensured that the documented knowledge was appropriate to be shared and endorsed its validity. My responsibility, as researcher, was to discern what knowledge was to be shared, or not shared, drawing on members of the expert panel as required, and present it in an academically sound, yet readable, format.

In the process of documenting Indigenous Australian Social-Health theory, it became clear that our "ways of being" (ontology), "ways of knowing" (epistemology) and "ways of doing" (methodology) differed from non-Indigenous epistemology and ontology (Martin, 2008, p. 72). Discerning the difference between what I thought of as common knowledge and what was different from mainstream Australian knowledge presented some

interesting learning experiences. Engaging in reciprocal learning, a circular teaching/learning process, with my non-Indigenous primary supervisor helped me tease out these differences and allowed me to articulate our values and protocols more fully (Muller & Gair, 2013).

Genuine two-way sharing of knowledge is a sign of mutual respect and understanding – Indigenous research requires a climate of mutuality. In addition to reciprocity and mutuality, Respect, based on equality – (the view that everyone is intrinsically equal) formed the fundamental precept for my research. Other key protocols and values identified were: the survival and protection of our knowledge is a political process; one speaks only for oneself unless explicit permission has been given; consensus; use of plain language; deep listening (Dadirri) (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2002); a time-rich approach; consultation and full disclosure; respect for gender and age and an appreciation that with knowledge comes responsibility. Knowledge and responsibility are inseparable; custodians of knowledge have an obligation to ensure that knowledge is respected, nurtured and shared where appropriate.

Writing and organising the shared knowledge, taking our oral theory to a written format, presented difficulties. I was "growled" at by a few people for using language that was seen to be "too white", because "we see things not as black and white but more colourful" (Muller, 2010, p. 153). I was trying to shove our knowledge into a non-Indigenous box where it was simply not going to fit. Finally, I returned once again to the transcripts of the research conversations where the answer was waiting for me: "It has to be linked to culture, in a cultural way, by giving an example first, then asking how the learner understands it, building on from there" in multiple, intertwined and knotted together layers (ibid).

Capturing the essence of our complex theory was daunting and Kovach's (2010b, p. 10) assurance that when using "Indigenous methodologies – start where you are, it will take you where you need to go" resonated with my experience. As stated above, decolonisation provided the framework for this research. Like colonisation, decolonisation is enacted through a set of complex processes that necessitates personal and social action, participation and commitment. Before discussing decolonisation, I present a brief look at the effects of colonisation and the ideology that supports it.

Colonisation

In this discussion I draw on the five stages of colonisation, identified by the late Virgilio Enriques and Poka Laenui (2000), that Laenui suggests are evident in varying degrees of intensity in all colonised countries. These stages are not necessarily sequential or separate.

The ideology that supported colonisation is still evident in modern Australia, although now perhaps, it is a little more subtle. The five stages of colonisation according to Laenui are:

1 *Denial and Withdrawal:* the stage where colonisers deny Indigenous peoples' culture and moral values. In Australia, Indigenous peoples' very humanity was denied and withdrawn.
2 *Destruction/Eradication:* of culture, social systems and peoples. Murder, massacres, eugenic breeding programmes aimed at assimilation/absorption and forced removal were used in the colonisation of Australia.
3 *Denigration/Belittlement/Insult:* Indigenous culture, languages, practices, knowledge and beliefs are denigrated and rendered invisible and valueless and, in some instances, outlawed and replaced by the coloniser's model.
4 *Surface Accommodation/Tokenism:* Remnants of the surviving culture are given token regard giving rise to the notion of the "noble savage" and the colonisers assuming the right of defining who is a **"real"** Indigenous person.
5 *Transformation/Exploitation:* the remnant culture is transformed and exploited by the colonisers.

Knowledge of history is central to the story of colonisation and decolonisation.

Pre-Colonisation: Pre-History

The story of the colonisation of Australia begins before invasion. Ironically, the information set out below is from the journals of early European arrivals. In this section of history, pre- and post-colonisation, I draw on resources that are easily accessible on the internet, so it is reasonable to expect mainstream Australians can access this knowledge if they choose to look. This is not knowledge locked in archives and available solely to academics.

Common coloniser myths taught in Australian schools, and accepted as fact, were/are that pre-colonisation the peoples of Australia were hunters-gatherers, with no permanent houses and no formal social structure: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were barely human, savages. The coloniser's versions of history promulgate the preferred stories that seek to justify the righteousness of colonisation.

Conservative estimates suggest that Australia has been occupied for between 40,000 and 120,000 years (Bowler, Price, Sherwood, & Carey, 2018). Australia has the world's oldest ritual burial, as the remains dubbed "Mungo man" were interred a minimum of 40,000 years ago (Prescott & Bowler, 2003). Trading was sophisticated, well established and documented. Trading routes transported goods, culture and knowledge across the width and depth of the continent (Kerwin, 2010).

Extensively citing journals and artworks of early European settlers, Gammage (2011) demonstrates that the Australian continent was deliberately and sensitively farmed by the original peoples. Non-Indigenous explorers stole from granaries they found, plundering the carefully packaged food supplies. Settlers' journals from the 1800s tell of grain harvesting, as well as the harvesting and planting of yam; stone houses and substantial permanent housing, some in villages with footpaths, were found across Australia also. The myths of Australia being inhabited by nomadic, barely human, peoples are exposed as a fabrication; these myths were created with careful/careless editing of these accounts of Australia's story. Australia's original peoples bartered, traded, travelled, governed and built dwellings.

Pre-colonisation, we were not a violent society, our "social organisation was highly complicated, religion deep and complex, and art and myths rich and varied" (Tatz, 1999, p. 319). Men and women were intrinsically equal; each had independent and interdependent responsibilities in maintaining the social order (Atkinson, 2002). Social structures were in place for resolution of conflict and the crime of rape or the forcible taking of a child away from parents incurred the punishment of death by spearing, enforced by the tribe collectively and "unnatural offences including criminal assault on children are unknown" according to Roth (1902), a medical doctor and "Aboriginal Protector" in Queensland (cited in Robertson, 2000, p. 269). The myth of Australia as a violent society, pre-colonisation, is challenged by early European records.

Invasion/Settlement

The coloniser's ideology disrupted the social structure. "The British brought with them an entrenched patriarchal system that legitimised the acculturation and dispossession of a race they considered inferior", distorting pre-colonised Australian society where males and females "were relatively equal" with "specific gender roles that were complementary and respectful" (Robertson, 2000, p. 59). "Patriarchal colonisation" bought "particular forms of violence" that acted to promote powerlessness and decay to the social system (ibid, p. 60).

Government policies of dispersal (eradication), integration (eugenics) and assimilation all had a transformative effect on us as a people (W. Anderson, 2005). The theory of racial superiority enabled the coloniser governments to endorse programmes designed to breed out the culture, language and "colour" of Australia's original peoples (Kidd, 2007). All aspects of life were regulated by the colonisers, in programmes designed to breed a fair-skinned servant class to be integrated into the mainstream, although there was never a point where whiteness, or full humanity, would be achieved regardless of colour or "quantum of blood" (W. Anderson, 2005).

Health

Before colonisation, Indigenous Australians enjoyed health and social and emotional well-being far superior to most people living in the colonisers' home country and were "relatively fit and disease-free" (Parker & Milroy, 2014, p. 26). Historian Greg Blyton (2009) identified archival evidence, beginning with accounts from members of the first fleet of colonisers that indicated, pre-colonisation, Aboriginal Australians lived well into old age. Previously absent diseases, were introduced by the colonisers, and when combined with dispossession and violence wreaked havoc on the population (M. Anderson, 2006, p. 2).

Mental health, social and emotional well-being, pre-colonisation, featured "strong cultural and spiritual practices" where people were healthy and balanced, "physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually" (Smallwood, 2011, p. 10). In 1944, prominent anthropologist A P Elkin (p. 23) readily identified the effect colonisation had on Aboriginal diet and health.

Racism

Colonisation relied heavily on racism, endorsed by the scientific racism, eugenics – the settlers accepting and believing in their racial superiority as it sat neatly into the colonisers' class-structured world view. Racism does not necessarily depend on individual intentions, however. When viewed as "one of many types of oppression which, along with its opposite, privilege, is based on a range of social characteristics" it can be "unwittingly and unconsciously (re)produced by many people who have no racist intentions whatsoever" (Paradies, 2007, p. 67). This unintentional deeply enculturated racism is what Jaxon Curtis aptly named "Cultural Malware" (2022) because like computer malware, this is deep racism insidiously implanted into people's thinking, that can emerge unexpectedly and unwanted (Muller et al., 2022).

Racism and oppression can become internalised by the colonised so that people believe the negative attributes ascribed to them and the colonisers' version of science and history. "Indigenous Australia has internalised racist messages that for so long have told us that to be Aboriginal is to be primitive, dirty, lazy and ignorant. The opposite is true" (Lucashenko, 2008). Disturbingly a study of foster carers of Indigenous children, found many of the non-Indigenous carers held a belief that the children in their care were intrinsically flawed due to genetic defects (Cuthbert, 2000). Racism continued to be prevalent in Australian society in 2014 (TNS Social Research: beyondblue) and continues in the present day (Locke et al., 2023).

Violence

Our history is one marred by physical, cultural and spiritual violence by individuals and the state (Robertson, 2000; W. Anderson, 2005; Watego, 2021). Destruction and eradication, depopulation, began with the British invasion.

Introduced diseases such as smallpox and measles were historically significant, but are not solely accountable for the depopulation of the Indigenous population and must be viewed with consideration of the broader impacts of colonisation.

Violence by the colonisers was particularly harsh; and as the original landholders were cast as vermin, murders and massacres by the colonisers went largely unpunished. In 1828 martial law was declared in Tasmania and it served to reframe the violence as an act of war, legitimating the atrocities of torture, murder of children and women and acted to justify or exonerate what others refer to as a clear case of genocide (Haebich, 2000). Strychnine was used to kill Aboriginal people in Queensland, as noted in a Colonial Office Minute in January 1866 (in Evans, 2003, p. 66). Dispossession, poverty, malnutrition and starvation, limited healthcare, racist government policies and the settler society's belief in their genetic superiority all contributed to depopulation (Mitchell, 2007).

Colonisation severely damaged traditional societies, as "Aborigines who moved into the new economic system were compelled to do so because colonists had wrought an unprecedented destruction on their ecosystem" (Robinson, 2008, p. 259). Protection policies of the coloniser governments forced people onto reserves or missions, and their lives were controlled by legislation based purely on race. People forced onto the missions/reserves were a source of cheap or free labour for the colonisers, with any wages taken to provide basic funding for the reserves (Kidd, 2007; Robinson, 2008).

Children as young as three were signed into wageless servitude, kidnapped by colonisers, sold and bartered as commodities, like slaves, and most "did not receive an education or life's basic essentials" (Robinson, 2008, p. 257). From the earliest contact until the 1830s, sealers in Tasmania abducted children and females as young as eight, allegedly to "protect them", instead they were used for sex and their labour, suffering horrific violence and murder in the process (Haebich, 2000, p. 79).

In a eugenic plan to breed out identity, culture and colour, and create a new not-quite-white servant class, children, primarily female, were forcibly removed based on their "race", under the guise of protection (Haebich, 2000; HREOC, 1997; Robinson, 2008; W. Anderson, 2005). These "stolen" children were raised in institutions or placed into white foster care to be raised in the colonisers' image with the welfare of the children poorly monitored by the state.

Members of the Women's Taskforce on Violence heard evidence of a young girl of the stolen generations, who was sent to work on a property aged 14. She was tied up at night, beaten and raped whenever the farmer's wife was unavailable to him. This occurred in the early 1970s.

> The woman showed the Task Force members the wounds on her back from the whippings she suffered and it was reported that the scars were so

> deeply furrowed that it was hard to believe that a young girl of fourteen could have survived such an ordeal.
>
> *(Robertson, 2000, pp. 75–77)*

The farmer's wife was able to hear the young girl's cries for help, and did nothing.

Some citizens appear not to have known about the horrors of Colonisation, while such claims of ignorance are also challenged:

> "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I just didn't know", sobs the motherly figure … At the front of the lecture theatre, the speaker, an Aboriginal woman of the Stolen Generations, is also crying. It is an emotionally charged moment at the 1997 National Adoption Conference in Perth. Suddenly, startling us all, a firm European voice rings out, "But how could you not know? I only came to this Country in the 1970s but I knew." The anguished cry and sometimes disingenuous reply, "I just didn't know" was repeated by leaders and members of the public around the Country following the publication of the Bringing Them Home Report, but none posed that profound question "How could we not have known?"
>
> *(Haebich, 2000, p. 563)*

As Paul Keating, Prime Minister of Australia at the time, said in his historic (1992) Redfern speech, "guilt is not what is needed". We need allies committed to walking alongside us.

Dissenting Voices

From the early days of colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not, are not, silent victims, nor without allies in the clash between the settlers and Indigenous Australians. In 1846, a Tasmanian Aboriginal man, Walter Arthur, and his colleagues sent a petition to Queen Victoria with a list of grievances on the treatment they received, and with an assertion that they were "free people" (Haebich, 2000).

Non-Indigenous and Indigenous people raised voices of dissent against the violence of colonisation. The dogma associated with colonisation was not accepted by all settlers and there were some tremendous efforts, and sacrifices, made by non-Indigenous colleagues and friends in the past (Reynolds, 1998). A letter to the editor of a North Queensland paper, penned in 1915 by a resident spoke fearlessly of the unscrupulous and unfair treatment by those in authority, towards the local Aboriginal people and their non-Indigenous supporters (Donovan & Queensland, 2002). Those who walk beside us, or have walked beside us, in our quest for justice are highly valued and their contributions deserve recognition.

Contemporary Colonisation

Colonisation is not a past event but an ongoing and contemporary issue. Australia now has anti-discrimination and equal opportunity laws, allegedly to ensure a fair go for all. In 2007, the Howard led Federal government, citing Indigenous child protection, suspended the racial discrimination laws in the Norther Territory, and demonstrated that these laws are subject to the political will and whim of the colonisers government. Most of Laenui's five stages of colonisation are evident in current policies or practices today. Surface accommodation and tokenism ensure that while equality is espoused, equal opportunities like education, employment and health are reliant on our fitting into others' definition of normal.

Educational curricula continue in the destruction and eradication phase by devaluing our knowledge, language and practices and replacing these with the colonisers model (Ford, 2005; Williams, 2011). Surface accommodation continues as non-Indigenous "Others" feel able to define who they consider a "real" Indigenous Australian, denying the legitimacy of the reality of many people who do not fit within their perceived criteria (Foley, 2000).

Despite the violent history of Colonisation, our adaptation, strength and resilience have seen us survive as distinct peoples, but not without cost to the well-being of so many of us. The most profound form of violence violates the spirit and soul, tearing at individual and collective identity. Racism, a major tool of colonisation, has become internalised for too many as interactions with the colonial social system have made many Indigenous people feel disempowered and dispirited. Paradies and Cunningham (2009, p. 551) define internalised racism as "the incorporation of racist attitudes, affect and beliefs into one's own worldview".

Internalised racism is often thought of as afflicting the colonised community, but it also affects the coloniser community's attitudes, actions and worldview. Decolonisation can act to challenge internalised racism, and just as colonisation is not a construct of Indigenous Australians, decolonisation is the responsibility of all Australians. I focus next on the internal process of decolonisation because to experience change at a structural level the internalised and subtle perpetuation of colonisation must first be challenged at a personal level.

Decolonisation in Practice

Laenui also outlined five stages of Decolonisation; (1) *Rediscovery and Recovery*, (2) *Mourning*, (3) *Dreaming*, (4) *Commitment* and (5) *Action* (2000, 2007) but in the foundational research, I found something was missing. Compiling the knowledge shared about the principles and values that inform Indigenous Australians in the helping professions, it was evident there

is an additional stage of decolonisation, a stage of *Healing/Forgiveness – Reclaiming Wellbeing and Harmony*, a phase for self-care, that nestles between the Mourning phase and the Dreaming phase. Reclamation of spiritual well-being, where resilience is nurtured and healing occurs, happens in this stage. After translating Laenui's stages of decolonisation into an Australian context, particularly the dreaming phase that has a deep spiritual reference in Australia, there were now six stages of decolonisation, Laenui's five and the new stage. The decolonisation framework used in my research are the following.

Six Stages of Decolonisation

1. *Rediscovery and Recovery:* This is a foundation phase of rediscovering history, traditional practices and languages, reconnecting with Country and kin: it is a time of renewed sense of identity, of recovering knowledges (Laenui, 2000, 2007). People may arrive at this stage by curiosity, accident, desperation, escape, coincidence, fate or as I found – spirituality.
2. *Mourning:* In this phase, feelings of anger and injustice need time for expression for the healing to begin; sadly, some people become lost in this phase, unable to move towards healing (Laenui, 2000).
3. *Healing/Forgiveness – Reclaiming Well-being:* The Healing/Forgiveness – reclaiming well-being is a pivotal stage of decolonisation – it is a time for self-care, healing. This is a time for reflection and the reclaiming of spiritual well-being that builds resilience. Healing is a significant stage for social-health workers and is central to the theory that informs our work (Muller, 2020).
4. *Dreaming:* This is a stage of strengthening and revaluing our philosophy and knowledge. Laenui sees this phase as the most crucial for recovery, describing it as *Building the Master Recovery Plan* (2000), however, in an Australian context this is more about drawing on the ancient and contemporary wisdom of our peoples.

   The ***Dreaming*** **and** ***Dreamtime*** are words that, in Australia, relate to Aboriginal philosophy, spirituality, creation and Country.
5. *Commitment:* From the dreaming phase comes the stage of establishing a commitment to a direction for social change (Laenui, 2000).
6. *Action:* This is a phase for pro-active, not reactive, action. This phase is not the responsive action to challenge injustices or action to ensure survival; it is not punitive action, it is positive action (Laenui, 2000).

Just as the stages of colonisation are not separate, the stages of decolonisation are permeable and interconnected. These stages are not

sequential or exclusive: "As one goes through the phases of rediscovery and recovery, then mourning, next dreaming, it is at times helpful or even necessary to return to rediscovery and recovery to aid in the dreaming" (Laenui, 2000, p. 159).

The sixth stage of decolonisation was a significant outcome of my previous research: the Healing/Forgiveness stage is a connecting phase, while also being a goal that links and informs Indigenous Australian Social-Health theory and is central to its practice. The research undertaken to document Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory, discussed in this chapter has a decolonising purpose. Because of this connectedness, before discussing decolonisation further, I digress slightly to share an overview of the findings of this first study as this informs, and puts into context, the new Healing/Forgiveness stage.

Knowledge Shared: An Overview of Our Theory

> Our knowledge has no beginning and no ending, *"it is not alpha and omega but Circular and Reformative."*
>
> *(Muller, 2020, p. 133)*

Theory can be a topic that fills human service workers with dread; often seen as an abstract academic concept, difficult to relate to everyday practice, with mumbles and diversions used to stifle any further conversation. I did not find this among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers; we yarn about theory – the values and principles that inform our ways of working. Talk of theory invariably included aspects of our philosophy and spirituality, carefully interwoven with practice examples, deep learning and humour. Adaptation and incorporation of selective non-Indigenous practice under the governance of our philosophy and theoretical framework was also evident.

Below is a brief, select, overview of Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory under headings that cannot do justice to the interconnectedness of such themes. However, Social-Health theory must be situated in the current reality, that racism continues to influence life and work and it is part of our everyday lives.

Racism

Experiences of racism were so commonplace in my research conversations that I almost overlooked it as a theme. Stories of racism held a twist of humour, usually against the perpetrator. As one person put it, "Blackfellas gotta laugh at these things, if we don't we'd always be crying" (in Muller, 2020, p. 121). However, serious health implications arise from racism (Dudgeon,

Bray, & Walker, 2023; Laccos-Barrett, Brown, Saunders, Baldock, & West, 2022; Paradies, 2007, 2018) and "continuing racism in Australian society presents a serious social problem with psychological, ethical and physiological ramifications" (Pedersen & Barlow, 2008, p. 148).

Racism in the workplace and academy was particularly relevant because a complainant against racism commonly suffers retaliation and repercussions such as demotion, and/or retrenchment. In academia, racism, paternalism and systemic biases act to limit the value of Indigenous knowledges. A study of Indigenous early career researchers in Australian universities suggested they fell under three category headings, Unicorns, Cash Cows or Performing Monkeys, (Locke et al., 2023). Showing little has changed, these researchers told how, while they were not valued, their knowledge was often appropriated and used to further non-Indigenous colleagues' careers. That is, in research we become informants when we share our knowledge, while non-Indigenous researchers become experts on us (the late Puggy Hunter in Muller, 2020, p. 127).

Immigrants, or new settlers, including non-white settlers Indigenous to other colonised countries, also enact racism against Indigenous Australians. When voluntary minority migrants arrive in a country *with their culture intact they are "more likely to participate in dominant group structures because they see it as a way to improve their status in society*" (Sonn et al., 2000, p. 128). New settlers seeking to gain integration and acceptance into mainstream Australian society can sometimes adopt the prejudices of mainstream society (Pedersen & Barlow, 2008). Racism underpins the ideology of colonisation whereas decolonisation challenges racism and can act to neutralise it.

Spirituality

> Spirituality is something that was always there, it is not something that is talked about freely like Christianity; it is part of who you are. Spirituality does not need a religion attached to it. Spirituality is what makes a person.
>
> *(in Muller, 2020, p. 167)*

Spirituality, the experience of the sacred, and Connectedness are integral aspects of Aboriginal Philosophy and featured strongly in my research conversations. The sacred is the domain of spirit that "resides in the relationship between the human spirit and the natural life force" (Graham, 2008, p. 186). Spirituality is incorporated into everyday ways of working; it is relied on for connecting with others' spirituality. I discuss spirituality, as shared with me, in relation to the theory that informs practice in what I refer to as "everyday spirituality".

Our spirituality's focus is on the present, connecting with the spiritual essence surrounding oneself and accepting guidance/trust in its influence in the future, not seeking to escape the present (Graham, 2008) while also incorporating the past, present and future.

A "deep yearning" is referred to in the absence of sufficient Spirituality: there is a "yearning they hold in the depths of their stomachs … a sense of being lost" that causes some to "turn to drugs, alcohol and suicide" (Purcell, 2002, p. 215). Aboriginal poet, Lyndel Robb explained the "restlessness that is expressed by physical and mental torture" as "this yearning for your people, your land and your Dreaming" for we "are born from Spirituality" and the "Dreaming has much more meaning when that part of your soul becomes restful, knowing and content" (1996, p. 114). "Coming into one's spirituality" is a wondrous experience but it can pose a risk of a mental health diagnosis if not understood.

Consciousness of spirituality can be nurtured from, or before, conception, or develop over time. Some people speak of "*coming into their spirituality*" over a few weeks/months, and/or almost instantaneously. "Coming into one's spirituality" results in a new sense of being able to tap into another source, to connect more deeply with Country and ancestral entities: it is talked of as a life-changing event.

Spirituality is "*about connecting with all living beings/organisms in the world in harmonic ways … it is about tapping into the still places I go to when I am on Country … about finding the calmness in the busy spaces of my life*" (Senimelia Kingsburra in McEwan & Tsey, 2009, p. vi).

Respect

Respect is the thread that ran throughout this research; respect is based on the basic premise that regardless of status or occupation each "soul" is intrinsically equal. Everyone is "acknowledged to have something unique to offer, because of his or her spiritual identity and personal experience of life" (Graham, 2008, p. 192). Respect underlines our need to seek consensus.

Shared Learning

As I listened, learned and reflected on the knowledge shared with me, it became evident that something more was happening. People were thanking me, saying that in sharing their knowledge and receiving knowledge from others they were able to express their practice with more confidence: some said they received healing from the sharing of knowledge process. This was evidence of the healing stage of decolonisation.

Healing – Reclaiming Well-being, a Stage of Decolonisation

> Reviving ancient knowledge from the ashes of colonialism is critical to … the healing agenda.
>
> *(Sinclair, 2004, p. 53)*

Reclaiming Well-being reflects the belief that well-being is our normative state, and refers to decolonising our minds of the coloniser's negative construction of our identity and "recovering our sense of wellbeing and equanimity" (Muller, 2020, p. 252). It is a stage where harmony can be found. Healing is a pivotal phase of decolonisation.

Healing/Forgiveness – Reclaiming Well-being, the third stage of decolonisation, is the space where this current study into mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture occurs. It is an action towards reclaiming well-being as a normative state for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Threads of the Healing phase are evident in the first rediscovery/recovery stage, as a critical review of the history and ideology of colonisation is often the beginning of engaging with the process of decolonisation. The ideology of colonisation, of racial and social superiority enabled the creation of settler myths, to be presented as historical truths. Knowledge of the true history of colonisation is an important aspect of Social-Health theory and features strongly in workers' practice.

Rediscovering history helps connect the past, present and future, and promotes understanding and reaffirms our "relational worldview" and can enhance our "spiritual wellbeing" (Mackean, Shakespeare, & Fisher, 2022, p. 11). However, anger and pain arising from stories uncovered in the rediscovery stage, can lead one to the mourning stage. Engaging with the other phases of decolonisation can assist people who risk becoming stuck in the mourning phase. Stories of resistance to the barbarity of colonisation, including those of non-Indigenous allies, also help one enter the Healing/Forgiveness phase where well-being can be reclaimed.

Healing is a contentious term as Melisah Feeney (2009) notes, the concept of "healing" implies that it is possible to fix lives that have been irrevocably shattered, when it obviously is not. As a phase of decolonisation, Healing and/or forgiveness does not mean forgetting past wrongs, or forgoing justice, nor does it mean absolving, but it refers to emotional healing, spiritual healing, which can then lead to physical healing.

> Healing is part of life and continues through death and into life again. … It can be experienced in many forms such as mending a wound or recovery from illness … it is about renewal … Healing gives us back to ourselves. Not to hide or fight anymore. But to sit still, calm our minds, listen to the universe and allow our spirits to dance on the wind. …. Healing is not just about recovering what has been lost or repairing what has been broken. … Healing keeps us strong and gentle at the same time. It gives us balance and harmony, a place of triumph and sanctuary for evermore.
>
> *(Milroy cited in Mackean, 2009)*

Renowned Indigenous author Melissa Lucashenko (2002) reflects that

> If we are fully healed, we might find compassion for them for being so low as to need this racism in their arsenal of survival tools.

Decolonisation and Our Non-Indigenous Allies

> See, the impact of colonialism has been huge … we are still recovering …
>
> [But] There's not a lot of understanding about the part of white Australia because they have this misguided belief that colonialism doesn't affect them. Of course it does! It's made them into the people they are today, [and]… Many are trying to run away from their own history …"
>
> *(Watson in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Development Team, 2009, p. 1.2.1)*

Laenui explains that "colonisation and decolonisation are social processes even more than they are political processes" and these complex processes require personal and social action and participation (2000, p. 1). In the process of rediscovery, the history of the colonisers' home country surprisingly made me realise that many of the colonisers were duped into the unknowing, or knowing, acceptance of the settler myths of quasi-science inherent in the ideology of colonisation.

Colonisation has changed the lives of Indigenous peoples and many of us are linked socially, genetically or emotionally, to peoples in the settler community; our past, present and futures are linked. Non-Indigenous practitioners also need knowledge of Indigenous history and the role their professions have played in colonisation, as this knowledge makes the Healing phase as important for non-Indigenous peoples who wish to be our allies. Koolmatrie and Williams (2000, p. 164) stress that non-Indigenous workers need to "Deal with the issue of what your people have done to our people, what your ancestors have done to our ancestors … [for] Unless you are healed, don't bother to come in and work with **us** because you'll only make **us** worse".

The Healing/Forgiveness stage is particularly relevant to everyone, because the issues arising from colonisation and decolonisation are as relevant for non-Indigenous peoples as they are for Indigenous peoples. Without confronting the witting, or unwitting, acceptance of the settler myths of colonisation, it is not possible for good citizens to continue to allow the current deplorable state of health and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Healing begins with personal examination of how the ideology of colonisation has become internalised and perpetuated through subtle and subliminal myths of colonisation.

Framing Research on Decolonisation

Decolonisation, while an integral aspect of Indigenous methodologies, can provide a research framework that is also relevant to our allies. Indigenous academics should rightly take on the role of "educating their non-Indigenous contemporaries" or risk Indigenous students, particularly those wishing to use Indigenous methodologies, continuing to be misunderstood (Kovach, 2021, p. 39). Kevin Gilbert also talked of the need for teaching "because you have to heal the Whitefella" … "we have to grow the Whitefella up" (1996, p. 61). Sharing our knowledge, that which is appropriate to share, offers the opportunity for educating/healing non-Indigenous peoples.

Decolonisation however, also offers an opportunity for research that is relevant to both the coloniser and colonised community. While Kovach (2021) identifies that Indigenous theory/methodologies have a decolonising aim, it is also our metatheory that dictates and establishes what are acceptable protocols and values in specific Indigenous research methodologies and theory. By adapting the framework of the six stages of decolonisation, and an understanding of the five stages of colonisation, decolonisation can present opportunities for other applications. It can provide a framework for research that can be used for applications by our non-Indigenous allies as they walk beside us in our quest to untangle the mess caused by colonisation.

Blending of Indigenous and Western knowledge can provide enhanced prospects in helping and healing professional practices (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Young, Najavits, & Toulouse, 2016).

National and international decolonisation movement draws members from colonised and coloniser peoples. Discussed here is decolonisation from a context of a colonised-and-coloniser peoples in a country dealing with the effects of colonisation to its social structure and national cultural identity. Unsurprisingly, there are differences in the way coloniser and colonised peoples do decolonisation, yet there is a common theme aimed at correcting and addressing the cultural malware originating from adherence to the social conformities within the ideology of colonisation.

International movements to decolonise different disciplines is occurring; such as mathematics (Crowell, 2023), archaeology (Kilian, 2022) and medicine (Opara, 2021). Accomplished academic authors suggesting how a coloniser country could act to decolonise the curriculum in their education structures opens a different international perspective to the movement. Examining and dispelling the myths of colonialist superiority as some form of normal and natural eugenic selection, and inserting truth to historical accounts, are some of the international strategies used in decolonising academic curriculum (Muller, 2023). In a move to address the propensity of textbooks to be written from a colonialist cultural lens, the push for a decolonisation of chemistry is not about losing anything, rather to include things to make

"chemistry more global" to create a "sense of belonging" and "build better chemists" (Sanderson, 2023, p. 316).

Conclusion

The rejuvenated snake introduced this chapter to start the story of how Indigenous Australians are recovering our knowledge, translating select aspects of our oral theory into an academically usable format. Decolonisation provides a framework for this resurgence of our knowledge and the identification of a new stage in Decolonisation – Healing and the Reclaiming of Wellbeing.

Sharing an insight into how our theory links to practice, demonstrates how decolonisation offers an opportunity for healing in both the colonised and coloniser community, for both are afflicted by the ideology of colonisation. Colonisation was, or is, enacted by the settler society; therefore, decolonisation is particularly relevant for the colonising community.

As Indigenous knowledge is rejuvenated, the challenge now is for non-Indigenous people to decolonise their minds and overcome the "systemic biases" in academia where "racism and paternalism work against both equal participation in research and the valuing of Indigenous knowledge systems" (Dwyer & Silburn, 2009, pp. 5–13).

> … You see, that mouth of the snake … our people have retreated into the belly of the snake. It's our consolidation of our Aboriginality, a renewing of our identity. Only recently have we begun emerging from the mouth of the snake with renewal and consolidation of who we are …
>
> *(Watson in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Development Team, 2009, p. 1.2.1)*

This new research story, *Shifting the Lens*, invites our allies, or those wanting to become our allies to join with us and share their knowledge in the decolonisation process. We extend this invitation because decolonisation is everybody's business.

5 MAINSTREAM YARNING

Yarning in this context is deliberate conversation using an informal style similar to, yet different from, what is called semi-structured interviews. Here the participants who shared their knowledge about non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture are introduced. Greater detail is added to what is mainstream culture, its foundational values and principles, and how this differs from Indigenous Australian culture. What participants were raised to believe and the ways this is changing starts to become evident.

Beginning this chapter, once again I faced a dilemma between trying to conform and fit neatly within Western academic tradition and a storying approach more aligned with Indigenous teaching and learning. Faced with this internal conflict, I returned to reflect on the reasons for this research, remembering that answering questions about mainstream Australians posed by Indigenous Australians, my main audience, was the primary goal. Mainstream non-Indigenous Australians who may take learning and benefit from this work, new Australians, and those who do not feel part of mainstream society, are an additional target audience. Remaining respectful of the people who generously gave their time and consideration for this study remained at the forefront of my thoughts.

For me, Western academic writing style offered an easier path, with an almost linear method with select guidelines, whereas the Indigenous, circular, storying style of conveying knowledge has greater complexity. This narrative style rewards careful listening (in this case reading), can have multiple layers of learning nestled within the text and provide examples of the research methodology in practice, demonstrating Indigenous ways of working.

In this chapter, the voices of those who shared their knowledge with me explain experiences and the internal attributes of being part of, of belonging

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to, non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. I start this chapter first by introducing the participants and begin the conversation with history. History is an integral part of Indigenous ways of working, using stories of the past to inform the present and future, and to set the context for relevant learning points.

Introducing the Participants

The names used for those who shared their knowledge with me are: Marian, Hope, Kylie, Theresa, David, Julie, Margaret, Erica, Michael, Sharna, Tania, Sonya, Vera, Emily, Clare, Delma, Leoni, Brenda, Jack, and opportunistic interviews, George, Robert, Ada, Gloria. Focus groups acronyms are used to identify between morning (FGAM) and afternoon (FGPM) groups.

Fictitious names are used, as noted in Chapter 3, complying with Western academic cultural customs, with the exceptions where the discussions on decolonisation by Regan Forrest and Susan Gair, are appropriately referenced. Vera, a pseudonym, insisted on being identified as a trans-woman, acknowledging that this may compromise her anonymity. All who shared their knowledge with me were tertiary educated adults, from a range of occupations such as; post-graduate student, university educators and academics, activists, professionals from the helping disciplines, and public servants – some in very senior positions. Participants came from professions such as social work, mental health, education, sociology, management, nutrition, health and medicine.

People interviewed were from Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia, although most spoke of having lived elsewhere in Australia. Thirty-one (31) people; twenty-seven (27) women and four (4) men, in total participated in interviews or focus groups. Nineteen (19) individual interviews and two focus groups with a total of twelve (12) participants. Twelve (12) people, eleven (11) female and one (1) male, participated in the focus groups. Sixteen (16) women and three (3) men were interviewed individually.

Ages where stated, ranged between twenty-eight (28) years and seventy-four (74) years. Five people were aged between twenty-eight (28) and forty (40), five between forty (40) and fifty (50), two between fifty (50) and sixty (60) and six were older than sixty (60). Although the focus group members had a similar spread of ages, only one was over 60. Four opportunistic interviews on a specific topic are also included.

Participant Background and Identity

All those interviewed self-identified as mainstream non-Indigenous Australian as this was the selection criteria for the study. Heritage, was mostly unstated although one person said they were French/Dutch but raised British and

now Australian, and another's mother was "Australian" (white) and father Egyptian. Four participants were British migrants (one who migrated as a nine-year-old child) and another Australian born held dual Australian-UK citizenship. Although there was some reaction when participants were faced with a binary of Indigenous or non-Indigenous, with some objection to being referred to as non-Indigenous or mainstream Australian, no other identity option was suggested. Attendees of the focus group workshops, filled out preliminary questions. All were born in Australia and identified as non-Indigenous mainstream Australian with one person unsure of their heritage.

Class

Intriguing to me, class featured in the self-identification of five (5) respondents. Three (3) stated they came from "upper-class" families, while not necessarily embracing that identity for themselves. One person said they were "not upper-class" with no other social positioning given and another identified as being raised in a Western, urban, non-Indigenous middle-class culture. Another implied they were upper class, but did not explicitly say it.

Research participants' experience and knowledge about working respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people ranged from people like Tania who said she knew nothing and agreed to participate for that reason, to Michael and Julie with considerable understanding. Being mindful that some may have constructed their responses from being familiar with my earlier work, very few had exposure to, or read my work. Marian and Vera were aware of my work but had not read it. Clare and two members of the focus groups had read my previous work.

An Interesting Side Issue

An intriguing number of people, who were initially very enthusiastic, withdrew or did not follow through with interviews once they read the conversation promoting questions. In hindsight, it may have proved helpful to note the basic details of those who enthusiastically expressed interest but did not follow through with interviews. Although there was interest from a wide range of ethnically diverse Australians, after reading the information before being interviewed, all but those from Western oriented cultures withdrew. Some of these were new migrants who initially self-identified as part of mainstream Australian society, along with Australian-accented people, saying said they did not identify as belonging to mainstream Australian culture strongly enough to participate as an informant; they felt on the outer circle of the dominant culture.

Prospective interviewees who considered themselves to be "experts" on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not proceed once they

received the list of conversation promoting questions. Also, there were no "sleepers", people with Indigenous Australian heritage who identify as mainstream, in this study.

Before this chapter begins, and when reading the following chapters, I would like the reader to be mindful of the following advice about non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture.

Kind Intent

"*Most people are kind*" is the most important thing Brenda would like people to know about her culture. In a similar vein Michael advised that "*if you strip most people down they do things because it's a good thing to do*". However, "*most people genuinely want to help but they just don't know how to, and that's something of an issue*" and it can lead some people to appear indifferent. Working from a strengths-based perspective, Michael believes that most people are good and well-intentioned, and a "*fundamental belief that most people act out of kindness and goodness*". In his senior position, Michael advises new work colleagues to "*seek and find the strengths that people have, get curious and tell stories because it's in that story telling approach, that yarning approach … you'll find common ground*".

Reflecting, Tania recalled how sometimes she will "*tend to skirt around things because I don't necessarily know what is appropriate to ask or not ask an indigenous person. So if people are being a little bit shifty in asking the appropriate questions it's not from bad intent, we just don't know better*". Brenda suggested it is worthwhile taking time "*to get to know the people you are working with because you never know what the mainstream person's experiences may be*".

Being Non-Indigenous Mainstream Australian

Being non-Indigenous and part of mainstream Australia is at the core of this study. Non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture is complex and rarely defined, since "*Being Australian is a complex notion that extends well beyond concepts of citizenship and it influences aspects of life that may seem unconnected to nationality*" (Elder, 2007, p. 2).

Accordingly, in this chapter the voices of individuals who shared the inner workings of mainstream Australian culture contribute to greater understanding of the dominant Australian society. These voices came from a variety of people to get a broad view because "*to say Australian culture is like 'this', really depends who is looking at it*" FGPM.

Careful preparation and providing information in advance made it easier to tease out aspects of mainstream culture that interviewees had no reason to think about previously. Demonstrating respect towards those prepared

to share their knowledge with me, I adopted culturally familiar language as used in Western focussed societies, such as "conversation promoting question" in place of my preferred "research yarning" to help put people at ease. Using examples before each question demonstrated the learner-teacher reciprocity (Muller & Gair, 2013) that encouraged considered and comparative responses. When replying to a question, participants often started with recognition of the difference between the Indigenous knowledge-based examples given and how they understood things to be, then proceeded to give rich and thoughtful answers. Considerate planning helped provide a culturally safe space for sharing of knowledge across cultures.

Shifting the research lens to explore mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture, when the focus is most commonly on Indigenous Australian culture, required some effort for the people who shared their knowledge in this study. Credit must be given to those who engaged with reflecting deeply on their culture, explaining things they had never had to explain before and delving into tacit aspects of their social norms.

Indicative of the difficulties and/or dissonance participants faced, there were many times I had to steer conversations off what interviewees knew about "us" and refocus it on to "them". Sharna explained this difficulty, noting that having to "speak for 'white' people" was an odd position to be in "*even though we expect Aboriginal people to speak for all Aboriginal people*". She also pointed out changes, in herself and society which have occurred over time, pointedly stating "*ten or more years ago this would have been a very different conversation*".

Motivation for people to share insider knowledge about their culture varied. Vera was interested in the insight that might be gained and was keen to share her experiences of what it meant to be, a male and now female, mainstream Australian. Along with her enthusiasm, Vera did question if enough people would respond based on her understanding of the focus community. Tellingly, the initial high level of interest in participating did not translate into interviews. However, those who did participate in this study were generous with their time and reflections, and desired to make a difference.

Overhearing a non-Indigenous person state "*I'm sick of trying to understand Aboriginal people, I want them to make a bit of an effort to understand me*", was one of the reasons Julie was keen to be interviewed. Considering this comment, Julie wondered "*why should they try and understand me*" in view of the history of colonisation and "*all the shocking things that have happened*". Surely, "*they've got enough problems*".

Clarifying misunderstandings, identifying some of the barriers and issues experienced by Indigenous Australians, as well as personal understanding, was Tania's motive for participating in this study. Tania was also intrigued by the notion of her culture being the focus of research "*because it's kind*

of like there's a real knowledge gap and probably some assumptions built into the system that we don't know are there that's causing this barrier". These assumptions, invisible to mainstream Australians can present "*a huge problem*" if unrecognised, as Tania explained, because if decisions and programmes are "*predicated on false assumptions, it's never going to work*". Openly discussing misunderstandings, Tania said "*most Australians feel like we've given you these opportunities but you're not taking these opportunities up and we don't understand why*". Reflectively Tanya suggested that "*it's probably because the opportunities aren't presented in the right way*", it's as though "*the door's unlocked, but we haven't told you what the secret knock is*".

Conversations About Rediscovering History

Providing background information in the "conversation promoting questions" before the interviews, helped guide the interconnected and recursive discussions in a positive direction. Use of point-of-colonisation historical accounts taken from the journals of European explorers set the grounding for a neutral discussion on colonisation. History, in one format or another, is an important part of Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory and the Healing and Forgiveness stage of decolonisation (Muller, 2020).

Beginning each research conversation with non-confronting history helped establish a sense of equality, as we were able to discuss the benefit to discovering previously hidden aspects of history. Rediscovery of these past journal stories is a shared event because so much was kept out of the national narrative, kept from Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Emotions and thoughts surrounding learning of the stone houses, farming and trading routes for the first time was a shared experience. Feelings of disappointment, shame for not knowing, or of missing out, by being told a heavily redacted account of history, opened most of the interviews. Michael felt conned for not learning this at school stating, "*it's outrageous really … the Eurocentric schooling*" and was particularly interested as his children were currently going through high school. Hope was disappointed that she was unaware, because "*it is something really important to know*".

Recalling when first hearing that Aboriginal people had permanent settlements and productive farms varied across the interviews and focus groups. Receiving the pre-interview information and questions before our research conversation was the first time some people had heard of such things as Aboriginal stone houses and granaries, while others had learned bits when in university. Emily had only read history in the "*context of white settlement … history from the perspective of white colonists*". One person had learned a little in an elective subject at high school in 1989–1990 and a few had heard of these hallmarks of civilisation discovered by early Europeans.

The most common previous understanding of participants, before they learned otherwise, is the popular hunter-gather-nomad view of Indigenous Australians as learned in Australian schools. However, one member of the afternoon focus group struggled with new information, stating "*it is not consistent … were people hunter gatherers and they stored things? I just don't understand how this fits*". Dual Australian-British citizen Tania was more curious as to "*why that was never presented*" but felt that it was not her history that was misrepresented. General opinion from the interviews was that carefully edited history suited the "*colonisers' purpose to say these were primitive people who didn't have the hallmarks of civilisation*".

After some cultural awareness training, Marian developed a growing awareness about injustices against Indigenous Australians over the past 15 years. While at university, first as a student then an academic, Marian's awareness increased by deliberately reading Aboriginal authors' books about their life experience, and grey literature such as the "Bringing Them Home Report". "*I suppose my understanding of the situation has changed radically in the last ten years because of where I'm positioned, where I work, my interest in it and seeking out that information that wasn't given when I was growing up*" Marian.

Cross-cultural type training and tertiary education was where those who were aware, learned about pre-colonisation building and farming practices often after being taught the incorrect version of history in school. Those who did know mostly learned as post-graduate students at university, with many referring to the works of Australian journalist John Pilger's 1985 documentary film "The Secret Country" and his 1989 book "A Secret Country", being the catalyst for actively learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. For Julie, who based her master's thesis on Pilger's documentary, "*the first couple of minutes*" and the "*different images of Aboriginal people*" captured and held her interest.

> I am over 50. I didn't get told anything at school … not at primary school or secondary school. It was when I read John Pilger, The Secret Country, it was an absolutely amazing book, and I was absolutely appalled with the history.
>
> *(Julie)*

Honest accounts of some of the most shameful history of the colonisation of Australia was brought to the fore in 2008, when Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, delivered his acclaimed "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples", also known as the "Sorry" speech, or simply the "Apology". A large proportion of Australians witnessed the Apology as it was aired live on television across the nation. All but one of the people interviewed had watched the Apology with most being emotionally moved by the landmark

speech. While watching the Apology Marian explained she felt "*hopeful, more optimistic about the future*", relieved that the government was taking responsibility for its actions of the past. For Marian the Apology, "*was just the first step in reconciliation and righting past wrongs, but that can't be the end of the story*".

Only a couple of responses varied from the majority with one saying it "*was simply a political platitude*", whereas Theresa, the only respondent who did not watch the Apology, stated she did not feel anything except "*disdain*".

Feelings of Connectedness – A Spiritual Event

Strong emotions evoked by the Apology were felt by most participants who watched the landmark speech. "*Connectedness*", "*quite moved*", "*emotional*", "*feeling part of something great and meaningful*", "*a sense of hope*", "*euphoria and joy*", "*pride*" and "*being part of history*", were used to explain some of the feelings experienced while watching the Apology. Drawing on these feelings as an example similar to Indigenous spirituality, helped set the context for discussions on spirituality. In some instances, interviewees found the difference between formal religion and spirituality difficult to separate.

For teary eyed Delma who exclaimed, "I *never thought I would see the day and still get emotional anew at the memory of it*" the Apology was an emotional experience.

For years, Delma explained, she had struggled to understand Indigenous spirituality and finally had some idea. "*I wouldn't have realised if you'd said to me, name what you feel, I probably wouldn't have said spirituality. And I wouldn't have known a name for it*" Delma.

Spirituality and Mainstream Peoples

Spirituality is not a topic that flows easily for mainstream Australians because they do not appear comfortable in discussing it. In contrast, Indigenous Australians discuss spirituality easily (Muller, 2020, pp. 134–155) it is linked to who we are, where we come from and "is our identity" (Ambrum & Weimers, 2005).

Science and evolution have contributed to a diminished sense of spirituality, along with the rejection or questioning of institutional religion because it is understood as being part of formal religious conviction. Despite valuing her spiritual experience and practising Reiki, the channelling of energy through "laying on of hands", Sharna finds "*that academic and rational thinking blocks it out … when I get too academic and rational I forget it*". Hope and Tania make the point that in mainstream society religion is seen as acceptable and spirituality is not. Tania who identifies as someone "*who has*

ever been plagued by existential questions", draws on history to explain that "*religion replaced spirituality … organised religion discouraged spirituality*" by declaring it evil unless sanctified by the church.

While working in a church-based agency, Marian has prayed with clients when asked. In such an agency, Marian said, "*your spiritual approach to a problem was valued … it was allowed and expected*". However, it is considered that "*including spirituality or your belief system should not be in any part of the mainstream discussion or theory*".

Australia likes to see itself as a secular nation, especially as a growing number of people identify as agnostic or atheist, and national church attendances are falling. Michael suggested "*distaste for evangelism*" and enthusiastic displays of religious fervour as a reason for the reluctance to discuss spirituality. In contrast to expressing religious zeal, Marian believes the social expectation is that "*your spiritual side is very personal so it shouldn't be spoken about. … so people are embarrassed to mention, or are very hesitant to say they have beliefs or a spiritual side in an attempt not to offend other people*". It is good manners not to discuss spirituality according to Sonya, as this politeness acts to protect the fragile and delicate feeling of spirituality she describes as being "*like the tip of a really delicate flower petal for most of us, quite tenuous*". Going further Sonya explains that "*It is easy to have your spiritual beliefs handled with grubby fingers. It is something that is really important to you, you feel really vulnerable sharing that with someone who might say 'god that is stupid, or don't be ridiculous'. Because it might spoil it for you, you might lose it*".

Reflecting on the difference between herself when she was a man, to now as a woman, Vera suggests that difficulty discussing spirituality arises from gendered ways of understanding. Vera explains that as a male, spirituality "*is not part of the rational scientific world. I mean for me it's been really interesting because as a man I was very rational, if you couldn't see it and explain it scientifically why waste your time thinking about it*". Now, as a woman, "*I am just aware that there is so much more of what gives meaning and significance – of what happens in our lives is outside of our rational understanding*". Tending to avoid using the word spiritual, Vera clarifies the male/female difference because "*there are things that are just way outside our understanding and really we don't have to try to understand them – just accept them. It never happened – when I was a guy*".

On the other hand, David does not discuss gender in relation to spirituality, instead pointing out that "*It's part of the mainstream thing, people don't tend to separate religion and going to the church or the synagogue or the mosque or whatever, from spirituality, they don't separate the two*".

Steering clear of organised religion to focus on spirituality, a variety of definitions were put forward. These fell into two main themes, connection to people, and connection to environment. A smaller group noted that younger

people are tending towards selectively blending aspects from a number of sources, resulting in a syncretic belief structure linking spirituality "*as being similar to empathy*" (Margaret) and using words such as "*karma*" (Brenda).

Speaking on behalf of her generation, noting it "*is always a dangerous thing to do*", Brenda (aged 28–40) shared her understanding "*that people around my age are more open to taking elements of spiritual ideas or practice or whatever, and just making them part of their own belief system. People have opportunity to read broadly, travel, try new things, or even watch foreign movies to see a different worldview*" and incorporate different bits and pieces into their life and belief system.

Connections and Spirituality

People-centred spirituality covered a broad spectrum, from humanitarian and academic. Leoni's esoteric discussion displayed how difficult talk of spirituality was because it is a "*mysterious domain of humanity*" that reminded her "*of some distant history around the enlightenment and the disenchantment of the world that happened at the enlightenment in Western European cultures when science trumped religion*". Continuing about science trumping religion Leoni reflected that many people had a "*yearning to be a part of and be refreshed by a sense of mystery*" but offered nothing about what she understood spirituality to be. Perhaps, as David puts it "*the reason people stay away from spirituality, it's very hard to document. It's such a hard thing to grasp*".

An individual "*being the best person that they can be*" and "*being connected with who and what you were and living to your own values and your own sense of self*" is how Julie describes spirituality. Margaret suggested that as good mental health is linked to being connected to others and community, taking it "*a step further there is the spiritual element as you described it, spirituality as a connectedness among people*". Holding a similar view, David sees "*spirituality as the connection between two human beings, so it's not really necessarily about higher powers, it's just that social group really*".

It was only during our research conversation that Kylie realised she had experienced the connectedness associated with Indigenous Australian spirituality, when a community Elder guided her. Kylie wistfully recalled her mutually respectful relationship with the Elder, saying "*that connection to her still informs my work because I remember that that's why I do what I do*". Kylie never really talked about the spiritual connection she had with this Elder, because although the "*idea of connecting with someone is really so important, to try to explain that to mainstream Australians, what that means, is very difficult*".

Building on the concept of spirituality and connectedness, working within the interviewees' understandings and drawing on Indigenous ways of using

spirituality, practice examples were explored. Respecting individuals and "*trusting people to know what's best for them … allowing people to solve their own problems, not doing it for them*" while "*living to your own values and sense of self*" is a practice model Julie mused.

As a nurse, Sharna talked of her experience of spirituality in her work, that ranged from intuition to metaphysical. Sharna felt privileged to be told the following story.

> An Aboriginal Elder was admitted to hospital and they couldn't sleep. The staff didn't understand what was going on. It was only when someone from their community asked what was wrong, the Elder said, 'the baby is crying, the baby is crying' and I can't sleep. The community member also heard a baby crying, although the non-Indigenous staff did not. A baby had died in the hospital after a road accident, and the spirit was still there. The Aboriginal people could all hear the baby, so the hospital staff had to get a Ngangkari [a highly trained Aboriginal healer] in so they could sing the baby [spirit] home again.

Sharna thought the hospital showed great respect for the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous beliefs by enlisting and allowing the Ngangkari to burn leaves and "smoke" the hospital rooms, in the spirit-cleansing ceremony. Sharna noted that if a similar incident occurred in a major city hospital it was unlikely a Ngangkari would have been so easily available to help. She also mused how such issues would be written onto patients' forms.

Connectedness to the natural environment as an example of spirituality, that is not religion, emerged as a strong theme. Taking an environmental view, Emily states that she would describe "*spirituality as part of being part of the natural world, the sea, the birds and the trees, flowers and all that is part of my connectedness with the universe*". While taking a global view of wanting to protect the well-being of the earth, Emily also experiences "*a spirituality attached to my connection to place, that sense of belonging, that sense of connection and understanding, the patterns of the land and the beauty and joy of it*". Talking about spirituality does not appear to be easy for mainstream Australians like Delma who found that although "*there are places you go that you feel things*" if asked about her spirituality she "*couldn't explain it*".

Spirituality and "The Bush"

In the bush,[1] Hope "*felt a connection just being in nature and I felt there was some kind of presence or some kind of power in the world, in the universe but I wouldn't have labelled it as anything or tried to understand it or put words on it*". Explaining further, Hope finds walking in the bush around

Sydney "*peaceful and renewing*", but her experience of Uluru and central Australia had "*a really different feeling … it really felt like kind of the heart of Australia … it's something really powerful and it's really different*".

Based on his knowledge and experiences of Country as a sentient being, Michael feels he is somewhat different from mainstream because he is not like "*a lot of non-Aboriginal people who are very disconnected … living in economies and not communities*". Learning from Elders how Country is connected and how he is connected, is something Michael explores from his perspective, explaining that – from his simple understanding of it – if he were "*to have a faith, a spirituality belief system, it would be that connectedness to country, Aboriginal spirituality*". Expanding on this Michael said that "*of all organised religions, that makes sense, I connect with that, so a lot of Dreamtime stories and creation stories, I think that they're highly spiritually significant for Aboriginal people but they are also metaphors to understand their teaching point*".

Preferring not to use the word spiritual, as a young male person Vera had some "*really interesting experiences*" on Pitjantjatjara country in central Australia "*that were quite moving and that didn't fit into scientific stuff at all*". Vera recognises that her connection to Country is "*hugely different*" compared to that of her Aboriginal ex-partner, yet there are places Vera feels "*deeply emotionally connected to*". Recalling "*one such place in the Northern Flinders ranges*" conjured strong emotive memories for Vera. "*It is just a little box canyon and there are a series of circles chipped into the rock and they are not recent: in fact, they are no longer circles, they are split circles because the rocks have moved and they clearly moved thousands of years ago. To me, that is a place I used to go when I was stressed or upset … to get comfort and solace. This makes me want to cry because I have not thought about that place for years. It's a place that for me feels so richly spiritual and I think I want to say spirit-filled. But I feel deeply connected to. It's the only place that I have felt that connection to*" Vera.

Relationship with Country

Country, as a sentient being deserving of respect, is spelled with a capital "C", in the same way as a person's name is capitalised (Muller, 2020, pp. 86–92). This is a "geosophical", earth centred, approach as opposed to a "theosophical", God centred, belief structure (Charlesworth, 2009, p. iii). Bush, land and nature were mainstream non-Indigenous terms used to describe Country, who write "country" in lower case. Emily and Delma described an ecological, or environmental, approach to and love for Country, especially the area they knew from childhood. This childhood connection to familiar landscapes was common among interviewees but it often related to family-on-country rather than a relationship with Country.

Family anchors Jack to the region where he spent a great deal of his life. Jack explained that "*it's more the family than the country to be honest. I was bought up in the bush till I was 12, then I had to live in the city all my life. … I don't particularly feel attracted to the place where I spent those 12 years, any more than any other semi-rural place*" Jack.

Marian, a deeply committed Christian, combines the spiritual, ecological and familiar as she feels "*a very close relationship with the Australian bush*" because she feels, "*closest to God in the bush*". However, Marian, Brenda and Kylie talked about feeling the greatest connection to the place where they and generations of their family were born and raised and fond childhood memories formed.

> I definitely have a connection to Country. My mum and dad's place is close to the beach. There is a sea breeze, a peppermint tree, magpies, and all sorts of birds around. Why I think I have a country connection is that is what I am thinking about when I think about my family, my history, all the feelings are around that. My country is where my grandparents are buried and where I was born … there is sometimes a bit of wistfulness, but mainly it is comfort. It is like a meditation for me when I do get back there. I am really more aware of all the senses that come into play when you are in your home area. *(Brenda)*

Kylie feels connected to where her family is and comes from. After going overseas a number of times Kylie notes the feeling of returning home "*is quite profound. … you feel different and I guess that's the closest I've come to feeling a real connection to country*".

Following a strong matrilineal line Marian strongly connects to where her grandmother lived "*… because that was my mother's country, that's where she was raised and my grandmother I feel I have a connection to that area of the world*".

Migrating from England aged 9 Erica was raised in South Australia. When she returned as an adult after living for some time in New South Wales, Erica realised she feels "*an affinity with the South Australian countryside … the Mallee and just the colouring of the countryside is a feeling I cannot explain. I have no insight into why I feel a connection with a place that I moved to when I was nine and lived here for ten years and then moved to Canberra. I just don't get it but it's real*".

Margaret acknowledged subtle changes over time in her thinking, experiences and feelings relating to Country. After living in England for a while she really missed something about "*the wide open space, big sky, and the Australian bush*". Then when Margaret went travelling around Australia she did a lot of bushwalking that she hadn't done before and had "*moments of – I wouldn't say spiritual moments, I was just being pulled by this country. I have actually experienced moments of that that took me by surprise but as*

an overall conscious thing for me I don't really identify with having a connection to country. Or maybe I'm changing that a bit now".

Reluctant to use the word spirituality, Leoni reflected on spending Christmas in the place both her "*parents' families were from before they came from other places entirely*" although she did not elaborate on these other places where her parents' families originated. Reflecting on her visit to the farmhouse ruins, standing at a place where her "*father had been as a small child*". Leoni followed her patriarchal lineage connecting four generations of male ancestors being born there and how the original family link was "*a thirteen-year-old boy when he went to that place in the 1830s or thereabouts*", and described it as "*just an interesting experience – I don't know what that is*".

Country and Child Safety

Knowing and respecting the value of Country is important for the well-being of Indigenous children, especially for those in out-of-home-care, Clare was not sure she can "*experience that importance in quite the same way … as there is a dimension that I can't get*". In her professional capacity, when talking about child protection, especially "*about the need for Aboriginal kids in care to have continuing connection to family, extended family, their community, their culture*" Clare "*usually adds on – and country. I know I sense that some people are puzzled when I say that. It seems to me it is something that's really important in what I have read about Aboriginal people talking about country*". Non-Indigenous people do not understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritual connection to Country or value its significance, particularly those involved in child protection roles, Clare pointed out.

Understanding and Relationship with Country

Connection to Country is not something that Sonya, Tania and Julie feel or comprehend. Despite having lived most of her life here, there is not anywhere Sonya "*personally feels close to Country in Australia*" like she does towards two places, "*one in England and one in Italy*".

> I don't feel that connection. It's hard to describe something you don't have. By 'country' what do you mean? Do you mean a particular part of the world or the climate, I can't necessarily say – I don't quite know what I'd define as country to answer this question.
>
> *(Tania)*

> That's something I've never really got. I don't have it, I don't feel that there's one place where I feel more connected with everything in the universe than anywhere else.
>
> *(Julie)*

Clearly, connection to Country is an individual and personal experience. For those who do experience some form of connection to Country, these feelings are often tempered with a frisson of illegitimacy, of not quite belonging.

Not Belonging: Illegitimacy

As a child, Theresa had a European idea of landscape, an "*outsider view*", because the books she read "*had European illustrations in them*" so as a kid "*found it hard to relate to this landscape*". These European stories had "*lots of traces of people in them*" but "*the Australian landscape presented to me was that it was really quite free of people*". Greater maturity and understanding means Theresa now has strong feelings about "*particular places and things and animals, for example sulphur-crested cockatoos, and certain places, particularly desert places*". When visiting her brother in Alice Springs Theresa experienced a "*consciousness there*", a feeling that "*it's not just me watching but also that the place is watching me as I move through*". However, along with this awareness of Country, Theresa experiences a sense of not belonging because she wondered if "*the people whose land it is*", would actually consider her interaction with Country as legitimate "*because I don't have a place in that system. I don't belong in that system*". Theresa expressed sadness at "*this sense of a yearning for something that is important to me, that knowledge that is a part of Indigenous Australian experience but not a legitimate and central part of non-Indigenous Australians*" Theresa.

Leoni also suggested this sense of belonging is not able to be achieved or experienced by non-Indigenous Australians. "*I think for a non-indigenous person like me there's often a great yearning to have a sense of connectedness that no matter how hard you might try you never can have*". Amid speculation about an ancestor, Theresa and her brother suggested that if she were Aboriginal they would "*feel more legitimate as Australians*". Erica thinks that although "*I consider myself Australian in the mainstream sense and I have a passport and a certificate that says I'm Australian so that's what I write on my forms*", knowing that it is Aboriginal land and questioning the right of the crown to grant land tenure creates a sense of illegitimacy to this identity.

Discussion on the spirituality of, and relationship to, Country helped uncover identity as a theme in exploring non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. As discussed in Chapter 2, the control of identity is a mechanism of colonisation. While the ideology of colonisation is based on wielding power over how identity is conceptualised, who is or is not Indigenous for example, it has flow on effects for the coloniser society.

Identity and Australian Culture

> Culture is not a 'perk' for an Aboriginal child – it is a life-line.
>
> *(Jackamos, 2015)*

Andrew Jackamos' statement above identifies the role cultural identity plays for Indigenous children, yet the same sentiment is not as openly or as eloquently put for non-Indigenous mainstream Australians and newcomers. Instead, there is a messy area where some strongly identify with their culture of origin, yet yearn for some form of legitimacy in being Australian and a way to reconcile with the past without further harm.

Here, I deliberately exclude extremist views that are all-too-commonly expressed, and focus on the people who shared their knowledge in this study and supporting documents. However, we cannot ignore the policies of child removal that continue to reverberate, and often breach connection to community and Country, that act to diminish building strong Indigenous identity. Although an important aspect of what this study hopes to contribute, such negative commentary can act to derail my resolve and distort the respectful voices contained within this text.

Identity is a concept that lacks clarity and consistency and "the concept of identity is both a relational and contextual construct" (Harris, Carlson, & Poata-Smith, 2013, pp. 2–3). Politics is part of defining Indigenous identity, with Nakata (2013a, p. 134) suggesting "'we' the Indigenous 'community' require more self-consciousness and self-examination of the way we talk about Indigenous identity rather than confining ourselves to endless contests over what is to constitute its legitimate markers". Besides political point-scoring, assertions that certain behaviour is un-Australian and xenophobic discussion about certain groups of new Australians, serious discussion about what constitutes legitimate markers of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian identity is rare. While there are multiple internet sites discussing the Commonwealth definition of who is Indigenous Australian, similar searches show there is no significant interest for a definition of who is non-Indigenous Australian, and no clear answer. There are no requirements of race, heritage, recognition by members of that community, only generic citizenship regulations.

In the lead up to January 26, Australia Day, an official national holiday to commemorate the day British colonisation began, media reflection on what it means to be Australian is common. January 26 is also known as Invasion/Survival Day to Indigenous Australians and their allies.[2] Despite this regular introspection into national identity, research shows that to be "Australian is still associated with a white Anglo identity" (Walton et al., 2016, p. 8). Combined with the haunting feelings of illegitimacy expressed above, it appears as though mainstream Australians do not quite know who they are.

Identity – Under Construction

Identity, how a person sees themselves and how others position them in society, is a central issue for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Identifying as non-Indigenous mainstream Australian is a complex issue.

Remembering that all the people interviewed were highly articulate professionals and academics, all of them acknowledged that they identify, and would be identified by others, as non-Indigenous mainstream Australian. However, this identity was not quite clear-cut as different layers of identity emerged to give a view of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture as one that is fascinating and diverse with complex issues of identity.

Use of adjectives to describe the ethnic origin of Australians, such as Indigenous or German Australian, create unease for the group described in this study as non-Indigenous mainstream Australians. For some like Clare who migrated to Australia from England as a young adult, it is a default identifier because she "*doesn't fit into British society anymore and*" she is "*not Indigenous Australian*" so she must be mainstream Australian. Another British migrant, Erica dislikes the term mainstream, linking it to a sense of loss, and alienation from "*land, culture and beliefs … certain wisdom*" but does not have a better word to use "*because the dominant capitalist politics doesn't give us a language to talk about that*". Also "*it marginalises Aboriginal people further so that's why I stopped using it because it sort of sounds arrogant to use it but I perceive it differently when you use it to when I use it myself*".

To be Australian remains tainted by the historical construction of Australian identity. Multi-culturalism and the stain of dispossession and marginalisation of Australia's original peoples challenge "Australian" as a "white Anglo" identity. When asked their ethnicity many of the people who shared their knowledge with me simply identify according to their citizenship, as Australian. Add-on ethnic adjectives tend to be reserved for not-white peoples, while to be Australian means "white".

Because he is in Australia Jack insisted his heritage is not relevant. It "*might be more important to me if I was living in the UK than living here where none of it matters.* On the issue of culture and identity, Jack declared that he is "*just Australian, not Scottish or Cornish. I am Australian*".

If she is asked about her heritage Theresa feels inadequate "*because I don't really have any ethnicity, I'm not an English or Scottish or Irish or a French person and if I'm not a legitimate Australian then I'm not anything, whereas some non-indigenous people do have a legitimacy that comes from being a first or second generation Italian or Vietnamese or whatever they might be. So I would see that my ethnic identity is pretty shaky and hence empty, if it's not Australian then what is it?*" Theresa thought that aggression can come from this uncertainty of identity, and give rise to hostility and violence.

This insecurity and fear can be the cause of why non-Indigenous people so often exert a "right" to question Indigenous Australian identity (Foley, 2000), but it is not the only reason put forward.

Right to Challenge

Questioning Indigenous Australians on their identity has become something of a ritual, based on the historical use of quantum of blood to classify Indigeneity.

Discomfort, power and control, as well as ignorance and racism contribute to non-Indigenous people challenging the identity of Indigenous Australians. Why people with fair skin would choose to identify as Indigenous Australian is an aspect that intrigued members of the morning focus group (FGAM), where Aboriginality was likened to a disability. "*Why would you choose that* [Indigenous identity], *if you didn't feel that, you wouldn't choose that. It would be like picking up a wheelchair and choosing to go through life in a wheelchair. It's a harder way of life, so you wouldn't choose it*".

Discomfort and inability to understand why a person who could "pass" as white would identify as Indigenous, indicates a lack of understanding of the political or social consequences of such an act. It was seen as a rejection of whiteness – an implied insult (Kowal & Paradies, 2017). French social anthropologist and psychiatrist, Marika Moisseeff (2011, pp. 336–337), identified significant issues that can arise if a fair-skinned Aboriginal person pretends to be white because "choosing to integrate this other dominant social world, by accepting one part of one's identity at the expense of the other requires a lot of energy and effort to disguise what one 'truly' is". Respected Aboriginal academic, Jackie Huggins (cited in Maddison, 2009, p. 110) explains the "act of passing" is considered a "horrendous crime", a traitorous act against those who have struggled to "retain their identities under assimilationist policies". Passing as white, is assimilationist.

Questioning of identity can be unintentional, or, as Kylie suggests it could be mainstream Australians taking back control of determining who is or isn't Indigenous based on "*a lack of understanding of the concept of race or maybe it's a biological understanding that race is defined by skin colour*". Maybe, as Julie said, people "*don't realise how offensive it is to ask that question, completely missing a critical aspect of that person's humanity, to think that you can ask such an offensive question*". Sharna, however, thought a love of categorisation was partly to blame because "*whitefellas like to put people into little boxes. If you are this, you are going to look like this, this and this. … people get pigeon-holed in a way that meets our needs. If they don't look like someone thinks an Aboriginal person should look, it is confusing and they can't get their head around it*".

Basing assumptions on appearance were reasons for the challenges to identity according to Tania and Sharna, with both recognising ways that the media acts to reinforce the visual stereotyping of what an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person looks like. However, Tania and Sonya did not see any offence questioning identity because they saw it as merely a verification of an observation or assumption.

Reaffirming a biological approach Tania uses an example of her father's nationality meaning she could identify as being *biologically* half British. Continuing with the biological analogy Tania states her identity and genetic makeup "*map onto each other totally, so if someone were to ask me what percent British I am, it would not be an offensive question. It would be just a question of fact*".

Becoming Australian as an adult, Sonya felt that she may be missing something or being insensitive because to her "*it's quite a normal reaction*" depending on how it's asked. Sonya who was born in France and raised in upper class England "*it's like people asking 'why are you French' because you don't speak French. It's just interesting to know*". Broadening her response Sonya added that she thought for some people feel they have a right to ask why a person identifies as Indigenous, "*because of this myth about so much money being spent on Aboriginal people as they are not going to ask if it's true that you get all these free things*".

Mythological Benefits

Envy of assumed, or mythical, benefits accorded only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the fear of rorting, and jealousy were reasons Michael believed were behind challenges to Indigenous identity. Myths abound on the supposed benefits that are only available to Indigenous people according to Julie, resulting in envy by non-Indigenous people for the imagined "*good stuff that they're getting*" and *why should they be getting it if I'm not?*"

Services and benefits such as Abstudy[3] are seen as a handout, and lead to colour-coded questions such as "*why should someone who doesn't look Aboriginal get a handout*", according to the morning focus group.

Margaret, a very highly positioned executive, explained that "*identifying as an Aboriginal is perceived in mainstream Australia as a rort to take our tax payers dollars, to play victim. These perceptions have been created by government policies and the way they're reported becomes a political issue every year*". In the mainstream there is a view that a persons' Indigenous identity needs to be "*questioned because you're just trying to get something out of us … and yes it would be very insulting*" Margaret carefully responded.

This fear of a group of people who selectively identify to access more than they are entitled to from limited resources was a common theme, as was a notion that certain people may be undeserving of benefits.

Class, privilege and an older era featured in Sonya's response that she "*wouldn't challenge a person who said to me that they were Aboriginal because I think it was bad manners*". However, "*if I was a poor white person who thought I had a grievance, and poor people often feel they have a grievance and rage, often justifiably so. Some of course are poor because they*

choose to be poor by deciding they are not going to work whether they could work or not. So you might think it is an understandable question".

With the explanations of why non-Indigenous mainstream Australians tend to challenge Indigenous identity in mind, none of the people interviewed had ever had their "white" identity challenged. Asked if they have ever had their mainstream non-Indigenous identity challenged, the responses were mostly no, never. "*No-one has ever asked me to prove my whiteness*" Theresa.

As a child, a teacher asked Brenda if she was Aboriginal after a black and white photo of her volunteering at an Aboriginal art exhibition appeared in the local paper. The teacher accepted it when Brenda said she was not. Owing to her dark hair, Marian has been asked if she is Lebanese, Spanish or Italian descent, but has never been presumed to be Aboriginal. Similarly, Kylie remembers her sister being called an Italian. Jokingly, an Indigenous person with the same surname as her has asked Erica if she was Aboriginal. Shockingly, Vera has been challenged on her gender and asked things such as, what percentage of her body, her chromosomes, are female, but not on her white mainstream identity. While clarification was sometimes sought, none of the people interviewed had their identity as non-Indigenous Australians challenged. Self-identification appears to be acceptable – providing one does not identify as Indigenous Australian.

Erica noted it's a "power and control thing", a contradiction where mainstream Australian people can dictate who is, or is not, Indigenous according to their whim. "*It's a case of – I will decide whether you're Aboriginal or not. If it is in my interest to declare that you are Aboriginal then I will; if it's in my interest to deny you something that you might be entitled to as an Aboriginal person like rights to your land or whatever then I will deny that you're Aboriginal then you won't get it*". This odd attitude is a reflection of the past policies of eugenics – where the government policy was deliberately set to "breed out the colour" of Aboriginal people (W. Anderson, 2005, pp. 218–220). Confusing the matter further, even during the eugenic policy era, there was never a point, or any percentage of "white" blood, when an Indigenous Australian would be classified as "white".

Asserting the right to question Aboriginality "*is another layer of racism and exclusion and marginalisation and control*" and reinforces exclusion by dictating who is or is not accepted as Indigenous or part of the mainstream society, according to Erica. This right-to-challenge, says Hope, is due to "*lack of understanding*" and "*entrenched racism*".

Enculturated, Acculturated Entrenched Racism

Australian society, from a non-Indigenous mainstream viewpoint, has a culture of deep-seated racism that can manifest as innocent or sophisticated

racism expressed in overt and covert ways. Erica explained that racism is so endemic in mainstream culture it occurs "*all the time every day systemically and systematically*". Because she reflects the society in which she was raised, Erica finds that despite her best intention and belief in equality, racism can accidentally slip out when there is no intent – and she "*hates that*". From her personal experience, Hope observed that racism is so entrenched people can be "*nice on an individual level*", then speak and act "*racist and sexist*" at other times, yet "*don't see themselves as having an issue*". Some of the people interviewed were surprised and shocked at some of the racialised views they had, and most certainly did not want such thinking in their mind, while others simply did not realise when they stated racial stereotyping or myths throughout their research conversation. This seemingly innocent racism has been aptly identified as "Cultural Malware" (Curtis, 2022; Muller et al., 2022) because it hides in the background of people's minds, making itself known at unintentional and unwanted opportunities.

Emily, a health professional, identifies health as a field where racism presents itself in the form of the racial superiority of "*white Western ways*" compared to "*your ways*"*; It is almost explicit that the white race is superior.* Racism manifests itself "*in every area of the health system delivery, sometimes explicit, and others covert and subtle ways*"*. The omission about your spirituality, and family structure, is a covert sign of white racial superiority*". It is worth noting that this is not always the case because some health professionals like respected anaesthetic Professor Tess Cramond (1987, p. 1203) is one example, as she respectfully included the very early "use of expired air resuscitation" by Aboriginal people in her academic writings.

Early Greek philosophy was used by Leoni to explain how Aristotle asserted that only the people living in the temperate zone could be classed as civilised, and that those with darker skin were not. Citing the historical ways used by the "temperate people", colonisers, to marginalise those outside the supposedly civilised zone, Leoni, taking care not to use the word racism, proposes there is a "*deep cultural positioning that hasn't been expunged*".

Kylie recalled how in 2008, at the time Kevin Rudd delivered "The Apology" she met some people "*who had very strong views; they were essentially racist*". This made Kylie "*quite fearful of discussing the apology with people like that*" even though she was confident that "*there were many people in Australia that did support it*".

Colour blindness and white privilege underpin both overt and covert racism, as Kylie understands it. "*It's about white privilege, acknowledging that as a white person I have privileges that goes along with that and I think that's a lot of the covert stuff, that white people are not appreciating the privilege that the colour of their skin can grant them and just assuming that it's the same for everyone*". Julie expressed great empathy when she imagined

herself encountering the racism she has witnessed her friends and colleagues endure. Exasperatedly, Julie noted that such negative experiences are said to be "*character building, but how much character does a person need to get*".

Encouraging people to think about the impact their behaviour has on others, Michael draws on people's sense of themselves as "*not bad people*". Using a respectful approach, he challenges people by saying, "*so you're not a racist but your language is racist*" which encourages people to "*pull back and say well I'm not such a bad person. Because they love to say – I'm not a bad person. And they're not*". Challenging racism as Michael does, may not lead to change, instead it may cause people to hide their racism, pushing it to become sophisticated racism that is only visible among similar minded people. Speaking from an insider perspective, Erica points out that people hide their racism, by asserting they are not racist but "*their attitudes and behaviour and some of the things that they say tell a different story*".

Then, there is "*institutionalised racism by default rather than by intent*". Margaret used an example of "*racism by default*" with a story of how Aboriginal people in a community were able to drive without licenses on remote roads as they were not officially public roads, "*suddenly a patch of road was gazetted that hadn't been gazetted before, and that made it so you needed to be licensed. So, for years Aboriginal people that had been driving suddenly got booked because they weren't licensed*". This was not intentional racism, but institutionalised racism, structural racism.

Sophisticated Racism

Sophisticated racism is not innocent or unintentional, but carefully hidden and generally expressed among those assumed to share similar values owing to their cultural background. When the issue arose of a non-Indigenous academic saying that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people who gain a doctorate hold an inferior degree (Hagan, 2012), Emily exclaimed that "*you would be hoping that people would try to pretend – to not make their racism so visible*".

As young scholars, Kylie and Hope were surprised to encounter racist attitudes among academics in universities. Kylie had mainstream Australians challenge her working with Aboriginal people saying: "*You're a young Australian, why do you care about it, what's it to you?*" While employed in inclusive teaching at university, Hope "*was surprised by racist attitudes amongst academics when talking about acknowledgement of country, what that meant, and how people might want to do that at the beginning of the semester*". Finding those attitudes held by academic colleagues was discouraging for Hope and made her sadly reflect that "*if they're here that means that they're everywhere and they're going to be worse than what's here so I think there's still a way to go*".

Stereotyping is a tactic also used in sophisticated racism as Erica found. *Occasionally when an Aboriginal will say there's not so much racism, it's getting better it's not so much a daily occurrence, I just think oh my God. I guess because I'm not Aboriginal people will freely say things to me that they wouldn't say to an Aboriginal person like – 'well of course she didn't turn up to work today because they're never going to change are they' – those sorts of things*".

Colonisation and its racist expression are an ongoing process, and racism in Australia has evolved to become very sophisticated and covert. Having worked in many places around the world, Robert, a white South African informant, stated that racism in Australia was the worst he had ever witnessed. Because of his heritage and origins many people assumed that he was accepting of racist language, slurs and actions in select company. Some of those settings were employment panels where he was alarmed at the overt and demeaning language and stereotyping that ensure a culture of systemic racism flourished. Robert was wary about repercussions, knowing he would be considered some form of race traitor if he made any official complaint – aware his whiteness and expertise would not be sufficient to protect his employment.

Erica acknowledges that racism is endemic in "*our*" [non-Indigenous mainstream] culture, and having "*lived in this society all my life*" it is something that "*I'm not consciously able to see it in myself.* Posing an interesting thought, Erica continues, and suggests that while "*you can't exterminate things from yourself*" racism is something that a person can gradually grow and evolve out of.

While this may be the case for people who desire to be rid of the socialised racism within them, it does not identify the issues to be confronted to achieve this. Further to the insider information about non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, shared above, family and social influences such as class also contribute to the reproduction of racism.

A strong Christian upbringing was attributed to both racist and anti-racist attitudes.

Being raised in the Christian faith is what Marian says makes her actively strive to act against racism, based on the biblical teachings that all people are equal. Marian despairs that many mainstream Australians she knows have racist attitudes and make racialised generalisations. On the other hand, Julie, who was also raised in a strict Christian religion, believed this taught her to consider white people were superior because Jesus was depicted as white.

However, Tania suggests that racial superiority springs from the ideology of colonisation. There's a sense of superiority about Western countries "… *whether it's racist superiority or whether it's a colonial thing*", they dictate what rules apply to them and what applies to other countries. Tania finds it hard to understand how such thinking continues, but puts it down to an era

"*when the British were considered to be on the top of the European pile, so it's a colonial thing*".

Social Class or Egalitarianism in Australia

Being a "colonial thing" resonates with racism as akin to the British "class" structure. Along with the guilt and rationalisation Sonya mentioned earlier, she believes "*the class distinction which is based on power as much as race is also very important*". Sonya, who was raised as upper-class; and Jack, whose family "*all think they are upper-class*" provided insider information on the British class structure and its links to racism. Three people interviewed for this study said they were raised in an upper-class family, however none of them identified themselves as belonging to this social stratum.

According to Sonya's understanding of upper-class British thinking, "*it's really interesting that it is much more a class thing than a race thing*" that "*made it possible for them to invade Australia*" because the Indigenous peoples of Australia were relegated to the lowest class and therefore did not matter. Sonya explained that in the class-structured world-view, the upper-class consider themselves a superior class and the lower classes are seen as irrelevant and inconsequential.

When the British arrived, Sonya reasons, "*they were a very classed society and the people in charge didn't necessarily think that we can conquer this place because there is no body there. They thought we can conquer the people who are there because they are like the people of the lower classes that we take no notice of anyway. They didn't need to see them as a racist thing, they just saw them like they saw the convicts and the others as being unimportant. I think that the actual racism probably came more important when they started specifically ill-treating Aboriginal people and stealing their land. Where they needed more of their land – where they needed an excuse to steal more of their land*".

Racism arises from rationalisation and an ensuing justification to discriminate, Sonya believes, because "*human beings always rationalise what they want to do. They always find reasons to do it*". Sonya expanded on this use of guilt in generating racism in the colonisation process of Australia, pointing out that "*if you intend to steal someone's land and treat people badly, you can't feel good yourself, unless you make out that there's something wrong with them; they deserve to be treated badly*" Sonya demonstrates this rationalisation by pointing out that while racism "*is totally evil*" it is "*natural to … be more comfortable to be with people like yourself*".

Research into the structure of social class and class-based prejudice, found that lower-classes are dehumanised and likened to animals by the upper-classes. Based on current attitudes, and limited to the single ethnic group – Caucasians, it was clear that the lower classes, low socio-economic groups,

are considered to be lower on the evolutionary state of being with "lower humanness" (Loughnan, Haslam, Sutton, & Spencer, 2014, p. 60). Further studies into dehumanisation and social stratification help explain how Indigenous Australians could have been considered as less than human by the colonisers, making it easier to justify the brutality meted out in the colonising process (Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). The eugenics movement is similarly based on a belief that the lower-classes were genetically inferior. Eugenics were used as the basis of Victorian legislation in 1939, to justify institutionalisation and the forced sterilisation of "slum dwellers, homosexuals, prostitutes, alcoholics as well as those with small heads and with low IQs" and Aboriginal people (R. L. Jones, 2011). These bills were not enacted, fully, due to the outbreak of war and embarrassment at the eugenicist nature of the Holocaust.

Musingly, Jack told how "*early in this colonisation process some people wanted to specifically implement a class system*" based on the ideology of "*land holders and class*". The plan being that select people be given large grants of land "*so they could be the upper class*". Formal establishment of a class system did not eventuate, as the national narrative of Australia being an egalitarian, classless society took precedence (Elder, 2007, p. 50).

Australia as an egalitarian country is a myth. David pointed out that while Australia is less class structured and more merit based because "*we don't have a hereditary system of titles where you have the ruling classes and the middle classes and the serf class*", the illusion that "*we give everyone equitable opportunities*" is simply not true. According to Clare, Australia is still divided by class, although the social stratification is not so great in Australia compared to England "*so long as you comply with mainstream*".

As an example, Clare shared a conversation she had with her sister, who still lives in England. Her sister "*feels freer in Australia because the differences between status of people and the class divides are not so great in Australia. She feels it is a more egalitarian society, … an individual is valued more than what family you came from, or what school you went to, or what suburb you live in. While Australia is a divided society, having grown up in England, you become incredibly aware of the minute differences. As an English person meeting another English person your mind is automatically kind of filtering through where am I in relation to this person? Am I on the same level or are they in some way higher than me?*"

Agreeing with Clare, Michael told of his experience with the class system while travelling in England. In pubs he was "*relegated to the middle bar*" while "*the toffs would be in the upper bar and the working class would be down in the lower bar*". The social division was palpable, "*it was right in your face and I think you don't see that kind of class distinction here in Australia*". Confidently Michael said, "*I don't believe we are egalitarian but in comparison with other countries we're probably doing reasonably okay*".

Tania identified a class barrier to knowledge, with a secret point of entry designed to exclude the lower classes, because although "*we like to deny that it's here – it follows quite different rules – we still have a class system here. While a lot of those things might seem quite opaque even in mainstream culture, sometimes the issue is like an understanding of whom you should speak to in order to make things happen*". It is like a secret knock that "*people who have grown up middle class grow up knowing. … I imagine there might be plenty of people who are from low socio-economic backgrounds in mainstream Australia who would struggle to negotiate those things*".

With a great deal of insight into the British class system, Sonya saw the class system as very visible, although "*more porous, in Australia*". Laughing, Sonya suggested that "*Australians like to pretend there isn't a class system here*", but "*as someone coming to Australia from outside, I think it's much more egalitarian in how you speak to people, but most of that is just bad manners*". Another difference Sonya found was that an "*upper-class accent opened doors in England, but shut them in Australia*" because the social class structure was simply different here.

As traditional notions of class were renegotiated in the early days of colonisation in Australia under a pretence of egalitarianism, Elder (2007, p. 59) noted that "divisions such as 'mainstream' and 'elite' were favoured". Mainstream was used to give a sense of equality while masking structural inequities that meant some would remain excluded regardless of aspiration. The class system has not disappeared, just recalibrated. In 2015, five social classes were identified in Australian society, "'established affluent', 'emergent affluent', 'mobile middle', 'established middle, and 'established working'" (Sheppard & Biddle, 2015, p. 4) all were classified within income and employment boundaries. Limitations of this study, a national telephone poll, may be the reason the real lower classes, the unwaged and marginalised are missing from the social strata list, or perhaps the academic class "*take no notice of*" the lower classes, as Sonya suggests of the upper class, because they are considered "*unimportant*".

In the narrative of egalitarianism in Australia, Indigenous people were excluded with the use of "scientific and religious ideas" (Elder, 2007, p. 55) that portrayed them as being lesser humans. Leoni confirmed this view, because "*the Australian ideal of egalitarianism and a fair go, was born when Aboriginal people weren't a part of the mix, nor were the Chinese or a lot of other folk. It was really an Anglo idea applied to Anglo people and the notion was dignity and respect were due those people but not necessarily to anyone else*". Putting aside carefully assembled explanation, in the reimagined class system of Australia, race was used as an instrument to oppress, exploit the lower classes, and reinforce the superior position of the higher classes.

Respect is a concept I return to discuss in detail in the following chapter. Respect is a key word when discussing the meta-theory that informs

Indigenous Australian's worldview, but it is clear there are some major differences from the way mainstream people explain an understanding of respect, that Leoni defines as "Anglo".

Egalitarian Australia

Non-Indigenous settlers adopted the egalitarian aspect of Indigenous Australians, even while excluding them. In the foundation study it was suggested that "the notion of being an egalitarian society where everyone is supposedly equal" was adopted by mainstream Australian culture (Muller, 2020, p. 195). Readily adapted into the mainstream view of themselves, although selectively implemented, it is unlikely that the concept of egalitarianism arose out of the British feudal system and the ideology of colonisation introduced by the settlers. Michael reflected that "*we like to think we are egalitarian but we don't know exactly what it means*".

Sharna reflected that despite the best of intention, equality "*didn't work when it came to economics and land*". Using the example of the initial settlement of South Australia, Sharna noted it began with a stated intention to be an "*egalitarian place where Aboriginal people would be treated equally*" but "*the reality was it was never going to work because people* [non-Indigenous settlers] *wanted the land … and they just went ahead and took it*".

Egalitarianism and the underpinning claim that all people are equal is a "*simplistic view*" according to Kylie who sees equality as "*a term that many Australians use to justify not being a racist and not being a racist country because in our society everyone's supposedly equal or the same*". Taking a sociological perspective, Leoni discussed the social stratification of Australian society, explaining how, like the concepts of merit, egalitarianism and equality are carefully crafted social constructs. Leoni made the point that because "*different people start in different places and the ability to express merit is clearly not equal, it's a socially constructed thing*".

Equality and Australia as an egalitarian society is a "*useful myth*" according to Julie, cultivated to "*prevent change*" so that "*we can blame an individual for not overcoming all their circumstances. It's about power, keeping people in their place. … so you can blame them rather than saying we've got a systemic structural problem*".

Equality or Equity

While most of those interviewed professed a personal belief that everyone is basically equal, a clear distinction was made that being treated equally was not the same as equity, or everyone having equitable opportunities. Vera bluntly asserted that "*as a society, a culture, we don't believe in equality at all*".

Two people interviewed were less clear on equality. When asked if she thought everyone was equal, Emily saw it as a balance, where in some ways she is unequal and in others, she is not. Theresa did not believe that everyone has an equal soul, using the example of a particular family member who "*if we were to look down on the earth and see all the individual people with all their little twinkling lights, all their little souls, I wouldn't expect her to be twinkling in the same way*". Although Theresa insists she is "*passionate about social justice*" and "*equal opportunity*" she does not feel people are equally worthy as this is conditional on behaviour and actions.

In a spiritual sense, Margaret believes everyone is equal "*but if you're looking in a practical sense then no, you're born into unequal circumstances … from that very first breath onwards you have very unequal opportunities*". Generalising, Kylie thinks the average Australian "*is probably quite colourblind*" and thinks that being equal means everyone is the same. In her research, Kylie found that her colleagues falsely claimed they did not "*treat Aboriginal people any differently from anyone else because we're all the same*". Kylie explained that while "*everyone should be equal, I don't believe everyone's the same*".

David believes that we "*have to get away from equal towards equitable, not treating everybody the same way but treating everybody so that they can have the same outcome*". Working in an area that aims to ensure "*everyone has fair equitable access to something rather than just equal access*" David explains that inequity by "*saying we have a complaints process for everyone. But if the complaints process can only be accessed if you have a landline and you speak good English and you have documented proof of all that you've done: then it's not equitable*".

There are "*all sorts of ways to making lots of people second class citizens*" Vera suggests. From her understanding of mainstream non-Indigenous culture, Vera explains that "*we effectively have all sorts of outgroups*", citing examples such as "*wealth, cultural and racial heritage, gender, education, style, body-shape*" by which people are judged as being less equal. Marian and Hope added racism and sexism to Vera's list of exclusionary factors.

Access to hidden cultural rules limit equity and opportunity, according to Tania, who thinks "*that there is an assumption that everybody in Australia has an equal chance to achieve certain levels of prosperity and health or what have you – it's whether the person takes that opportunity up*". Tania explained that while "*everybody might have the same opportunity; there are a lot of hidden rules*". Reflecting on something she had read recently Tania also explained the advantage granted to being a straight white male in mainstream society: "*a white male, living the life of a white male; it's like playing a video game on the easy setting*".

Conclusion

Personal perspectives of what it means to belong to mainstream non-Indigenous Australian society, to be born belonging to the dominant cultural group in Australia, were reviewed in this chapter. Participants generously shared their thoughts on diverse but connected issues such as history, spirituality, identity, class and equality.

Narrating this chapter enabled me to provide a relevant example of the methodology used in this study. Providing the list of conversation promoting questions before interviews or focus groups, and giving examples as interviews progressed, facilitated a rich dialogue that flowed smoothly from one topic to another. Beginning discussions with history positioned the focus on colonisation, away from the personal and firmly in neutral territory, provided a safe space for participants to speak freely and without fear of judgement.

Reflecting the circular learning outlined earlier, knowledge was layered and connected, returning to certain learning points for deeper learning to take place. For example, history led to connections then spirituality where the ethereal sentience of Country helped explore issues of identity. Exploring internal attributes uncovered how non-Indigenous mainstream spirituality was sometimes expressed as a syncretic blending of different religions and new-age beliefs, with smatterings of Indigenous spirituality. Chapter 6 follows on with an exploration of external relationships, such as respect, and how respect is related to family structures, Elders and aging, individualism and gender roles.

Notes

1 Indigenous Australians refer to “The bush” as “being on Country”.
2 January 26 also marks what is referred to as Rum Rebellion day when in 1808 a military coup overthrew the British appointed government.
3 A government study allowance for Indigenous Australians.

6

MEANING OF COMMON LANGUAGE

Respect the Law – Respect Is Law

Commonly used words can convey different meanings depending on the context and culture where they are used. "Deadly" is such an example. In a mainstream non-Indigenous Australian context, if something is "deadly" that means it is life-threatening or likely to kill. If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders refer to something as "deadly" it is good or excellent. "The Deadlys" was a national Indigenous Australian award that recognised excellence in sport, entertainment, the arts, health, education and training.

"Respect" is a keystone word that has significant different meanings and concepts for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In the foundational research, it became obvious that my non-Indigenous research supervisors held a different understanding of what respect meant to mine. Although there were some similarities in the meanings ascribed to respect, the differences were significant enough to warrant a more in-depth inquiry into what the meaning of respect is for non-Indigenous mainstream Australians.

A colleague in the afternoon focus group explained encountering the difference of meaning for "respect" between cultures. "*It's really complex, I know when we first started talking about respect, it was a misunderstanding between us. You saying it's about respect, and me saying 'is it?' Also just hearing Aboriginal people talking about respect, almost like a concrete concept or something – like it's there. Like the Elders past and present*".

Respect the Law – Respect Is Law

Gleaning an understanding of what topics such as respect, or spirituality, mean to mainstream non-Indigenous Australians was not a simple task. Discussing these same issues with Indigenous Australians in the foundational

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study for this current one, research conversations were free-flowing, in-depth and at times deeply philosophical. The difference was stark.

Respect from an Indigenous understanding was presented in the conversation promoting questions and identified that this was a topic of interest, yet many people interviewed struggled to articulate what it meant to them. Despite citing respect when discussing their understanding of spirituality, neither Julie nor Sharna expanded on what they understood respect to be; instead treating it as a universally understood word. Jack skirted the question when asked what respect meant to him and talked instead about colonisation, racial superiority, class and power, along with his academic speciality. David reflected that "*in a roundabout way there's a whole heap of stuff packed up in the word 'respect' – at an individual level, at an abstract concept level, at a society level*".

Definitions of Respect

The Oxford Dictionary states that respect is "deferential esteem felt or shown towards a person or quality" and demonstrating respect is to "refrain from offending" (2009, p. 1151). Checking my understanding of deferential, the Oxford Dictionary defines deference as "courteous regard, compliance with the advice or wishes of another" (p. 343).

An Indigenous Australian definition:

> Respect, as we use the word, refers to a multiplicity of rules that dictate behaviour, towards self, others, and Country; it also dictates the complex recognition of knowledge, moral behaviour, and Eldership/Seniority. Respect also informs, but is not limited to, childrearing practices and social interactions within and between groups and peoples. Respect is a thread that is entwined with our ancient law, philosophy, and spirituality, and it informs appropriate codes of conduct.
>
> *(Muller, 2020, p. 166)*

Respect – For Non-Indigenous Mainstream Australians

The non-Indigenous mainstream Australian concept of respect is based on individual relationships in a person-centred approach. This contrasts with the inclusive geosophical, earth-centred way Indigenous Australians talk about respect in relation to self, others, Country, knowledge and so forth. Erica felt that she only had a shallow insight into "*the complexities of respect*" that I talked about because she "*didn't grow up with it*".

Agreeing that she understands respect as individualised and person centred Tania explained that the first thing that came to mind is that although it's complex, it is more about people "*you take each person as you find them,*

and each person should be afforded a certain level of respect for their personhood as far as it can be taken".

"*Really deep regard … and a gut and heart thing*" based on "*truth, trust and regard*" is how Sharna described what respect meant to her. "*Trust, honesty and values*" were also a feature of respect for a member of the afternoon focus group. For Erica, "*respect is giving due weight to other people's feelings and preferences and things like that*". Emily explained, "*Genuine respect for another person involves some level of understanding and acceptance of their difference to me*".

Respect, according to Michael, "*is one of the by-products that come from building trust-based relationships*" and based on "*genuine love and compassion for one another*". Centred in Michael's commitment to social justice his understanding of respect comes from working "*to build a trust-based relationship with someone whether that is on a family basis or a work basis*". It occurs from "*giving of yourself to that person in the hope that that's reciprocated. When it's reciprocated, that's respect, for me it's almost a modelling of the other*".

Marian explains respect as giving, "*honour where honour's due and … because you're human and you've been through life and you're valuable just because you are who you are, you are unique, not because you are in some position or have assets or you have a position of power*".

Certain conditions applied to respect for many who reflected on what it meant to them. To Sonya, respect is "*conditional on the essence of the person*". A person she would respect would be "*well disposed … generally a positive force in life. I don't think that respect would be towards a person who is negative and harmful*".

Taking an academic stance, Leoni says respect in theory is "*really about placing a value on the point of view of a person and experience*". Continuing she added that "*you can value for all sorts of reasons, you can value the police because ostensibly they are there to provide law and order, but there isn't an unqualified right to this. Respect comes with value it seems to me. I think to get behind that word, its operation lies in different ways for different people*". Unfortunately, Leoni did not expand on what values she associated with respect.

After giving deep thought to the issue Kylie said she struggled to find the right words to explain what respect meant to her because there was the high regard that I discussed which she considered "*true respect*", and then "*you've got respect because of manners*" Her thoughts were respect is "*listening to others' opinions even if you disagree*" and "*certainly not about fear of repercussions, is more about manners*". Kylie added that there is also "*respectful behaviour which is acting in an appropriate way and being open and willing to learn*".

David thought carefully about what respect meant to him and responded that "*at a very basic level, at an individual level every human being should be*

treated politely, with care, not having to worry about their own individual state, their own safety: should be treated so their opinion is given due weight in a discussion, treated in a way so that their emotions aren't – I'm trying to explain this without using the word 'respect' – you treat people politely with due deference, the way that you yourself would like to be treated".

Empathy was linked to respect by Margaret and the afternoon focus group. Personally, and "*from the mainstream perspective*" Margaret said "*I wouldn't respect for respect's sake. I'm more of that individualist*". She expands respect and the link to empathy as "*it comes down to being aware that something, even if you don't understand it yourself, can be important to someone else, to a large range of people, so therefore you should respect that as if it were your own even though you don't have a full understanding*".

Respect Authority: Respect The Law

Respect for the law and authority presented some interesting differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, colonised peoples and people who benefit from the colonialist social structures. Instinctive respect is conferred towards people in positions of power, like police, yet participants in the afternoon focus group stated they "*wouldn't automatically respect someone in a uniform, but you start off on the assumption that you respect them*".

David, as did most of the other people interviewed, explained that "*we have respect for the law as an institute that keeps people generally safe and in a social community*". Hope saw "*police as protectors*" and respects them for the job they do to keep people safe and "*the work they are doing to protect the community*".

After saying she did not give automatic respect for a person in a position of authority, Delma then said except for police who are deserving of respect because they "*do so much for us*" and "*have a damned hard job to do, day after day*". She added that "*if you don't do anything wrong you don't have anything to fear*". Hesitatingly, and quite surprised she had overlooked some recent disturbing accounts of Indigenous peoples deaths in custody where police were involved, Delma acknowledged that it can be different for Indigenous Australians. Delma, a staunch ally, was surprised by her initial response because she was very conscious of the reasons why, along with people from different classes and social status, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can have differing perceptions of police.

> There are individual police that you look at and go yeah, I respect the way they work because the way they work is collaborative; they engage with people, they work hard in certain ways to do well for people. You feel

respect for that person for the hard work they do, although you could use the terms appreciative, grateful, rather than respect.

(David)

People in positions of authority were understood to be deserving of respect because of the power granted to the person in the role. This relates to the deference mentioned in the dictionary definition of respect. Fear is also an element of respect that is given to people like police because of the authority and power they can have over us, said Tania. "*Regardless of what they think of the individual … there's some people that we will respect; we respect that person because of the authority that their job brings and that's probably where that fear comes into it*". Likewise, it is the position of authority that Sharna respects, whereas her respect for particular individuals in positions of authority is based on their intentions and actions.

Social hierarchy is an aspect of respect for Erica who reflected that "*respect is acknowledging the role and responsibilities that a person has because of a position that they are in*". Erica thought that while "*we are all equal on some level, we're all individual people on the planet*". For example, the Prime Minister "*as the most senior elected person in our country, are automatically entitled to respect which involves a whole lot of things including protocol*". Conditions apply to this entitled respect, Erica clarified, because if a person is accorded status and respect for the job they do, if they do not "*fulfil their obligations as part of that job then they may not get the respect that they could normally expect*". Police are an example Erica used to explain the conditionality of job-status respect as "*they do the best that they can and they wear their uniform with pride, so to that extent then I am respectful and polite when I am dealing with the police generally. However, if I see or hear of a person who is racist or in any other way abuses their power to hurt other people then I have no respect for them at all and I think they should be out of their uniform and on their bike*".

Vera does not believe there is respect for police, declaring, "*I call that compliance and timid acquiescence – I wouldn't call that respect*". She also made the point that sometimes "*police show no respect for the people on the street and equally many of us are guilty of disrespect in that sense to police*".

Manners – Politeness

Social expectations, obligations and learned behaviour influence the understanding and application of respect for most of those who shared their knowledge with me in this study. Therefore, respect can also be understood as manners and polite behaviour. Hope reflected that for her, "*it is more the good manners, not so much fear, just treating everyone, as you want to be treated, having that general level of courtesy in your interaction with*

people". Respect, in the culture of her upbringing was, for Erica, "*the usual stuff like respect your elders, as a child you do what you're told and you don't challenge another's authority*".

Conversation in the afternoon focus group explored the complexity between politeness and respect, deciding that it goes much deeper than "*behaving in a respectful way. There is a difference between manners and respect. Like my colleagues – there might be someone that is a bit dodgy that I don't respect, but I will behave towards them in a respectful manner, even though I won't actually feel respect. So it is quite complex, it is almost a surface politeness*".

There are "*common traditions*" around the respectful greeting of someone you are meeting for the first time, Michael explains, that demonstrates you "*respect people for the role that they play*". Although, as he points out, there are limitations to being respectful of authority, because "*respect comes from when you work to build a trust based relationship with someone whether that is on a family basis or a work basis*". Being bought up to "*treat all people with respect*" as Michael was, is a common theme among respondents, yet it appears that conditions can apply.

Earned: Individualised and Conditional

Individual, value laden, and conditional language was a common thread when talking about Respect. The afternoon group agreed that in their culture a person must earn respect because it is individually earned and given: "*it is not so automatic in our culture compared to other cultures.* As one person explained, they don't automatically respect someone, it has is earned by behaving, "*in a respectful way to me*". Clarification was made that there is an automatic respect that differs from the earned aspect, and bestowed on a person because of their occupation and authority, such as police.

Explaining respect is complex and somewhat convoluted. David pointed out that demonstrating respect by "*showing people their inherent worth*" is a way of earning respect: "*the respect you earn in work or situations like that, you can't just be respected, you've got to earn respect*". Teachers know that they cannot go into a classroom and demand respect, they must earn the respect of their students "*because they are not going to give it to you as an entitlement*", explained Vera who then added a differing view. "*I do have problems with that because I do think there is a respect that simply goes because we are human beings*" and "*acceptance goes with a sense of respect*".

Along with empathy, discussed earlier, there is an earned component to respect. Margaret agreed outlining how she tends to give people respect initially but clarifies they can also lose her respect: "*I'm willing to give but I'm willing to take away as well*". According to Delma, a person can be respected for certain attributes, like knowledge, yet fail to gain her respect for their

actions. Selective and conditional, respect is evidently part of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, although it differs in many ways from the Indigenous Australian concept of the word.

Respect of Difference: Racism and Class

Respect is more than politeness, there is a cultural expectation that people with authority, are to be respected. As children, people in the focus groups discussed how they were taught to treat anyone in an authoritative position politely, with explicit expectation they behaved well for them and did not do disrespectful things like talking back; to obey.

However, family and social enculturation can instil the notion that certain people are deserving of respect and others are not, and act to cultivate intolerance. Members of the afternoon group thought I was being "*overly generous in saying white people don't understand*" as they thought disrespecting Indigenous Australians is a deliberate and personal choice. Although complex and hard to explain, the group members were clear that disrespect remains a choice even if raised to discriminate against people based on their race or not belonging to an acceptable cultural or social group.

Personal affront at being disrespected is evident among younger people, as Tania pointed out. "*Respect is a big issue in gang warfare. I don't know if it's quite the same thing but if you disrespect someone or if someone perceives disrespect – you disrespected me – that can trigger violence*". Disrespect is part of modern slang, as Tania explained, "*To 'Diss' someone is to show disrespect – it is short for disrespect*".

Clare, an esteemed professional in human service delivery, decried how people would be polite and respectful towards her, and refuse to offer her vulnerable clients "*basic normal manners*". Working in the social welfare area, Clare identified this lack of respect as due to the class difference and respectability, because often "*the worker will readily shake my hand and not bother to shake hands with the clients*". When service delivery personnel demonstrated disrespect towards clients it was very noticeable and particularly hard for her vulnerable clients as "*people are very sensitive to not being respected*". In mainstream culture Clare explained, there is a "*differentiation between the deserving and undeserving poor*" who are often seen "*as scum, worthless, the dregs of society, bad people*" in a way that harks back to the "*English poor laws*".

Refreshing Respect

Growing, evolving and changing, are words that sprung to my mind as I was momentarily stuck for words during my interview with Brenda, one of the younger people interviewed. My thoughts raced as I was struck by the

influence of Indigenous Australian culture on how Brenda explained respect and how she felt more comfortable relating to an Indigenous Elder because she knew the basic protocols around what to do and the kind of conversations she could have. Knowing these basic protocols helped Brenda enjoy meeting Aboriginal Elders because "*you know what you are allowed to ask. You might offer them a cup of tea and ask them where they are from – and hear some stories and that kind of thing. For me that is comfortable*".

Not wanting to generalise, Brenda said she wouldn't be able to engage in the same kind of conversation with a random older non-Indigenous person that she might encounter because of "*things like power distance and other motivations that make it all so complicated*" As she elaborated, Brenda expanded on her thinking, saying how "*mainstream is so multi-dimensional as well, and people come from different backgrounds, with different baggage, and different expectations*". And she is "*probably less likely to expect respect from non-Indigenous elders*". While not expecting respect from Indigenous Elders, Brenda finds that there "*is that openness to a conversation and I suppose it is linked to respect*".

Pensively, mentally applying the same respect she would use with Indigenous Elders with non-Indigenous Elders, Brenda began to consider the possibilities. "*I just couldn't imagine walking up to a mainstream Elder and trying to initiate a conversation in exactly the same way. Who knows; I might get a great response. Thinking about it, if somebody approached my grandmother that way, they would probably get quite a good response*".

Thinking about the mental shift on respect that Brenda vocalised, caused me to look closer at differing attitudes across generations through examining family structure.

Family Structure

Mainstream family structure is mostly described in terms of those directly related by blood/law. The people I interviewed were more fluid in their descriptions of family, with respondents from blended families where parents have separated and re-partnered incorporating both parents' families into their notion of family. For a few interviewees, emotionally close friends are included in the category of family, along with self-selected family members with no genetic or legal connection.

Michael is unimpressed because he thinks that "*as non-Aboriginal people have become more nuclear family system orientated and believe that they're living in an economy not a community then you get more and more of that breakdown in thinking where it's just me and my kids*". This contrasts with Aboriginal culture, that aims to provide safety and security for all and where "*the most vulnerable and weak members of the community are looked after*". Drawing on his own family, Michael recalled his father sharing stories, yet

his father and grandfather didn't have that "*yarning, the story telling passed down from one generation to the next*". He received few stories about his maternal grandparents "*because the family system broke down so it was very much nuclear*". Michael is disappointed that his family connections were disrupted for he would like to have had many more stories from and about his grandparents.

Nuclear families, consisting of a couple and their children, are "*a very Western thing*" Tania proposed. In her business meetings in the Middle East and within the Chinese culture Tania noted that "*asking about people's families would be considered a very important part of relationship building, whereas for Westerners it's almost like the wrong way to talk about those things*".

Biological and Legal Relatedness

An inter-generational grouping of people including uncles, aunts and cousins are what family is for Marian. She admits this is from the mainstream understanding of families where "*the main family unit that people consider family is very much the nuclear family. In some cases what's called the extended family might be the grandparents on both sides of the couple and the uncles and aunts on both sides of the family*".

In her workplace, Margaret says that who is classed as family is laid out in policy, who is deemed to be considered appropriate as family in relation to caring or compassionate leave is defined in the protocols. These protocols only recognise close relatives, such as mother, father, brother or sister. Vera's explanation of family fit this category as hers is "*very fragmented and atomised so it's pared right down to the nuclear stuff*", consisting of parents, sibling and children. As one of 12 children, Julie is very close to some, but does not keep in regular touch with all her siblings, only seeing them at infrequent family gatherings. At these times Julie is polite and "*I just pretend that I like them for the time that they're around, and then they go and I don't have to have anything to do with them*".

From a non-Indigenous mainstream Australian cultural perspective, Tania thinks that families are generally considered to be "*people who live together under one roof … generally the mother and father and the biological children. … the biological parents of children, so there'd be the mother and the father, the biological parents of dependent children – they're talking about a nuclear family where the mother and father are married and they live together*". Tania suggested that where there are extended, blended or step families these tend to be described as such.

With parents from two differing cultures, her mother is "Australian" (non-Indigenous mainstream) and her father is Egyptian, Hope notes a direct contrast between her parent's families. There are some differences and

similarities between the two cultures, with her mother's side of the family being "*pretty close – but we don't get together that often*". However, on her father's side the family is much more important "*they do much more together and they're in each other's lives more*". Being a parent herself, Hope reflects her father's family structure valuing "*the support of family and wanting to be physically close to family, … it's just such an important thing*".

Families can be renegotiated over time, through learning others' ways. Emily outlined where she is now "*moving away from what I would have seen as a traditional family structure where it was my mother and father, grandmothers and aunts and uncles – to be more inclusive*" of close friends as family. Even though she is from a blended family with both her parents having been married once before they married each other, Brenda considers family as who she "*is related to by blood*". However, her genetic definition of family has not prevented Brenda from creating extended family from close friends, and knows others who have a "Sydney mum" or a "Melbourne mum".

Having more than one mother and/or father is a concept that is becoming more common due to blended families that include step-parents. After her parents' divorce and remarriages, Theresa was able to understand how a person can have more than one mother or father, but that was not her experience. "*In terms of having that same sort of strong bond with a father and then another father, I can imagine it but I didn't experience it*". Owing to divorce and social changes, Theresa believes "*traditional Western European ideas about the family are changing*", with the nuclear family not as common as it was a few generations ago.

Michael can relate to this change to mainstream ideas of family structure, explaining that his parents split when he was very young and "*my father now is not my birth father*". Family for Michael is not simply biological because he is closer to some people who are not "*blood-related*" to him. He has never believed that being related by blood means there is a closer bond, because "*it depends how you are in terms of social interaction with people, it's that social web that makes you family or close to people, rather than your ancestry*".

Mothers

Indigenous Australian family structures and kinship systems can be complex. People can have numerous siblings from different parents, and in some instances, they can have more than one mother and far more than four grandparents. Brothers and sisters do not necessarily have a genetic connection. This complex family structure can present difficulties when interacting within mainstream systems. With the use of the case study below to promote discussion on who is considered family, the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream Australian concepts of family became more vivid to the people who shared their knowledge with me in this study.

A colleague was devastated when her head of department ridiculed her for having to take time off to attend her proper-mother's funeral as she had attended her mother's funeral the previous year. The final point of ridicule occurred when she stated that she had to take her mother to her proper-mother's funeral. In this case, there was no attempt by the boss to gain understanding of the employee's family structure.

All of those interviewed agreed that the example given reflected poorly on the manager. Outraged, David declared "*the boss needs to have greater cultural understanding and should have asked for clarification in an inquiring tone, rather than acting is such a managerialist manner*". Margaret insisted, "*there is really no excuse these days*", and after some thought, Emily simply stated she believed it to be "*racist*". Likewise, Erica put the obligation on the manager, suggesting that it was not unreasonable "*to sit down with a member of your staff and respectfully saying 'I don't understand, what do you mean you've got more than one mother, can you explain it to me'. It's not that hard*".

However, there was some discussion on how the onus was on the employee to explain the situation better or use different terminology. Seeking a practical solution, Marian suggested that "*other forms of leave could have been used*". Although leave to attend a family member's funeral is defined in workplace policy, Emily reflected that it is "*about mutual understanding and talking it through, and about people being open to difference*". This difficulty in employment relating to Indigenous Australian cultural obligations to attend funerals, highlights "the sense of subjection to a fixed hierarchy that always subordinates Aboriginal values to White ones" (Habibis et al., 2016a, p. 64). Discussing this need to attend to family bereavement protocols, the default position is an expectation that "the Aboriginal person must lose, give up that value, that expectation to attend that funeral" but in doing so is to deny an "inalienable nature of culture" (ibid).

Margaret sadly shared that some people simply hold a belief that the employee would be "*trying to rip us off in some way … trying to get some free time, not because you are emotionally affected by this person's passing, you're just doing this to get a day off. That's the bottom line*".

At different stages in life, people can become "Mum" or "Dad", despite biological relationship. This is particularly so for Elders, aged people, who may be cared for and respected as a parent regardless of any genetic connection. Respective social groups treat Indigenous and non-Indigenous Elders differently. This is particularly noticeable in the area of family and respect, for example, mainstream Elders are not necessarily considered holders of knowledge, unlike Indigenous Australian Elders.

Respect and Elders

This section, looking at age, aged and Elders in mainstream non-Indigenous culture had some interesting responses. While some of those interviewed felt that they did share a similar respect for Elders, others did not. Rejecting any lack of respect for aged people, David laughingly retorted "*but you haven't met my wife's grandfather!*" Marian simply could not understand the mainstream lack of respect for Elders.

Respecting the aged and Elders are central to Indigenous Australian culture and family structure. Who is recognised as a significant "Elder" in the Indigenous community, is a complex issue that is not part of this discussion. However, "it is wisest to treat older people as Elders, as befits their age: "significant" Elders will be acknowledged as such by others" (Muller, 2020, p. 170).

Values ascribed to Elders and older people differ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. Margaret reasons, "*non-Indigenous people look at Aboriginal Elders with that respect, because they've been defined for them in that way. Whereas Anglo elderly people are defined as being helpless and weak and a burden, someone who needs to be looked after and someone who is getting doddery and becoming infantile again almost*". Margaret's suggestion that non-Indigenous people give Aboriginal Elders respect because they are defined as being special people, whereas the notion that "*our*" elderly people are defined as being of little worth, was a common theme in this study.

A few respondents made it clear that, with their insider knowledge, in many instances non-Indigenous respect for Indigenous Elders is simply tokenistic, a social politeness, or political correctness. There is no incongruence; Indigenous Elders are treated respectfully, but only due to perfunctory politeness. Vera explained, "*that as a broad sort of cultural bit of knowledge, we all know that in Aboriginal cultures the Elders are venerated and stand in high regard, but many white Australians (let's call us that) don't necessarily have the same regard for Aboriginal Elders*". Rejecting the view that respect for Indigenous Elders is tokenistic, Kylie, one of the youngest cohort, holds a different view, finding that "*when you have a personal connection with an elder the respect is a lot greater, for me anyway*".

Lack of respect for Elders is not a trait universally shared within mainstream Australian culture as David and Marian point out. Speaking out against any assumption that no one in his culture respects their older people, David shared an example of his wife's grandmother, aged 95, and grandfather, aged 101. "*Okay, so they didn't know about computers, they didn't know about the internet, they didn't know about rocket science, but they knew a lot about how to be good people and that was really what you learnt from them. So I can't say that we don't afford the same respect because for me that's quite an alien concept*".

Similarly, Marian's family raised her to be very respectful of older family members, valuing their experience and advice. Her grandmother was a very prominent figure in her upbringing, she was "*someone respected and valuable*". Kylie finds that there are things that "*google and the internet*" are not able to replace the knowledge and experience of the older people in her life, because as she got older "*there are things that I need my elders for. Whereas when I was younger those things might not have been so important to me so it depends on how relevant the knowledge is as to how high you hold someone in esteem*".

Sonya believes that older people were respected in times past, such as a century ago, but "*in Western civilisation the pace of change has gone so fast that the cult of the young has happened*".

Cult of the Young

In what Sonya referred to as "*the cult of the young*" youth is idolised. Youth is seen "*as a kind of physical and mental ideal,* according to Tania, and "*people spend a lot of money to keep looking young because that's considered the most attractive way to look*". Hope thinks "*it's the admiration of young people or youth that that's the only thing that's valued, being young and beautiful and successful and once you get past a certain age you become invisible*". However, she notes that this attitude is being challenged by the baby-boomers, many of whom are refusing to act "old".

Speaking from within her "*white Anglo culture*" Margaret suggests that they "*don't revere old people*" because "*we have such a cult of youth and vitality and strength and self-reliance*". Going further, she says members of her culture are afraid of becoming old, and of death, because when one ages, they lose their strength, their skin loses elasticity so they look different and "*we're a bit afraid of them*". The fixation on youth as an ideal in mainstream culture can be viewed through the prism of people being either deserving or undeserving of respect, and being commodified as being of financial or emotional worth to a particular individual.

Value and Worthiness …

Monetised value of a person's worth in non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture is described by Michael who says "*people are defined by the role they perform, not by who they are as a family member or who they are connected to, so that paying of respect at a micro level just doesn't occur*".

Drawing on her interest in history, Vera traced the gradual development of youth as perfection in Western culture, and the way it is now "*celebrates and venerates youth*", and the influence this has had in the construction of age as a negative. Western culture positions age as a time of loss: "*loss of youth; loss*

of beauty; loss of collagen; loss of attractiveness, and loss of health". Vera questioned, "*If you construct something as a loss then how do you appreciate it as a gain?*" Wryly, Vera highlighted that this notion of youth as a prize, is "*absolutely stupid because we all get past youth pretty young*".

Current cultural emphasis in Western societies, "*on people's worth being measured by their attractiveness and youth, money and power*" is what Theresa assumes has resulted in older people having little influence or value "*unless they're very rich or well connected*". When older people are retired and no longer in the workforce, Theresa believes it is their loss of youth, money and influence that contributes to them being considered of little worth. Vera also identified how in mainstream culture, aging is positioned as a "loss" in the ledger of worthiness.

A person's value is related to their economic worth in mainstream Australian society explained Marian, laying the blame on successive governments promoting the philosophy that a person's worth is determined on how much they earn and can contribute. Marian disagrees with what she sees is "*a change over time that the main policy drivers in Australian policy seem to be the economic contribution*". She believes there are much more important things than a persons' economic worth and how long they can earn money and contribute.

Class and status in our society also contribute to the way an aging person is "*depreciated*" according to Erica, who believes "*our society measures success and status, through*" an individual's control over people and resources and "*power is intimately connected to money and work. So, when people are out of the work force then they are really conceived to be useless and have no status*".

Expanding on the issue of power and control of people and resources, Michael reflects that at first meeting, non-Indigenous people identify with their work role, whereas Indigenous Australians identify through connection with Country and kin. He notes, "*the very first question asked of any Aboriginal people when they meet is who's your mob and which Country do you come from?*" This "*just doesn't happen with non-Aboriginal people*". They ask, "*Where do you work? What's your role?*" Answers are along the lines of "*I'm a photocopy technician or a manager or something*". This is why Michael considers that while non-Indigenous people do value things like children and family "*a lot of people put value on work, on earning an income or what reputation they've got and that seeds this lack of respect for elders*".

Basing the value of a person on their economic worth, commodifies them, and attributes them with a monetary value. As a result of lower income being associated with aging and retirement, older people become devalued.

Independence

Independence is an attribute valued in mainstream Australian culture that also contributes to deciding who is, or is not, deserving of value. Age can

alter the ability for people to be as independent as they once were. Asking for help in Western culture, can generate feelings of guilt since it may imply there is something wrong with the asker. The afternoon focus group suggested there is "*quite a strong understanding that non-Indigenous people were raised with*:" that in seeking help "*you can't cope, you are a failure*".

Requesting help or assistance places demands on another's time and can lead to a fear of provoking resentment owing to decreased independence. In the afternoon focus group, conversation flowed around the guilt and resentment of reduced independence and how "*that permeates to elderly care because we have lost that respect. Elderly people are embarrassed to ask for help, because they don't want to trouble their children, or children don't want to help*".

Technology

Perceived lack of technological knowledge and ability also positioned older people as out-of-date, and no longer relevant in a contemporary context. Tania suggested there is a common attitude that society is changing so rapidly and "*old people are out of touch, they don't know what it's like living in our world, in our time, because they're from a previous time*". With modern lifestyles been driven by technology innovation, this "*newness is valued over wisdom*" reflected Theresa.

Vera proposed that "*the prizing of technological progress makes it seem as though old people are just relics of no interest or value*". However, this ignores that people who are now senior in years developed the current technology. Sonya, one of the older respondents, told how years earlier she and her husband were at the forefront of technology usage, not keeping up with current technology makes her feel helpless and frustrated. On the other hand, several other older people interviewed were adept at using technology, advising me on google searches and specific functions of mobile phones and computer tablets.

Manners

Respect as an element of good manners is evident in terms of how older people are treated, where politeness is demonstrated even though there is little actual respect. Sonya made the point that while even though "*people might say older people are stupid, they might actually treat their parents and their uncles and aunts with respect*". Age is irrelevant. Julie clarified that for her respect is merit based; "*it's not about their age, it's about the context, the environment and what the person is saying and doing*". Respect must be earned, "*people need to demonstrate that they are worthy of the respect that goes with that kind of status*" according to Julie.

Three people interviewed identified that a lack of respect is the issue – a lack of respect for young people from older people. Delma, aged 74, reflects that "*My mob have feet of clay. We sometimes tell them lies, we let them* [young people] *down and I think governments are part of that. Young people are so switched off, they don't have any respect and I don't blame them*". Youthful Brenda shared her personal experience of how a lack of respect for young people results in a lack of respect for Elders. In her early thirties, Brenda relates how it is not that long ago since she was a teenager, and how many young mainstream Australians are not shown respect by their elders. At every turn teenagers and young people seem to have older people in positions of power who antagonise them and do not show them any respect. Brenda recalled how "*over time that fosters a bit of a grudge or just a feeling that you're not respected by older people in the area and so it becomes a two-way thing*". Agreeing that respect is a two-way issue, Vera thinks "*there is a lack of respect for younger people by older people. It is a failure to appreciate their value simply as people in themselves*".

Respect-as-politeness, relevance and worth also featured in responses from Julie and Theresa. Julie was brought up to "*treat older persons with respect*", to be "*courteous and well-mannered towards them*" but their views are not what she would necessarily "*emulate or follow*". Theresa has a clash in personalities and does not value her grandmother's knowledge or experience, because it is irrelevant as the "*world is so different now, the world that I live in is so different from the world that she lived in*". Although her 94 year old grandmother thought she has "*wisdom to share*" Theresa explained her doubt that anyone would see the older woman "*a source of information or wisdom for the decisions they have to make*". The grandmother is treated "*respectfully and treat her kindly because she is a member of the family and it's a nice thing to do*".

Times are changing though, as older mainstream Australians assert their relevance and challenge attempts to dismiss their value.

Challenging Age

An increasing number of older people are pushing back against age stereotypes, with people affirming that while they are retired, they are competent and want to retain control over their lives and decision making. Erica finds it shocking that "*people actually have to make a case for themselves after they've given everything for their kids and the next generation*".

Using observation of people in practice, reflection and clarification, layering and integrating of new knowledge with my existing knowledge (Muller, 2020, p. 5) I identified a notable difference in the pre-retirement and post-retirement sentiments expressed by esteemed academics. Being quite familiar with the work of Clare, at a professional level, and another academic,

George I sought their clarification on whether my observation and analysis was correct. Both retired academics confirmed that retirement, and age, had enabled them to discard the restraints employment had on their freedom of expression.

Social justice, and critique of current policies within their field, featured more strongly in these academics' post-retirement rhetoric. They each discussed how in retirement, academic class norms could be relaxed, enabling their writing to be unabridged by the social strata boundaries. The works of both scholars' post-retirement presentations and writings were far more inspiring, discerning and compelling than their pre-retirement academic output.

Exclusion of lower classes from the academic social sphere was part of the explanation George gave for the difference in his academic stance, pre- and post-retirement. George told of how he felt a bit of an imposter, owing to his lower-class heritage, and that this created a great pressure to conform to the norms of the academic class. He believed that failure to conform could result in exclusion, ridicule or unemployment. Pressure to conform to mainstream academic structures similarly affects Indigenous scholars, as they try to negotiate between the expectations of the academy and their Indigenous communities (Hart, 2008). It is not the class divide that Indigenous academics discuss however, but the risk of having one's thoughts overwhelmed by Western thought (Muller, 2020, p. 76).

Observing how retirement resulted in Clare and George going from good to great orators and thinkers, the encroachment of the attitude of conditional respect towards older mainstream non-Indigenous Australians was also evident. Outrageously, the power and prestige of being a professor, accorded to both the academics, began to wane with retirement. Commentary from colleagues in conference audiences indicated that once retired, Clare and George's wonderfully unabridged knowledge could be relegated to being inconsequential. Sentiments overheard by fellow academics were age related retorts such as, "What would they know … and, that was then, this is now".

Gender Roles and Feminism

Women and men are considered equal in Indigenous Australian culture, with different, but linked, roles and responsibilities. Difficulties arise when some opportunistic males attempt to exert coloniser-introduced patriarchal power over women. Patriarchy has negatively affected Indigenous Australian social structure, but the understanding of equality has remained intact. In some ways, this equality can make feminism and the gender roles enacted by non-Indigenous mainstream Australians, a difficult concept to fathom. Although gender equality "*like a broader equality, is accepted by the mainstream*" explained Brenda, "*it is not enacted and put into practice*".

When viewed from a culture where women and men are inherently equal, male-dominant patriarchy does not make sense. Some of the reasoning behind the rise of patriarchy put forward by the morning focus group was that it arose from the feudal system, missionaries and the Christian bible, and English law that treated women as possessions of a male. Jokingly, the one male in the group asked, "*Do you get extra privileges because you are male?*" which was met with mirth from the remainder of the group.

Adopting a historical and scientific approach, Tania points out that looking at gender through a lens of mainstream culture and protocol, "*historically women were seen as defective versions of men*". Guessing that this stems from the biblical story of Adam and Eve, where "*man is the archetype and woman is the sub-type*", women were categorised as "*weaker, not as smart, with these defective bodies that bleed*". Feminism challenges that because "*we're not intellectually inferior, and we can do things on equal ground with men*".

Drawing on her personal experiences, Julie believes patriarchy stems from churches and their biblical interpretations. Recalling an incident from her childhood at a Catholic school, Julie told how the bishop asked the class; "*How do you spell 'mister'? I spelt it, and he said, how do you spell 'missus'?*" Julie hesitated to answer as she had seen it written a number of ways. With no response from the class, the bishop then said, "*See that's because the woman is dependent on the man and she hasn't got her own title that can be spelt because she doesn't need one!*" This infuriated Julie, even though she was only about ten years old.

Opportunities and roles available for women in mainstream society have changed over time, although, Jack lamented, "*many young women don't even know the gains made in their mother's and grandmother's time*". When Jack started his working life, women had to leave the public service when they got married. Married women were identified in relation to their husbands. Recalling his mother, Jack told how she would get offended if someone did not address a letter to her as Mrs and her husband's initials and "*I have never tried to call her Ms*". Softening this, Jack told of a "*kind of counter argument that women could exercise power over men because they pretend to be subservient!*"

Feminism, the push for equality between women and men, has many facets; it is not one single ideology, with feminists ranging from the far right and left of the political arena. As Leoni discussed, when marrying, some feminists choose to take their husband's surname while others retain their own. Vera considers herself a feminist, "*because the way that the gender inequality works is pretty appalling*". Feminism is interesting to Vera, having lived life as a man and now a trans-woman, as "*it contests a whole range of male privileges and male understanding of the world*" however she holds some reservations. Considering that what "*some significant branches of feminism have*

done is simply to occupy men's power base and contest men's power there, without sufficiently honouring what women actually have", Vera thinks "*it would be a really awful mistake for women to become like men*".

A committed feminist, Emily holds to "*those values of feminism, about challenging men's ability to control women and to create fear*". However, as Emily acknowledged, feminism "*is entirely a Western construct, feminism, nothing to do with colour*", because "*in the early days of the movement in Australia, the concept of colour was not in there. We feminists went around talking about our own views*". Distinguished Aboriginal academic Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson highlighted how the feminist rhetoric made "race and class invisible", and did not include Indigenous Australian women in her seminal book, *Talkin' up to the white woman: Indigenous women and feminism* (Moreton-Robinson, 2020, p. 34).

Most of the people interviewed suggested that patriarchy is a historical aspect of England and the churches, its origins unclear. Sharna did consider that "*if you go way back and there must have been a time when it was more equal*", but there "*was also a time when it was really male dominated*". According to Julie, inequalities between women and men arose from a number of factors, such as religion, media and violence. Recalling her experience in a violent marriage, Julie believes that "*women give up a lot of the power because they get sick of fighting, worn out, run down*" this results in a loss of "*their sense of integrity*" *and* they start to believe that they are the one with the problem. Julie understands that advertising supports this power imbalance because of the way women are portrayed in "*advertising around cosmetics and clothes*" with a social script that they must spend time and money to make themselves beautiful and attractive, so there isn't "*much energy left for anything important*".

Social Construct

Acculturation to gendered roles occurs in families and the social environment inhabited by an individual. Assuming a sociological position, Leoni explains that culture is a "*socially invented*" construct, that as a group, people construct a society, and in mainstream culture "*that structure encourages the expression of particular sets of different relationships from time to time*".

Growing up Theresa soon learned to adapt to cultural norms after finding that following the role model set by her primary income earner, and dominant mother at home, made her unpopular when she "*wanted to behave like it didn't matter what the boys did or the girls did*". She soon adapted to the dominant gendered cultural role of a non-dominant female. Aiding the pressure for Theresa to adapt, was witnessing her mother's values change when she married a second time to a man who was very patriarchal.

Sonya recalled her mother as a strong woman doing all the driving, and was keenly aware in her upper-class family environment "*it was not men making all the rules*", although her step-father "*had final say about most things*". Being born in 1942, there were things that women did not do, but Sonya did not really encounter a culture of male dominance until she migrated to Australia as a young adult, when she had to get her husband to present her idea to the president of the school parent and citizen committee as her input was not accepted.

Raised in a matriarchal family of strong women, Marian has been the primary earner in her family while her husband stayed at home to care for their children, although she does admit that her "*personal experience of gender roles is quite egalitarian and may not be the mainstream at all*". Marian recalled her father as bread-winner and mother at home, until they separated and her mother returned to work in her profession. Marian was surprised at this because she was unaware her mother had "*been to university in the late thirties, had a professional background, and had worked overseas*". Encouraged to gain tertiary education by her mother, Marian admits that she was "*afforded gender roles that are probably more modern than in other Australian families*". While things are changing over time and it is "*more accepted in mainstream society that women could have careers*", feminism is needed to fight for such things as the right for women to receive equal pay to men for equal work.

Life for Julie was very different from Marian's as she "*grew up in a very sexist family; there were jobs for boys and there were jobs for girls – and never the two shall meet*". Feminism is an issue of equality for Julie, who pointed out the inequity of wages and value for what is considered women's work in low-paid areas such as aged or child-care.

Generational Change

The relationship between men and women, and the care of families, is a work in progress for her generation according to Tania. Looking at people closer to her generation, Tania feels there is "*less of an official role, with breadwinner and family roles more balanced as people make their own arrangements depending on what suits them*". Tania also raised the issue of how women's work is commodified and that jobs women are dominant in, are categorised as less productive and therefore worth less money. Giving an example of a teacher with 80 students, being more "productive" in terms of profit, than a teacher with a class of 30, regardless of the outcome for students, Tania demonstrated how "*the caring professions which women have gravitated to have been undervalued and poorly paid*". This is another example of respect being linked to a person's value and their economic worth in mainstream Australian society.

Being a young professional woman, Kylie had reason to give gender roles and feminism some thought as she anticipated becoming a mother in the near future. Discussing practical views on the roles of men and women, children, childcare and career, Kylie explains she "*grew up feeling that I was equal to men or that there was no reason why I shouldn't be*", yet clarifies that this does not mean women are the same as men. Preferring to connect with the Indigenous view of gender equality, Kylie considers "*men and women as being equal but having different roles, because that acknowledges that whilst being equal, they are not the same*". Having given it some thought, Kylie suggested, "*this desire for equality has manifested in this notion that women need to be the same as men*" although that can lead to inequality if women are expected to continue doing the caring and household roles as well as paid work.

As a working professional woman, Hope expects her husband to do some things "*that would have been traditionally seen as male roles*", but also considers home keeping as a team effort. She certainly does not want to "*go back to that 1950s model where the women ended up doing all the housework and all the child care and the husband goes out to work*". With two young sons, Hope is unsure if she would treat them differently if they were girls, but is raising them to help with cooking and cleaning, because it is everyone's responsibility.

Parenting her daughter, Brenda takes care to tell her that she is "*clever and an intelligent and caring person as well as beautiful*", because only being told you are a pretty girl can deliver the wrong message that being a woman is only about looks. Identifying a trend in her region towards an idealised 1950s housewife style, so-called stay-at-home "yummy mummies", as evidence of a gendered role based on female youth and beauty, Brenda told how these stylish young women are driving expensive cars, bragging about their husbands' incomes as high paid miners. Raising concerns for the futures of these women when the mining boom or relationships ended, Brenda believes this will leave them completely disempowered, and out of the workforce "*particularly those who went into a relationship at a young age without any education*". She does not want this future for her daughter. Brenda believes attitudes of young women "*come from family as well, the sort of role models you have around you, the way your mother and father and people around you behave*" and if young girls are only complimented on their looks as they grow up, they could end up falsely believing that beauty is everything.

Culturally programmed attitudes of gendered roles continue to have an influence in mainstream Australian society. Discussing how a person's sense of self has been constructed "*around the messages that they have consciously and unconsciously absorbed*" from family and the media, Julie decries how strong capable women are depicted in the media as deeply flawed, "*either having a drinking problem or she's unable to have successful relationships*". Some women, according to what Julie says is her "*imperfect understanding*", have learned to use their "*feminine wiles to manipulate men*", that stems from

a time when women were powerless, not allowed to own property, and with money and assets controlled by their husbands, or male relatives. As a learned behaviour, Julie suggests that when women are led to believe they are "*not supposed to have any wit*", some will conceal their intellect and use "*flirtation as a kind of strategy to fight back to get what they want. It's about power, control, and the only way they think they can get something*". Margaret used one word to explain flirting – "*pragmatism*". Although Tania believes many women are not aware they flirt, "*it's kind of a funny one because it's one of the tools of a female's arsenal and they're not willing to give it up*".

Flirting: Gender Games

Personally, witnessing flirtatious behaviour, from strong women towards men, has intrigued me since my undergraduate studies as a mature age student. Contradictions between what women who were avowed feminists said and did were evidenced by examples such as meetings where women ceded power when a male of similar status entered the room, or women acting coy unnecessarily and out of character. Equally, the men appeared to expect it.

Sonya sees flirting differently. Flirting is behaving in an amorous playful manner that is generally not serious. It is a frivolous game that Sonya enjoys playing because "*it is light-hearted, like a little flame that burns for three to five minutes then it's gone*". Unspoken rules govern this flirting game according to Sonya, which is based on equality, knowing nothing more will come from the encounter. If there are greater expectations, Sonya insists "*that's not flirting, that is something else*", and relates how she has "*been in situations where I would not dream of flirting in any shape or form just in case someone thought that it meant something else*".

Discussing the gender difference between the way men and women are treated, Thomas McBee (2016), editor of an online news publication, finds he is treated differently now as a man, compared to how he was before he transitioned from a woman. His professional life is so much easier as a man. Transitioning gender provided Thomas with some "startling insights into what helps and hinders us … [and about] the costs and benefits assigned to us by our culture". Things like being heard and taken seriously in meetings, and negotiating a wage increase, are vastly easier for Thomas as a man, than they were for him when he was a woman.

Generously, Vera, who insisted on being identified as a "*trans-woman*" shared her experience "*as one man*" and as she now sees things as a woman. When it comes to men and women being equal, Vera understands that in Western culture, "*most men can't even see that it could be different but equal – they just see the difference so men are able to claim superiority. As a man you really do think that women think you are hot shit. But my sense is that most men think like that*".

Going to the same hairdresser when he was a man and now as a woman, Vera looked back on the conversations she had at the hairdressers as a man: "*the conversation revolved around me, my work, my world – it was all very flattering and full of adulation and flattery – Oh isn't he an important man*". As a woman Vera noted that the conversations are very different when there are no men present. "*Then if a man comes in the conversation switches to him, much of the other conversation stops or goes very quiet and on the side and the man becomes the centre of attention*" and when he leaves, "*the quite different conversation resurfaces*". From these observations, Vera notes that women contribute to the gender power imbalance by "*acting like men are god's gift to creation. As a man, I had no idea that this is what was happening*".

Flirting is something that Vera enjoys, partly because it gives assurance that "*I'm attractive as me*". Beginning life as a woman, with insider knowledge of male weaknesses, Vera had to face her co-workers in her new gender identity and drew on what Tanya referred to as "*one of the tools of a female's arsenal*" – flirting. Pragmatically, with simple practical reasoning, and a fear of ridicule from her male colleagues, Vera said she "*always wore a bra and showed as much cleavage as I could get from my new breasts – and it worked. That is the most embarrassing thing – it worked!*"

With insider knowledge of being a white middle-class male, who now experiences the world as a white middle-class woman, Vera is critical of the role patriarchy has in mainstream Western society. Using anthropology as an example, Vera made the point that originally, Aboriginal society was said to be patriarchal because it was viewed "*through a Western patriarchal lens*", until female anthropologists began to gather the women's stories, proving it was not the case. The main frame of reference for western knowledges is "able bodied men, and to a lesser degree, women", but Vera noted, that does not include "*men or women of colour, or of different cultural backgrounds, the poor, or those who are not able bodied, etc. etc.*".

Sharing a story about a trans-woman friend, Vera told how based purely on maleness, far more was invested in the education and career of the child born male compared to the female born siblings. There was a huge discrepancy between what the family invested in the "son" compared to the daughters, "*just because he happened to have a penis*". (*After Vera's interview, I decided I want to be white, middle-class and male!)

Individualism

Individualism and independence feature as positive attributes within non-Indigenous mainstream society, as with other Westernised cultures. Clare sadly pointed out that even human rights are based on individualism, that contrasts with the collectivist and inter-dependent culture of Indigenous

Australians. Individualism is an aspect of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture identified as an area of interest in the formation of this research. Aunty Mary Graham (2008, p. 181), Aboriginal Elder and philosopher, identifies that "you are not alone in the world" is one of two basic precepts of the Aboriginal worldview. Expanding on this, Aunty Mary describes how, if "a human being becomes a totally individuated self, a discrete entity whirling in space, completely free" it is a "fearful freedom" that results in "a sense of deepest spiritual loneliness and alienation" which "envelopes the individual" (2008, p. 186).

When Habibis, Taylor, Walter, Elder and their team (2016b, p. 4) reversed the racial gaze and undertook research to gain rare insight into how Indigenous Australians in Darwin view non-Indigenous Australians and their mainstream institutions, they identified that "white values of individualism and materialism" were "problematic and damaging for people and communities". Pursuing material success and individualism, has come at the "expense of connection to family" with loneliness and stress that has made white Australians "selfish and reluctant to share" (ibid, p. 4). It is what Aboriginal author, Melissa Lucashenko (2008) describes as "stuff sickness" whereby Indigenous peoples are increasingly being urged to become, "greedier to earn better incomes and live better lives," and relinquish our values and philosophies in exchange for "the beads and mirrors of the 21st century".

This "consumerism and the pursuit of money, referred to as "dollar dreaming," is a feature of Western society and central to "white culture" (Habibis et al., 2016a, p. 64). Emily agreed and laughingly quipped that it "*is reflective of it being a capitalist rather than communalist (as opposed to collectivist) society*". Money featured in Sharna's response that "*debt and indebtedness in Western society leads and entices individualism*". Margaret confessed that this individualism is reflected in the consumerism, smaller families and emphasis on individual achievement all reflecting this "*'I' driven*" culture. Consumerism and individualism are part of the dominant capitalist politics, according to Erica, causing "*a malaise of our society, of loneliness, alienation and dis-connectedness*" which can manifest as "*depression and angst and mental illness*" in society. Contemporary society undervalues relationships and communications, replacing it with electronic gadgetry, the beads and mirrors of the 21st century, and this consumerism "*makes us incredibly ruthless because I think that sets people against each other*", Vera fumed.

Michael explained how "*Europeans, non-Aboriginal culture is about wealth creation, individual rights and freedoms, and nuclear family systems*". Continuing, Michael compared what he saw as the collective and relational, family centred Indigenous Australian culture, to that of non-Indigenous mainstream culture that has "*a very individualistic way of looking at things*". This individualistic way is evident "*when groups of non-Aboriginal people*

come together", because they are "*like loose federations of individual people who are expressing their individual rights*", Michael said.

Resilience and relying on others is considered a weakness, and individualism as a positive attribute. While other people might assist her, Julie insists that "*ultimately the responsibility for what happens to me in my life is mine*". Narratives in mainstream Australian culture revere "*individual achievement*" and, as Margaret noted, "*we define ourselves through stories of individuals*". Individualism is "*to do with becoming independent*" Marian observed, and of "*reaching adulthood*", because in mainstream culture there is an expectation "*that you can do everything on your own, set up your own home, have your own job, and live independently of your parents*". Continuing, Marian notes how becoming an independent and a self-reliant individual is a mainstream milestone that indicates "*you're now an adult, that you can now do it on your own – one of the yard-sticks in society*". Kylie agrees that in mainstream culture, there is a perception that an individual is expected to show they are strong and independent, capable of doing things on their own, and that "*relying on others and asking for help might be looked down upon*". Agreeing with Marian and Kylie, Tania suggests that individualism is so important "*we don't want to show any signs of weaknesses – we value resilience*". Their culture has an unwritten rule of independence, according to the afternoon focus group, that says a person "*can't be indebted to anyone because you might be expected to pay it back*".

Fear can act to reinforce individualism over collectivism. Thinking aloud, Theresa said that there is fear of losing control of things like "*privacy, and money and space and time*" and that "*we would suddenly be impoverished*" if a more collective or relational approach were taken. Individuality is moderated in part, with what Theresa refers to as a "*social responsibility*" that applies towards the relationships one has with people, and accounts for things such as looking after younger siblings in a playground. Tania and others identified how the built environment is increasingly limiting individual social interaction to those who one has social responsibilities towards, such as work colleagues and family.

People are not inherently individuals; individualism is a learned cultural trait, shaped by the values, attitudes and behaviours of those around them. Erica identified how "*we*", non-Indigenous mainstream Australians, "*are shaped by the values around us, the messages in advertising and marketing and our parents' behaviour and the people we go to school with shape our own behaviour*". Drawing on the understanding that individualism is a learned value, Erica thinks this is why "*people believe one thing, say another and do another quite easily because it reflects the confusion between what they have learned at different stages of their life and how deeply embedded those beliefs are*". That is, non-Indigenous people can claim to be staunchly individual, while at the same time be connected to family and friends.

Individualism, connectedness and relatedness can coexist, depending on the meaning applied to each word. Recognising that individual achievement can be gained, and lauded, while remaining connected through relationships and collective endeavour, David sees positivity in "*people challenging the collective doctrine and going off individually. In one way it's a bit of bravery to challenge the way the world is, to try and make it better*".

Unsure if she agreed with people being "*complete individuals*", Sonya drew on history to explain what she believes to be individualism arising because of successive generational advancements. She explained how in Western Europe, "*religion, the class system and economics led to a lot of conservative conformity*" but the industrial revolution created opportunities for individual achievements that were quite different from what a person's parents or social systems could have imagined. However, Sonya continued, even if someone acted as an individual in doing something very different or moving to another continent, "*they still had some relationship to their society*". This is the "social responsibility" Theresa mentioned. Rarely do people claim to be an individual with "*no connection or responsibility to someone else*", which leads Sonya to think of a "real" individual as one of those "*who get the guns and shoots a whole lot of people but they are extremely rare*". People like to belong, and not be totally individual, Sonya mused, reflecting on how lonely people will join things like a book club "*because they want to have someone who cares if they are alive or dead*".

Humans are social beings, and as a society we function best with "*interdependence*" according to Marian. Mobility in the workplace means many people work and live away from genetic family. In cases like this, Brenda has observed "*an inclination to reform families*" and that "*quite often people strike up relationships, friendships, with people who are a little bit older than them and they become their Perth Mum, or Brisbane Mum*". Life experience and reflexivity helped Kylie challenge the "*individualistic paradigm*" taught to her during her university studies, that individuals were responsible for their life circumstances. Kylie revealed that over time, she has changed her view on "*the importance of individualism*" in her work and has "*come to question it in other areas as well*". Individualism is a strong theme in non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture; however, there is some flexibility in how it is applied.

Protestant Work Ethic and Capitalism

In explaining non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, Clare drew on history and referred to the British poor laws, the agricultural and industrial revolution that saw the rise of social stratification, and the effects of Protestantism. Clare outlined the influential social theory works of German sociologist Max Weber, 1864–1920, explaining how the Protestant work ethic

contributed to the rise of capitalism and modern-day attitudes of who is deserving and who is not. Protestantism, Christian faiths such as Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinism and Methodist, although originating from the Catholic Church, differ in theological interpretations. Weber argued that Protestant churches, linked a person's "work and economic activity as a God-given duty", promoting work as a moral good, and this value gave rise to the "spirit of capitalism" (van Hoorn & Maseland, 2013, p. 2). The development of work as a calling, gave entrepreneurs a clear conscience to exploit workers who believed in the moral benefit of work and that their toil was earning their eternal salvation. Studying the impact of the Protestant work ethic, economists van Hoorn and Maseland (2013) found that negative effects of being unemployed appeared stronger in Protestant societies for both Protestant and non-Protestant individuals.

Active Pentecostal Church member, Marian, had a Protestant upbringing and disagrees with Weber's explanation of a Protestant work ethic. She said, "*I know there's encouragement for hard work but I don't think that's how you're saved. We can't earn our way into heaven even through being religious or doing good deeds*". However, Marian considered that Weber's Protestant work ethic could contribute to "*this economic lens*" that considers "*every individual unit has to be productive and producing*" and be the reasoning for, the "*economic rationalism in our policies*". Although Marian strives for individual goals, she believes success does not need to be competitive, but acknowledges that is not how society views it. "*Competitiveness is encouraged – competing not collaborating*" is the mainstream non-Indigenous social norm stated in the afternoon focus group.

Tania learned about Christianity in school, and relayed how she understands that history shows individualism in Australian society "*comes very much from the Protestant work ethic base rather than the Catholic*". Where I would have put a greater emphasis on the purpose of life being happiness and contentment, Tania explained "*the way it really works;*" looking at the government and the economy, "*value is in work and happiness is something that will come*". Policies are based on thrift and sacrifice, with happiness coming in retirement, but in the meantime, said Tania, "*you must get on and work*".

Discussion in the focus groups reaffirmed the role that capitalism and its associated consumerism has on individualism, with the morning group noting how in mainstream society, identity is tied to work or their ability to undertake paid work. One member of this group pointed out how after having children, saying they are a stay at home mother is not enough, and so seek other work related identities, such as volunteering, or studying. Members of the afternoon group raised issues of how work-as-a-virtue mentality allows individuals to be at fault if they are poor, and constructs poverty and homelessness as a personal weakness.

Conclusion

The focus groups added group dynamics to the research conversations, with responses gaining depth as members spoke and built on others' replies, expanding on the internal elements as discussed in Chapter 5, and the external relationships discussed in this chapter. Differences and similarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian understanding of concepts such as respect, family, Elders and gender roles emerged as knowledge was respectfully shared. This chapter culminated in discussion on individualism, how it came to be, the values and principles that inform individualism and how it differs from Indigenous Australian collectivist and relational social norms.

However, one point discussed midway in this chapter, under the heading "Respect of Difference", made me pause and take a deeper look at the issue raised. The afternoon focus group suggested that I was too generous for suggesting a lack of understanding by non-Indigenous mainstream Australians was behind intolerance towards Indigenous Australians. Instead, this focus group said that "*white people*" can, and do, make a deliberate choice to disrespect Indigenous Australians. Choosing to disrespect may be "*about that personal choice*", but the words at the start of Chapter 5, that "*Most people are kind*" and act with "*kind intent*", presented a different picture.

Reflecting on both these negative and positive sentiments made me aware that developing mutual respect may require more than knowledge about the past and how this influences the present and consider what processes act to motivate people to make a personal choice to be more respectful. With the possibility of this change process in mind, the attention in Chapter 7 is on the interactive dynamics of mainstream Australian culture in the focus group setting and intercultural decolonisation. Here I explore and identify ways people can engage with personal decolonisation and learn, if they are willing, to make a personal choice to be respectful of people and cultures other than their own.

7

INTERCULTURAL DECOLONISATION IN PRACTICE

A section of this chapter was published as "*Preparing to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island (Indigenous) peoples: Decolonisation for social work practice*" (Muller, 2016).

> Ngiyani ngiima yilaadhu yalagiirray ngiyani gimiyandi gaalanha yilaalu-gi go (We are here today as we were yesterday and will be forever … amen)
>
> (Waters, 2015)

Above is an old Kamilaroi prayer, shared by Marcus Waters with his permission. Simply put, this prayer carries great depths of meaning relevant to why Indigenous Australians continue to try to engage with Australia's settler society. We were here in the past, here now and will be forever. This past, present and future connection to Country engenders determination to find ways to restore balance and reclaim well-being in Australian society and is the fundamental reasoning for this research project.

This chapter draws on the six stages of decolonisation outlined in Chapter 4 and demonstrates their relevance to non-Indigenous Australian peoples through a discussion of the Dinawaan[1] (Emu) based focus groups conducted for this study. Continuing with a circular learning approach, in this chapter the reader is presented with foundational knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of the process and benefits of the ensuing discussion. Significant aspects of the Dinawaan workshops, discussed late in the chapter, can be more readily visible with this

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background knowledge. Following a circular learning style, information may be reiterated to ensure retention in relation to the new knowledge presented.

Decolonisation, as discussed in the previous chapters, creates a safe space for the re-evaluation and transformation of negative feelings experienced by learning the previously hidden history of colonisation during the first stage of Rediscovery and Recovery, and recognises any strong emotions that can occur in the second, Mourning stage. Working from the central third stage of Healing/Forgiveness – Reclaiming Well-being, creates opportunities to explore how things can be different in the fourth stage of Dreaming (Muller, 2020). Stages five of Commitment, and then six, Action, are those where any transformations are committed to, and action is taken towards their implementation. Flexibility and permeability across and between the six stages enables decolonisation to be responsive to an individual level of engagement, with reclaiming well-being as its central principle and goal.

Healing and Reclaiming Well-being are central to decolonisation; it is where we find a space of safety, and regain our equilibrium. Inviting our allies to engage with the process of decolonisation, and share their experiences of it from a non-Indigenous perspective, has been rewarding and thought provoking. Generously shared, this information has assisted in developing a framework to shed light on a previously missing aspect of cross-cultural learning: it provides a resource to assist explaining non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture.

Born Belonging

Decolonisation can be a difficult concept to engage with, particularly for those who are part of the cultural mainstream. Their understandings and practices create the dominant social structure that privileges mainstream national identity, resulting in limited need for members of the settler society to examine their own racialised identity (Jenkins, 2015). Critical whiteness theory is useful in discussing whiteness or white privilege and the benefits of belonging to the "white" dominant settler social group, and helps identify that while "black" people can readily discuss what it means to be black, "white" people often struggle and/or take offense when asked to critically reflect on what it means to be white (Walter et al., 2011).

Drawing on critical whiteness theory to explore what decolonisation as a non-Indigenous ally entails, Suzanne Jenkins asks:

> What does it mean to be white in a nation that was created for the benefit of white people? Do those of us who are white reflect on our experience of being white, of being born belonging? The white experience is so different to the Indigenous one. To develop any real level of understanding necessitates that we actively pursue the meaning and effect of an experience

> that is alien to us. To achieve this we need to realise and understand how racialised our white lives are before we can truly begin to accept the nature of the problem and strive to be part of the solution to it, personally and professionally.
>
> *(Jenkins, 2015, p. 120)*

Recognising past wrongs is vital, and "issues related to grief, loss, and shame" need to be addressed as these can "reduce tolerance for vulnerability" and result in "denial, anger and retaliation" notes Jenkins (2015, pp. 115–116). Aboriginal counsellor and founder of the *Australian Institute for Loss and Grief*, Rosemary Wanganeen (2014, p. 475) identifies a unique loss and grief model as a culturally appropriate counselling and teaching model for promoting healing, giving examples that demonstrate her model is also relevant for non-Indigenous Australians. Non-Indigenous ally, Sarah Maddison (2011) identifies that it is settler society's collective "white" guilt, which has promoted blame and denial, and stands in the way of meaningful reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Cypriot scholar, Michalinos Zembylas (2008, p. 266) explains that the negative feelings evoked by confronting historical wrongdoings can be grief, loss and the discomfort of shame. These feelings promote negative reactions of "aggression, resentment and intractable conflicts" where others are blamed for being the reason for these undesirable emotions including guilt. It is not enough for significant change in behaviour and attitude to rely on an assumption that if people were more informed about history and negative racist behaviour, it would stop.

Evaluation of the *Stop. Think. Respect. (Phase two): Discrimination against Indigenous Australians* campaign, which highlighted racist behaviour as offensive in a series of television commercials and action research, demonstrated that **positive changes were recorded** when comparing attitudes before and after the promotion. Oddly, the assessment of the delivered campaign also noted that "the proportion of the target audience who found **discriminatory behaviour to be acceptable increased**" (beyondblue, 2015, p. 3) and despite the notion of equality being a highly regarded quality, there continued to be resistance to putting the concept into action. It is clear that current approaches to developing greater harmony through addressing a troubling divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians touch on points of change, yet have something missing. Reclaiming well-being from emotions of shame, guilt, grief and loss, requires healing.

Shame, and its associated hurtful reactions, can be productive, and if addressed appropriately, can deliver positive outcomes (Jenkins, 2015; Wanganeen, 2014; Zembylas, 2008). Feelings of shame indicate a person feels interest and emotion in the issues, and this interest creates a space and opportunity for re-evaluation and transformation. Maddison (2011, p. 164) suggests that only through "intercultural dialogue" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can we

achieve "a new relationship that is acceptable to all parties", and proposes engaging with the process of internal decolonisation to achieve this. Engaging with the six stages of decolonisation can create this space.

Interest in the five stages of colonisation and six stages of decolonisation as a succinct way of approaching decolonisation was clear from ongoing communication with the focus community of non-Indigenous mainstream Australians. Persevering with the discomfort, tapping into a person's interest and good intent, has contributed to the emerging thinking on intercultural decolonisation as discussed below.

Although Prime Minister Paul Keating's "Redfern Speech" (1992) asserted that "guilt is not needed", knowing what to do with strong emotions like guilt and grief is important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people when engaging with decolonisation. A refusal to focus on negative emotions such as guilt opens up opportunities to dream, to imagine, and find a better path for the future. When engaged with an open heart and mind, difficult discussions can occur in a space of safety.

Engaging with Intercultural Decolonisation

Internal colonisation is an often hidden impact of colonisation, where both the "*colonised and the colonisers 'internalise' the denigration and belittlement to then go on to accept it as the 'natural order of things'*" (Gair, 2015). This results in the colonised and colonisers accepting or resigning themselves to their assigned roles in the social script, "*where the colonised struggle with the imposed oppression but do not overcome it then self-blame … and where superiority and racism is internalised for the coloniser as normal and therefore invisible (white privilege)*".

As one submission to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Development Team stated:

> Healing to me also means cleansing my mind from the memories of traumatic events, and realising that whatever took place was beyond my control and wasn't my fault.
>
> *(2009, p. 27)*

Cleansing the mind of past events, and negative emotions attached to a realisation of how the coloniser society has benefited from these events, is a serious task for non-Indigenous people, and not without costs. The ideology of colonisation is deeply embedded, often hidden and unrecognised, in the settler culture. Non-Indigenous ally, Deborah Bird Rose (2004, p. 214) suggests that deep commitment is needed, if the regimes of violence associated with colonisation are to be unmade and connections with moral accountability and decolonisation achieved.

While identifying that the non-Indigenous population must tackle negative attitudes towards Indigenous people, and calling for educators to do more, Pedersen, Bevan, Walker and Griffiths added a warning that "they would have to be careful not to polarise opinions or cause backlash effects" (2004, pp. 240 and 247). The caution not to polarise opinions to avoid backlash reinforces that any action remains dependent on the good-will of the dominant settler society, and is an example of the subtle and covert nature of modern colonisation.

Adult educationalist Stephen Brookfield suggests that possible backlash could arise from a fear of committing cultural suicide, of being excluded, for challenging conventional assumptions of the culture that have defined and sustained them up to that point in their lives (1994, p. 203). Present also is a fear for one's cultural identity, as it is no longer possible to ignore the brutal history of colonisation and how it contributes to the modern social inequities. Claims of not knowing will be unsustainable, and this brings an implied responsibility towards change.

Interacting with decolonisation can cause cognitive dissonance, an internal conflict when a person's beliefs are challenged by opposing evidence. Intercultural decolonisation can also result in cultural dissonance, the experienced difficulties that can arise when negotiating between one's own culture and another culture. Cognitive and cultural dissonance can be inevitable when engaging with decolonisation. French sociologist, Bernard Lahire (2008, p. 169) describes how an individual's experiences can result in them feeling they belong to a particular class or culture, that they are "legitimate" (consonant); or, feeling "illegitimate", that they do not belong (dissonant). For mainstream non-Indigenous Australians who have strong "legitimacy" of belonging to Australian culture, cultural dissonance can occur when engaging with the complexity of Indigenous Australians' role in the social structure. Identity, a strong theme in this research, and feelings of illegitimacy attached to the research participants' Australian identity, was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Some of my participants expressed surprise when they came to the realisation that non-Indigenous people also need to engage with decolonisation. In shifting the research lens, participants who shared their knowledge with me had to analyse the endemic assumption of Western-based coloniser culture as the normal by which differing cultures are positioned as "the other"; not one of "us".

Some key informants and the expert panel expressed similar thinking to Susan Gair, with some suggestion that "Internalising" could be an additional stage of colonisation or one that needs further examination. Owing to internalised colonisation being "common knowledge" among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, I have only touched on it in this and my previous work as it is one of the central issues of the internal Healing and

Forgiveness stage of decolonisation that emerged in the first study. Although the negative attributes ascribed by the ideology of colonisation have been internalised with devastating repercussions for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, the focus of this research is on non-Indigenous mainstream Australians. Refocussing the research conversations, reminding participants that this was not about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, but about *their* own mainstream culture, occurred so often, it was a clear indication of the complexity and depth involved in examining the mainstream social script.

Recognising the issues hindering engagement with intercultural decolonisation also identifies strategies for engagement. Commitment demands action, the final stage of decolonisation. Action is necessary because if the previous stages of decolonisation are engaged with and no action is taken, it simply becomes a more refined form of colonisation.

Personalising the Six Stages of Decolonisation

Prior to this study, my thoughts on how non-Indigenous people engaged with decolonisation were limited. Acknowledging that some people simply do not want to know, preferring the cultural story they are familiar with, others have shown real commitment and considerable thought into how decolonisation applied to them and theirs. Hope and inspiration grew with post interview contributions to knowledge on how non-Indigenous people are engaging with decolonisation – intercultural decolonisation.

Since identifying the six stages of decolonisation in 2010 (Muller), Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and human service workers have gained inspiration and used, or adapted, the six stages of decolonisation to suit their work, either as a research framework or to advance their thinking as illustrated by the following examples. Dameyon Bonson, founder of the Black Rainbow Living Well advocacy and research organisation for Indigenous LGBTI people, has adapted the six stages for his suicide prevention strategies (2014). Non-Indigenous ally, Suzanne Jenkins (2015) incorporated the six stages to advocate for psychotherapists in the quest for a more socially just society. The six stages have also provoked further thoughts on decolonisation from a non-Indigenous perspective.

After her first reading about the six stages of decolonisation prior to her interview for this study, Erica reflected on what she learned and how non-Indigenous Australians might put these stages into practice. Over time, Erica continued to share with me how her thoughts changed. Sharing her initial thoughts, Erica saw the *Rediscovery* stage to be one for a non-Indigenous person to seek and speak the truth, listen to counter-narratives and expose

coloniser myths. For Erica, the *Mourning* stage focussed on the loss experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from colonisation, noting a need to reflect on the reasons that led to it. Erica noted that the *Healing* stage was a phase to "seek atonement, say sorry, and commit to healing together", which demonstrates the negative emotions discussed above, indicating the way strong feelings were enabling the decolonisation process. Positive talk about openness, respect and so forth, expressed by Erica in her initial feedback, remained firmly focussed on Indigenous Australians – she had not yet realised that decolonisation was also needed for her mob, non-Indigenous mainstream Australians.

Regan Forrest (2012a) continued to think deeply about what constitutes Western culture after her interview, and what the issues are for non-Indigenous Australians engaging with the six stages of decolonisation. Hearing of historical accounts that she had been unaware of, Regan began engaging with her personal journey through the stages of decolonisation, but that is her story to tell if she decides to.

Regan Forrest shared some of her reflection on participating in the research project on her blog:

> Since I participated in this research project, I've been giving "Indigenous-mainstream" relations a fair bit of thought. As there are stages of colonisation, so there are stages of de-colonisation. So where do I fit in to this decolonisation process? I consider myself relatively ignorant of Indigenous culture and world-view. But how do I learn more? I have fears of asking inappropriate questions, saying the wrong thing, or inadvertently causing offence. And I suspect I'm far from the only one. But we need to collectively work past this barrier if we are to work closer towards reconciliation. For this reason I've found being involved in Lorraine's research personally enriching.
>
> *(Forrest, 2012b)*

Following her interview, Regan Forrest suggested there are five parallel phases experienced by non-Indigenous mainstream people when they engage with decolonisation: (1) *Denial/Blame*, (2) *Guilt/Shame*, (3) *Withdrawal/Helplessness*, (4) *Interaction* and (5) *Reconciliation*. With input from others who shared their knowledge with me about non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, the initial five stages proposed by Forrest were fleshed out to Six Parallel Phases of Decolonisation that can be encountered by the coloniser society: (1) Denial/Blame, (2) Guilt/Shame, (3) Withdrawal/Helplessness, (4) *Demanding*, (5) Interaction and (6) Reconciliation. As with the other stages of colonisation and decolonisation these stages are not necessarily sequential or separate.

TABLE 7.1 Colonisation, decolonisation: Engaging with decolonisation

Colonisation – five phases	*Decolonisation – six phases*	*Colonisers' parallel six phases of decolonisation*
(1) Denial and withdrawal	(1) Rediscovery and recovery	(1) Denial
(2) Destruction/eradication	(2) Mourning	(2) Guilt/shame
(3) Denigration/belittlement/ insult	(3) Healing and forgiveness	(3) Withdrawal/helplessness
(4) Surface accommodation/ tokenism	(4) Dreaming	(4) Demanding – the colonised to fix the problem
(5) Transformation/ exploitation	(5) Commitment	(5) Interaction
	(6) Action	(6) Reconciliation

Table 7.1 sets out the phases of Colonisation, Decolonisation and Colonisers' Engagement with Decolonisation to help explain the differences of these similar sounding stages.

Colonisers' Parallel: Six Phases of Engaging with Decolonisation

1. *Denial/Blame:* a refusal to accept that discrimination and cultural barriers continue to impact on the lives of Indigenous Australians.
2. *Guilt/Shame:* strong feelings are experienced because of the atrocities of the past and the complicity of the colonisers.
3. *Withdrawal/Helplessness:* inability to envisage ways to "fix" the past and/ or ease feelings of guilt.
4. *Demanding:* coloniser shifts the onus onto the colonised with demands that they fix the "problem".
5. *Interaction:* exciting and challenging phase where reaching out to the colonised to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding occurs.
6. *Reconciliation:* true reconciliation is achieved and decolonisation has occurred from both coloniser and colonised perspective. This stage is the goal of decolonisation.

Denial/Blame

People can begin in this Denial/Blame stage, visit it numerous times, or retreat to it in response to the difficulties of engaging with the decolonisation process. Statements such as "*everyone is equal under the law now*", "*they have only themselves to blame*" and "*they haven't sorted themselves out by now, perhaps there really is something inferior about them*" are expressed in this stage (Forrest, 2012a). Cultural dissonance and fear of cultural suicide (Brookfield, 1994) may contribute to a refusal to acknowledge that

discrimination and cultural barriers and the effects of colonisation continue to impact on the lives of Indigenous Australians.

Guilt/Shame

Strong feelings of guilt and shame emerge from learning the rediscovered, previously hidden, history of colonisation, the atrocities of the past and the complicity of the colonisers, the core of modern Australian culture (Forrest, 2012a). As stories emerge of the racist coloniser ideology that enabled such outrages like dispossession, massacres, starvation, diseases, eugenic and racist government programmes are rediscovered, it can become a real threat to one's own cultural identity, like cultural dissonance (Gair, 2015). This fear can lead to anger, denial and blame.

Contrary to Keating's (1992) assertion that "*Guilt is not a very constructive emotion*" guilt and shame can be constructive emotions that result in positive outcomes, with appropriate skill and guidance. Grief, loss and shame, can reduce tolerance and result in a return to the Denial phase, yet these feelings also indicate interest and emotion that can be harnessed to continue the engagement with decolonisation and healing. This unpleasant stage can lead to wanting to find answers or solutions, in the following phases.

Withdrawal/Helplessness

Seeing no way to "fix" the past, and/or to ease feelings of guilt and shame can result in people engaging with intercultural decolonisation, and enter the Withdrawal/Helplessness phase. While in this period, people can experience a fear of doing the wrong thing or offending someone that leads to feelings of helplessness, inaction and withdrawal. Regan Forrest (2012a) notes, "from the outside this may look very similar to the first stage of Denial, but it comes from a very different place of intent", it comes from feelings of helplessness.

Similar to the Mourning stage of decolonisation, some people can get stuck in this phase. Others exit from the decolonisation process at this point, revert to the denial or guilt phases. Some people emerge from the mourning phase and move to the next or subsequent phase.

Demanding

This is an intriguing phase, where the coloniser shifts the onus onto the colonised with demands that they fix the "problem". Demanding occurs when people are unable or unwilling to engage in the work decolonisation requires. At this point, people can absolve themselves of any responsibility and exit from engaging with decolonisation.

Expectations that non-Indigenous Australians are somehow entitled to demand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people teach them how to work with Indigenous Australians fall into the "Demanding" phase. Researchers have been observed to use the knowledge gained by such demands to become experts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples while the Indigenous people who shared their knowledge remain as simple informants (Muller, 2020, pp. 127–128). Demanding that Indigenous Australians "fix the problem" with expectations that Indigenous Australians should provide how-to-work-with guides, abrogates the responsibility of individual non-Indigenous Australians for their own learning and actions.

The Demanding stage is a sophisticated denial of responsibility by the settler society, where blame and responsibility for action are placed on Indigenous Australians. When Indigenous facilitators present cross-cultural (or similarly named) workshops, without any need for non-Indigenous people to reflect on their cultural role within coloniser society, this reflects the "Demanding" phase of engaging with decolonisation. Once non-Indigenous people commit to responsibility for their decolonisation, the following phase is entered.

Interaction

This phase is exciting, although it can be challenging, because it is where non-Indigenous people reach out to Indigenous people, seeking to facilitate dialogue, and mutual understanding, with respect, as allies. Varying in experience and proficiency, most of our staunch allies operate from this phase, occasionally engaging with the previous stages of guilt/shame, withdrawal/helplessness and demanding, or the rediscovery, mourning and healing stages of decolonisation. Strong allies return deftly to re-engage in the interaction phase.

Courage and respect are necessary in this stage as cultural malware may contribute to blunders and misunderstandings. Sometimes these errors may discourage the colonisers and cause them to retreat to the third stage (Forrest, 2012a). Respect is crucial during the interaction period, because by acting with respect misunderstandings can be clarified, mistakes apologised for and friendships forged.

Unlike the Demanding stage, this is where collaboration is central. It is an individual's responsibility to seek learning; it is not the responsibility of Indigenous people to educate each person. Knowledge gained by actively researching a topic is, as mentioned earlier, a respectful method of pedagogy, for teaching and learning (Ford, 2005).

Respectful seeking of knowledge can be very productive, providing the inquirer presents as good-spirited. Respect is the key component when seeking advice and guidance from an Indigenous colleague and that includes

commitment to independent opportunities for learning. This approach also generates reciprocal learning, as points of inquiry are framed in the context of the knowledge seeker's world view.

> To give an example of how the interaction stage works: a non-Indigenous colleague of mine sought my help to better understand what she had observed while sitting in on an employment interview panel. The panel had Indigenous and non-Indigenous interviewers and the applicants were predominantly Indigenous. Because the interviews were conducted in a very different way from what she had experienced, my colleague's previous experiences of such processes had to be explained, followed by what she had witnessed, and the differences she noted. From this, I gained insight into the cultural norms expected by non-Indigenous people in an employment interview. I was able to inform my colleague that the aspects of the interview consistent with what she would call group work, were Indigenous ways of working. The use of examples to set the context for each interview question differed greatly from the more adversarial approach to which she was accustomed. Discussion then flowed to issues of how our notion of respect was demonstrated between all parties in the interview process.

Reconciliation

Recalling that these phases of engaging with decolonisation are permeable and flexible; movement between them is fluid as people move between the phases. Reconciliation as an outcome of decolonisation has two major goals, national/social and personal.

At a national level, decolonisation and reconciliation will be evident when there is justice, with racism no longer endemic in our society, and equality in all of the social markers of health, education and employment; and there is mutual respect between the coloniser and colonised. In his 2015 Reconciliation lecture, ex-prime minister Kevin Rudd (2015) suggested that reconciliation relates to "a 'state of mind' or set of social attitudes … a framework of policy and law and measurable social and economic conditions". Considering the complexities involved, attaining the reconciliation phase at a national level will require time to work through the barriers to understanding and respect; to rewrite the social script authored within the coloniser ideological framework. Reconciliation is a national goal, whereas engaging with decolonisation is a personal responsibility.

Personal attainment of reconciliation will undoubtedly see many who engage with decolonisation fluctuating between the Interaction and Reconciliation phases.

In itself, this is a great achievement, because it indicates good-spirited engagement with the Healing stage of decolonisation. This Healing was identified by Kevin Gilbert (1996) and Joyleen Koolmatrie (Koolmatrie & Williams, 2000, p. 164) and others, as so necessary for non-Indigenous Australians who want to work alongside us.

Insights into settler experiences of engaging with decolonisation, set out above, demonstrate that the process requires genuine commitment, action and effort. Some may opt out due to the first three stages of the parallel phases of decolonisation, perhaps to return later. Successfully engaging with decolonisation is not without determination and effort; however, the rewards for non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians are great. Healing from the effects of colonisation, and creating opportunities to form mutual respect and gain allies is a major incentive to push through the pain or discomfort of decolonisation. It is also worth being mindful that both colonised and colonisers have been harmed in the colonisation process.

The following discussion ties in the knowledge presented earlier in this and previous chapters, using a selection of quotes and examples from the Dinawaan workshops and appraisal forms. Narratives from the groups and individual interviews are discussed further in the following chapter. Telling the story of the Dinawaan groups reveals how feelings of guilt and shame, the stages of decolonisation and the stages identified in engaging with decolonisation, work towards promoting intercultural decolonisation.

Dinawaan[2] *Workshops – Focus Groups*

Initial planning for this research included a few focus groups as well as individual interviews, yet when faced with actually putting the groups together doubts crept into my thinking. Momentarily, I considered dropping the focus groups altogether as I was unsure how much response I would get, particularly in light of the negative views expressed in newspapers and online news forum commentaries on Indigenous topics. I was also concerned that if there were a strong racist undertone, at best a forum would be boring and produce only superficial data, or at worst, it could become a problematic and divisive event. Trepidation of encountering racism in these groups that were open to the professional and tertiary education arena was a real issue.

Despite useful and informative cross-cultural educational programmes being delivered in universities, racism endures and Indigenous presenters can be troubled by some people in the audience (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016). Too often, the onus is on the individual targets of racism to develop greater resilience and effective responses to racism, which is more reflective of the "Demanding" stage. Meanwhile, there has been little evidence of the development of an "Indigenous flip-side of cross-cultural training" recommended by Grant et al. (2009, p. 8). People with racist views can hijack and dominate

discussions on Indigenous issues leaving little or no time for respectful collaborative dialogue. Pushing this fear and anxiety of hosting a hostile focus group aside, I reflected deeply on the knowledge and wisdom that had already been shared with me. Then the wise words of Cree scholar Margaret Kovach to "– *start where you are, it will take you where you need to go*" (2010a, p. 10) provided the courage to continue with the groups.

Eventually, it dawned on me that I had been looking at mainstream focus group methods, and that my hesitation was due to a wish to avoid hostility or conflict. Avoiding opportunities and situations are likely to occur is a strategy commonly utilised by us (Paradies & Cunningham, 2009). Words of wisdom shared with me in my earlier project came to my mind. Anon. L. insisted "if you are going to teach it has to be linked to culture, in a cultural way, by giving an example first then ask how the learner understands it, building on from there" (Muller, 2010, p. 153) and reflecting our circular teacher/learner approach, I realised that I had to combine the two. A focus group had to be done our way; to reflect mutuality and to demonstrate a best-practice methodology, so that participants received knowledge for sharing their knowledge. Using a mainstream parallel, this sense of mutuality is not dissimilar to offering a reward to participants of a ticket into a prize or a gift voucher, as is common in mainstream research projects.

Invitation to Share Knowledge

Emails were sent out to contacts asking them to share among their networks, with an invitation for interested non-Indigenous mainstream Australian people to a "free fun workshop" exploring "Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory with Art, followed by a focus group discussion exploring mainstream Australian culture". Invitations, featuring a banner from a previous Dinawaan workshop (Muller, 2020), were included in the electronic Townsville newsletters of James Cook University and Queensland Health with feedback and enquiries indicating they were forwarded on to wider contacts. Despite requests, I was not able to offer the workshops in other locations.

Mutual exchange of knowledge was clear in the invitation to participate; with "fun" and "art" used to entice interest and indicate that this was not merely a lecture and focus group. Humour is part of our Indigenous way of working. Each person who inquired was sent a copy of the "conversation promoting questions", with instructions not to wear their "best" clothes because of the art component.

Two focus groups, morning (FGAM) and afternoon (FGPM), were held in Townsville with twelve (12) participants in total. As with individual interviews, some people did not follow up after receiving the information pack, and there were a few no-shows, as well as a few last-minute attendees. Anonymity has been maintained in the retelling of these groups.

Recalling from Chapter 3, eleven participants were born in Australia and only one of the twelve participants did not identify as non-Indigenous Australian. Along with another, they identified their ethnic heritage solely as "Australian". One was not sure of their heritage. The remaining nine were of Anglo-Celtic, Western European heritage and one participant had some Maori ancestry.

Attendees were university students, staff and industry workers who, in accepting the invitation, indicated they held interest and may have emotional investment in the topics to be covered. Their interest showed they were beginning or already engaging with decolonisation. It is this interest and emotion that Zembylas (2008) notes can bring change. By linking the workshops to our cultural way of teaching and learning, I was comfortable that most participants were, or hoped to be, our allies.

Both groups were held in a classroom-type setting, later moving to an area suitable for the art component and discussion. I enlisted the help of an assistant, my adult daughter, to help with the set-up and tidying of the room, catering, recording and note taking, and taking note body language as well as engaging with participants. Each session took approximately two and a half to three hours and refreshments were incorporated. Breaking for refreshments between the Dinawaan presentation and the research focus group provided time for informal talk between participants and an opportunity for reflection on their understanding of mainstream culture, for yarning.

Refreshments were healthy and suitable for diabetics, according to the "Best practice" model identified in the foundational research for this study (Muller, 2020, pp. 187–190). Consideration of food and drinks served at Indigenous gatherings takes into account the ages of the participants, where they are from, and should pre-empt any dietary needs. For example, meeting planning takes into account Elders' needs for softer foods and always with the ever-present consciousness of the prevalence of diabetes. Because the focus group was not a gathering of Elders, the requirements were not complex. Water, tea and coffee were available. Morning or afternoon tea provided had a fruit platter along with low fat biscuits or cake. Gluten free was available. If lunch had been required, it would have been something simple like sandwiches and a fruit platter; it would have been low fat and included vegetarian options.

At the start, each person was given a folder with information and consent forms, information relating to the research and presentation and preliminary workshop, and focus group appraisal forms. The appraisal forms were used to establish a brief overview of the participants' knowledge of their own and our culture before and after the Dinawaan workshop. The last evaluation form asked for feedback on the entire workshop/focus group experience to indicate the usefulness of the Dinawaan workshop in creating respectful and meaningful conversations and understanding of mainstream and Indigenous

Australian culture. These appraisal forms allowed me to identify the effectiveness of using a decolonisation framework in developing a more comprehensive method of intercultural respect.

Cultural Collision or Opportunity for Mutual Learning

Each session began with the meaningful protocols of an acknowledgement of the traditional owners, and respect for the Elders past, present and future. A poem by acclaimed Indigenous Australian poet Oodgeroo, *Paperbark Tree*, explaining her recovery of knowledge, followed. I then proceeded with a presentation on my earlier research, *Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory*, incorporating the stages of colonisation, decolonisation and how it set a foundation for the current study.

Reviewing the preliminary appraisal forms after the workshops, it was evident that both the AM and PM group found the presentation interesting and informative, and for many participants it was the primary reason for attending. More than one person stated on the appraisal forms the reason for attending was to:

> *"learn more about Indigenous views of mainstream culture and to learn more about Indigenous culture"* FGPM; and *"to work coherently with and understand Indigenous clients"* (FGAM).

Non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture was the normal lens, by which everyone else was viewed. Comments noted a desire to learn more about what Indigenous people thought about "*us*" and gain "*more informative views on Aboriginal health and healing*" (FGAM). There was a marked difficulty to shift thinking away from Indigenous culture as the research subject, towards "*their*" culture being the focus of my inquiry; a common cultural dissonance that was evident throughout this study.

Indicating good intent, people also readily identified that they were keen to share knowledge of their mainstream culture in exchange for the presentation, with the desire to create greater understanding between the two cultures. People were happy to share "*whatever I know that can be useful*" and "*to learn more about myself … to combat racism through education*".

Following the presentation on Indigenous Australian Social-Health theory, practising circular learning processes, we moved onto the very relaxing and art based Dinawaan workshop that retold some of the earlier material in a different manner, and incorporated another layer of knowledge to the previous information. Beginning the workshop with a presentation on my previous study set foundation knowledge for the following art-based workshop. The Dinawaan (Emu) workshop (Klein & Mawn, 2008) provided a way to depict our theory and set the context of this

research, and retelling our knowledge and culture in another way. This is an accepted Indigenous way of working, giving an example first, so that the respondents can get an idea of what is being asked and so there is no feeling of being put on-the-spot. Drawing on decolonisation theory, the Dinawaan workshops act to build confidence in the rich and academically valid theoretical base that informs the practice of Indigenous Australian helping professionals (Muller, 2020). It is based on generating respect and empathy between cultures using history, art and humour in an environment where all participants are equal.

Dinawaan workshops are a low-key art-based way of passing on complex knowledge. Common feedback from Dinawaan participants is that it is like returning to kindergarten, that begins with reading a children's book, *Edwina the Emu*, by Sheena Knowles and Rod Clement, to set a relaxing tone. Very early in the workshop, a sense of equality emerges, fun and laughter feature strongly as each person follows instructions and uses bright pastels to create an emu picture. Rather than using boxes, circles or arrows to illustrate Indigenous Australian Social-Health theory, each stroke and smudge of the Dinawaan is ascribed meaning, highlighting aspects like connection to Country, family, knowledge, as well as connecting to non-Indigenous knowledges. This is experiential learning that transfers knowledge using humour, art and tactile senses.

Circular learning methodology was evident during the Dinawaan workshop as knowledge from the preliminary presentation was re-presented in a different format, with an additional layer of learning. It is hard to be serious when adults are drawing and using their fingers to blend the soft chalk-like pastels according to direction from my not-artistic self. The "art students" didn't take long to understand why they were advised not to wear good clothes (even though the pastels wash out). Explaining our Indigenous theoretical framework during the process meant that learning was gently received in a place of equality and cultural safety. This is an Indigenous way of working with respect.

An additional reward for being part of the workshop is that each participant had their funky artwork to take home and display. Comments on the feedback forms showed that the "emu" was one aspect most liked. The reciprocal gift of the Dinawaan workshop in exchange for participants sharing their knowledge was clearly acceptable. Presenting serious learning in the light-hearted and non-confronting Dinawaan format helped create a respectful environment so participants felt relaxed and confident in sharing their knowledge with me. This is not cross-cultural education in a commonly used form; it is designed to promote respect and understanding using Indigenous Australian methods. Assisting receptiveness to the process of decolonisation, by exposing some of the myths that act to underpin colonisation, is an additional benefit.

Laminating the completed artworks and displaying their beauty on a wall (similar to the invitation image) prompted laughter at how each one was drawn under the same instruction, yet each was very different. It was a learning moment. With an understanding of the differences and similarities at the forefront of participants' minds, we began discussing non-Indigenous mainstream culture.

History started the discussion; I asked if they had known the early accounts I had presented, and when they began to be aware of the true history of colonisation in Australia, in a format that basically followed the lines of the conversation promoting questions. Much discussion in the focus groups fit more appropriately among the voices of the individual interviews following similar themes, so the issues that were unique to the groups is what is discussed here.

Respect featured strongly in the groups, with the interaction adding greatly to the depth of understanding of what respect means to non-Indigenous mainstream Australians. Unlike the individual interviews and more like the circular conversations of my earlier research, talk of respect was linked to Elders and individualism.

Individualism and respect in the focus groups were also linked to guilt, individualism, independence and time as a precious value laden commodity.

> The society that we've been grown into, as whitefellas from an English kind of background, tends to worry about the individual rather than the group.
>
> There is that guilt of asking – you don't want to put other people out

And

> you can only take so much of other's time, time is precious.

As the PM group discussed individualism and independence, examples flowed on how this worked within the family structure, how being independent influenced parenting style. In non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture people are taught individual independence as important, "*being the master of your own universe and resilience … being individual and not being dependent on other people*".

Parents expect to cope with their children by themselves and doing so is a source of pride, because to ask for help is considered a weakness. Giving help to another, is considered a positive, receiving it is not. There was agreement that they would help a friend or acquaintance if asked to pick up children from school or care for them overnight, but would never ask for the same help. "*We would do anything others ask but we wouldn't ask them. That's some unwritten rule of independence. It is weird isn't it?*" The drive to show that individual independence, to show that ability to do things by themselves

is considered crucial because "*if I say everyone else helped me out here, I don't look quite as good as if I say I got here on my own*" (FGPM).

Analysing and reflecting on the transcripts and appraisal forms as people shared insights into their culture in this mutual exchange of knowledge, the fluidity and permeability of engaging with the decolonisation phases was visible. Decolonisation stages of Rediscovery and Recovery, and Healing, were most evident with any discomfort at challenging concepts softened due to the care taken to create a culturally safe space in these groups.

Interestingly, in the before and after self-assessment, understanding of Indigenous Australian culture rose, whereas understanding of their non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture fell by up to two points on the Likert scales, with only a few remaining the same for both. My interpretation of the downward movement in understanding their own culture is that there were some aspects not previously given any thought because it had been considered "normal". From the simple feedback responses it appears that the workshop had caused deeper reflection on how the social script of colonisation had constructed aspects of their world-view.

Considering that these groups, like the interviewees, are from a selective target group of educated helping professionals interested in assisting with my inquiry, good will was an expectation. Overall, open hearts and open minds were the rule, with each person being at different stages in their learning and experiential journey towards greater intercultural understanding. There were however, a few alternate views expressed.

Exploring Dissent: Refusal to Engage

> There is no such thing as can't cook – it is won't cook

Going over the information gathered from the groups, the transcripts, appraisals and feedback, the often used family refrain above, origins unknown, came to mind. When met with a refusal to engage in learning a required skill, this retort was useful in childrearing, and adapted to suit the situation. Refusal by individuals to engage with decolonisation or efforts to promote greater intercultural respect is not so simple to address.

My initial fears about holding the focus groups were partially validated by two people in the morning session, who were visibly encountering the denial/blame and the demanding phase of engaging with decolonisation. Discussing racism delivered an interesting response from one participant that appeared to be heading in an unhelpful direction. In response, one of the student participants artfully set an anti-racist tone by recalling how she shut down a lecturer who was racist against refugees: "*and because I kept my cool she then changed the subject because she knew she wasn't going to win because I wasn't going to fire up, just keep voicing my opinion*" (FGAM).

Group norms functioned well as the rest of the group talked about how distasteful racism was to them, deflecting a similar response when the same person tried to insist on normalising racism as being "*like between every generation and between every race, because …*" (FGAM).

Another group participant, complained that she just wanted answers on how to get her Indigenous clients to do as she wanted, suggesting that "*Australians see you as being a handout and why should they get a handout if they don't look Aboriginal*". Obviously in the "Demanding" phase of engaging with decolonisation, this person later tried to insist I answered her questions relating to her work. Commonly heard, these comments often act as a precursor for others contributing further to this line of denial/blame comments. Such deterioration did not occur in this group who set the group boundaries ensuring that the conversations remained civil.

Care taken in enlisting people for the groups paid off, as the majority highlighted the benefit of careful preparation and planning by overwhelming the negative views. Disturbingly, both these participants mentioned above, put my fair-skinned daughter-assistant's identity into the spotlight, with one person recorded just after the close of the session when no one else was near, giving advice to her about "passing as white".

Contemplating the stark difference between the majority of group attendees and the two dissenters, heightened my awareness of how the parallel phases of engaging with decolonisation operated. Denial/Blame, Withdrawal/Helplessness and Demanding were expressed. Cultural dissonance, and/or fear of cultural suicide as identified by Stephen Brookfield (1994, p. 203) may explain, in part, this anomaly in the groups. On the first appraisal sheet, these two alone identified their ethnic origins solely as "Australian". Later stating that they disliked being referred to as non-Indigenous mainstream Australian, before one mumbling that she was "*Indigenous too*".

For a person who is "born belonging" to the dominant group, engaging in intercultural decolonisation and considering ways of interacting with Indigenous Australians remains optional as Regan Forrest and Sonya noted in their research conversations. Engaging with decolonisation requires free will, because under compulsion the emotion suggested by Zembylas (2008) as a necessary component of change, may not be present. Both the contributors mentioned above, who solely identified as Australian, indicated they joined the session under direct instruction, one from her employment supervisor and the other had been strongly advised to attend by a professional colleague. Individual and personal needs were what they hoped to gain out of the workshop, rather than the mutuality expressed by the other group contributors. Interest, the other component Zembylas identified as necessary for change, was sparked for these two by the presentation, and the Dinawaan art segment worked its magic while its gentle transfer of knowledge captured everyone's attention. Interest alone, without emotional activation, appeared,

in this instance, to result in a return to the denial/blame and withdrawal phases of engagement and a refusal to participate further in exploring how their worldview is influenced by the social script of colonisation.

People can and do refuse to engage with unlearning colonialist thinking, or rejecting racism, as identified by the evaluation of the effectiveness of the beyondblue (2015, p. 3) commissioned *Discrimination against Indigenous Australians* campaign. Despite some positive changes being recorded in the assessment of the beyondblue action research, acceptability of discriminatory behaviour actually increased and there was continued resistance to putting the concept of equality into practice. Participating in cross-cultural or cultural competency type training does not prevent individuals refusing to engage with the content of the exercise. Decolonisation requires an emotional response, and it takes time, reflection and commitment.

Spirit of Dinawaan

Decolonisation requires change, learning, re-evaluation and transformation, and it is a messy and complicated process. The stages of decolonisation and the new Colonisers' Parallel Six Phases of Engaging with Decolonisation, help make sense of this complex process and assist in the further development of creating greater cultural respect between the colonisers and colonised.

Deep reflection on how the knowledge I already had fit with this new aspect took me back to the advice I received in my earlier research, to remember "the importance of self-actualisation, … and allowing a person to learn, or not to learn, when and if they choose … Blackfella way" (Muller, 2020, p. 172). The need to respect free will, when added to the assurance that "when timing is right things will happen" (Randal Ross in Muller, 2020, p. 137) reaffirmed that learning will come in its own time and the time has to be right for people to engage with decolonisation.

Recognising and respecting that some people refuse to engage with decolonisation does not mean forgoing efforts to make it easier for those who are open to learning. Current cross-cultural training can activate emotions and interest by informing people about history and identifying racism and intolerance and so forth, but is not always enough to promote changes in behaviour and attitudes. Developing ways to foster interest and investment in engaging with decolonisation can come from personal interest, feelings of guilt/shame, helplessness, demands of workplace and/or a desire to "belong" to societal norms, according to the literature.

This chapter demonstrates how, with careful planning, skilful delivery and creating a culturally safe place, non-Indigenous mainstream Australians can readily engage with decolonisation because they are also impacted by colonisation, and stand to benefit from the decolonisation process.

For me, there is a sense of spirituality in the Dinawaan art based workshops, what others might refer to as a certain "magic", with the simplicity and ceremony of each person creating their "emu" image. In these focus groups the Dinawaan helped form the foundation for further development of a missing aspect of cross-cultural education by demonstrating how difficult conversations can be had in a culturally safe environment. Engaging with decolonisation, as an ideological process, strong emotions like shame, guilt and helplessness can be respected as part of the effects of colonisation. In a culturally safe environment these negative feelings can be shared, explored and sometimes even discarded, in a process of intercultural decolonisation. Inclusion of both the coloniser and colonised voices is important in this process of promoting greater cultural respect.

Conclusion

Discussion in the previous two chapters centred on the internal and external expression of what it means to belong to non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. Attention in this chapter was on the two focus groups, featuring the Dinawaan workshop where group dynamics highlighted the progression of members engaging with intercultural decolonisation.

In the following chapter, the voices of those who shared their insights in this study shed further light into what it means to be non-Indigenous mainstream Australian with practical advice they would like to give to Indigenous Australians and those not familiar with the nuances of mainstream culture. The first part of this chapter outlines the practical advice the research participants offered, and the second part features aspects that emerged through the process of observation and clarification.

Notes

1 More about the Dinawaan workshops can be found in my earlier work (Muller, 2020).
2 Used with permission of its creator Susan Klein (Klein & Mawn, 2008).

8

KNOWLEDGE GAINED

Commodification of time, value and ultimately difference in understanding what respect means come together in this chapter. Greater detail on non-Indigenous mainstream Australians' culture is contained in the practical examples of help they would give others in dealing with them are outlined here.

This section mirrors a similar feature of the foundation research where the people who shared their knowledge with me were asked what they believed "others", those not of the researched culture, need to know. Responses ranged from detailed to succinct. Here some of those odd aspects, those seemingly incomprehensible points of difference, are discussed and shared with respect.

The emergence and commodification of time begins this chapter. Time, and timeliness, was the most common theme when interviewees were asked what they wanted us, Indigenous Australians, to know about their culture. This was expanded to explain operational aspects to assist Indigenous Australians engaging with Westernised mainstream Australian education and work entities.

Time

Asking people to help can create a sense of guilt of asking people for their time because it is considered a commodity of value. The notion of time as a precious asset grew when clocks became more available throughout the industrial revolution and time became increasingly regulated. When combined with the Protestant work ethic the time-is-money ethos became a cultural attribute explained Leoni.

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Initially expensive and scarce, clocks were mostly seen on church and public buildings in major towns and cities of England. Clocks and then personal watches became more common due to technological advances and greater accuracy in the 1800s, and a culture of "time thrift" developed: time became money, "the employers' money" (Thompson, 1967, p. 61). Synchronisation of time to labour output grew as timepieces became more ordinary, and workers' hours became increasingly disciplined and regulated by time. Time was also manipulated and workers exploited in the period when timepieces were only affordable by the wealthy (Thompson, 1967, pp. 85–86). As time was used to impose stricter working days, a time sense became internalised in Western societies (Glennie & Thrift, 1996). Drawing on her knowledge of sociology, Leoni explained how using time to "*discipline and structure our day*" is a construct of Western culture that is only a "*phenomenon of the past hundred and fifty years*".

Time as a contentious issue in cross-cultural interactions featured as part of mainstream non-Indigenous culture's "dollar dreaming" (Habibis et al., 2016a, p. 64). People interviewed said that time is watched, a commodity, money, currency, critical and precious: all monetarised value laden words. Clare said she would have liked to talk more about time – "*but we have run out of time*".

Learning timeliness was the most common suggestion interviewees put forward when asked for their recommendations for what they believed it would be useful for Indigenous Australians to acquire when engaging with mainstream Australian education and business entities. When given examples of mainstream Australian tardiness, that mirrored the time-rich Murri-time, or blackfella-time, there was a certain amount of confusion. Using simple examples like television programmes that are not on time, I pointed out that no one suggests that this lack of timeliness is due to the programmers' race/ethnicity.

Realising the double-standard after raising timeliness as something that should be learned, Delma chuckled because she knew "*non-Indigenous people who are bad at it too. Isn't it funny but I don't remember as much criticism about them as I have heard about Indigenous people*". One beautiful excuse given by an informant on mainstream culture, after a two-year delay, was "*Oh, I was so busy and more pressing things kept getting in the way*". After a pause, this kindly person responded with the realisation "*it is all about priorities, and I guess Indigenous Australians sometimes have different priorities to me*".

By suggesting a need for more understanding of the time-constraints many people have to work within, there was little consciousness that what was actually being asked was for Indigenous people to be more compliant with Westernised time approaches. Further to this, a person assuming their time is important because they are so busy implies that the others' time is not as important.

Culture of "Busyness"

Tania explained how people like to say they are busy because its seen as a positive thing because "*work carries moral worth*". If a person is busy, it means they are working hard, important and valued whereas if they do not have a lot to do it is interpreted that a person is not pulling their weight in society.

Placing a monetary value on time, by the commodification of time, has seen the development of a culture of busyness in Westernised culture. Thinking about time as a limited resource has resulted in a culture of busyness, due in part to the pressure of multi-tasking and work intensification. Technology, such as "email, internet and mobile phones" (Brannen, 2005, p. 115), means that many workers are "forever on call" and the boundaries between home and work are becoming blurred. Real or imagined busyness is at times valorised and a "source of status", and its lack, a source of derision (Burnside, 2014). This culture of busyness is linked to the dignity of work and money, which resulted in paid work being elevated in status and value, relegating unpaid "caring" work as unvalued.

People will go to great lengths "*to give the impression of busyness*", Brenda explained. Even though sometimes it is true that they are busy, those in senior positions "*like to give that impression that because they are at the top they are very, very busy*" even if they are not. Drawing on her experience of seeing a doctor for an appointment, Marian acknowledges that "*everyone is busy and has a schedule*" so she appreciates it when they give her their full attention, in a time-rich way. On the other hand, also using an example of seeing a doctor, Vera said when she has a doctor's appointment at 9 and is not seen until 10, the time delay makes her "*angry, frustrated, and on edge because I have a diary of other things to do*". Seeing it as a competing interest in whose time is more valuable Vera notes that it is simply bad manners.

Saying you are busy can be a polite way of declining something Tania disclosed, because "*being busy and being in demand is considered of value* … and *being busy is good*". Busyness reflects hard work, according to Tania, and therefore the "busy" person is more deserving of life's comforts than a person who is not "busy". There are social protocols inherent in the culture of busyness because as Brannen (2005) suggests, "busy bragging may be obnoxious". Busyness can also be used as a social lie because, Tania wryly said, "*anything you really want to do you'll find the time for, but being busy and being in demand is considered of value*".

Self-described as possessing a strong internalised sense of time, Tania is time-driven and has been socialised to always have her "*eyes on the clock*". She worries about spending too much time on one thing when there is another issue that needs her time. Internally reflecting on her culture's attitude towards time, Tania determines that "*we think of time as a sort of currency*",

so when speaking with someone "*you are consuming that currency for them. It is almost like you respect their time by not taking up any more of it than you need to*". Tania expands on this by linking time-as-currency to work, "*the focus is on productivity, as the more we can get done in a day the better*" ever mindful that "*the clock is ticking*", making it clear that non-Indigenous mainstream Australians have a time-centred approach.

Greater understanding of different concepts of time would benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, according to Margaret who works in a high-powered environment. Expanding on this, Margaret told of issues arising when organising meetings, or even "Welcome to Country" speeches, and a common fear of herself and colleagues that they could be "*time-slurred*" by late or non-attendance of Indigenous guests or clients. Continuing, Margaret suggested that it would be helpful for "*both parties to know about why time is important or how we treat time or consider time*". Margaret said, if Indigenous Australians had "*a greater awareness of time as an issue*" for non-Indigenous Australians, it would enable better communication and help to keep people informed.

Unrealistic time-frames and very tight schedules are a feature in Western organisations, and time can be critical in the organisation where Julie holds a very senior position. Preferring a more time-rich approach for consultations, Julie finds it is not always possible if she has to deliver crucial consultative responses in 24 hours. Relaying a frustrating example, Julie talked of a time she spent "*twenty hours travelling for a two minute meeting*". Spending more time travelling than working can be offensive to both sides.

Organisation of contemporary Western lives around time "*makes it difficult not to be constantly rushing and therefore constantly alert to the time*" and Vera suggests it is emotionally distracting, resulting in a lack of connection between people. Giving an example of how she gets "*frustrated and upset and on edge*" when her doctor is running late, Vera explains it is "*that time pressure*" because "*I know I also have a diary of other things to do*". This constant awareness of time creates pressure and stress and despite attempting to be attentive to her students, Vera exclaimed it is "*extraordinarily difficult*" to stop thinking about what she has to do when they leave.

Working within Western, or mainstream organisations is "*definitely time-centred*" for Michael, who said, "*it's all about planning, action, and reporting against time frames*". Yet, from experience Michael believes that the "*styles of work that work best are the ones where patience is at its core*", a time-rich approach. Yarning about working in a time-rich but timely way, a model of practice preferred by Indigenous Australians (Muller, 2020, p. 198), Julie told of a boss who "*has a real knack for this*". When faced with an urgency of getting a paper written on a complex problem, this boss allowed "*as much time as we need[ed] and because she doesn't stifle the conversation*" it enables people to "*concentrate on what's being said*" and results in

very effective and satisfactory meetings. Tania also had positive experiences of working in a time-rich way with an Aboriginal women's group where they would "*sit around for up to four hours and talk, but all of it was relevant*" and well worth the extra time.

Good counselling services take a time-rich approach as it gives a feeling of not being rushed, Margaret and Marian pointed out. Michael relayed how an Aboriginal men's project he was involved with and helped develop was time-rich, "*it was gentle, it was slow, it was led by the community, it was led through consultation*", with active involvement of all people in the decision making.

Contrary to the broad acceptance of time as a commodity to be sliced, diced and rationed, Marian thought "*most people would prefer a time-rich approach, to be heard and understood*". When conducting the interviews for this research, both a time-restrained and time-rich approach was evident. Research respondents cited timeliness as the reason for preferring phone or skype interviews. Interestingly, by allowing the interviewees to set the discussion length, despite a suggested hour maximum time commitment, some interviews went for approximately two hours duration, and only a few took an hour.

In his interview, Michael explained that "*people like that ability to think things through*" and was pleased to recognise "*a time-rich approach*" that our research conversation used. Continuing, Michael suggested that when seeking to make fundamental change, it could be achieved through consensus seeking methods that are based on a core of "*a healthy allocation of time*" and "*built on patience*". He believes that mainstream Australians can effectively use a consensus model, but "*they just don't know they can do it*".

Organisation of Time in Decision Making

Mainstream Australian, Western, ways of working within organisations are discussed here, and positioned in contrast to the consensus model that is preferred by Indigenous Australians. From a Western academic perspective, consensus decision making is seen as a creative way of working to reach agreement with all participants of a group, and different from the more common majority rule decision-making process. Spanish academic authors on the topic, Herrera-Viedma, Herrera, and Chiclana (2002, p. 394), discuss consensus as a major area of "multi-person decision making (MPDM)", and define it as "a dynamic and iterative group discussion process, coordinated by a moderator, who helps the experts to make their opinions closer". However, this positions decision makers in the domain of experts, whereas consensus is useful for any group committed to achieving decisions that all members can live with. Consensus is a respectful and collaborative way of decision making that "seeks equilibrium, balance" and Indigenous Australians are familiar

with and skilled in it (Muller, 2020, p. 102). A consensus-based method of working, respects differing views and opinions, and offers the benefit of addressing and minimising issues that could lead to "lingering resentment, frictions, and ongoing problems" (Mcray, 2015).

Cultural methods of decision making are learned and shared within a culture's members from childhood onwards. In non-Indigenous mainstream culture, decision-making styles and social structures are hierarchical; therefore, the consensus-seeking model is not familiar. On the other hand, Indigenous Australians are enculturated with consensus-seeking ways of working.

Despite the positive attributes of a consensus-seeking way of working, there are times when individual decision-making is needed and right. Consensus is simply not practical at all times, as Sharna and others pointed out; in cases of emergency or urgency, people need to make individual decisions. Sharna noted that in her leadership role, she could easily be "*an autocratic captain and totally miss something*". Instead, she has learned to be a better leader from the Aboriginal consensus way of working and has adopted a more participatory style of leadership. Thoughtfully, Sharna reflected that "*consensus is possible when we are all thinking about and coming from the same way but we don't do that*" because Western culture is more "*autocratic*" in nature.

Acknowledging that in many workplaces the boss makes the decisions using an autocratic or hierarchical model, Marian believes that "*the best decisions are made on input from everyone*". Marian did admit, however, that she has found it useful to have "*somebody, like a chairperson*" make an informed decision especially in urgent or pressing instances. With considerable experience as the chairperson of boards and large entities, Leoni demonstrates this Western approach to decision making, relating how she makes decisions informed by meeting members, but after getting advice from everyone, ultimately "*at the end of the day I will make a decision*".

Kylie maintained that mainstream Australian ways of working are very outcome based, because "*we are not willing to invest time before hand*", and this supports a hierarchical management structure with a structured reporting framework. In the "*hierarchical milieu*" of such a workplace there can be a very distinct "*pecking order*" based on "*power, ego and control*", Julie explained. These entities are not a democracy and, Jack pointed out, "*connections, friendships, or old-mate networks*" can over-rule, or side-step the workplace hierarchy. Emily suggested that even though in mainstream practice some believe they are engaging in participatory decision-making, due to an inherent "*power imbalance*" it is not consensus seeking.

Inclusive decision making is portrayed as popular, but as Jack declared, "*we like the idea of consensus, but often there is no structure so nothing is achieved*". Partisan convenience can drive decision making even when disguised under a tokenistic banner of consultation and consensus.

Vera takes a harsher view based on her experience in "*bureaucratic institutional white contexts*", because when "*we talk about consensus in certain contexts, … we are really talking about manipulation of the rank and file to agree with what the management have already decided. We talk about it but we don't do it*". Julie used this opportunity to suggest that there is a negative lesson that needs to be taken into consideration when engaging with mainstream non-Indigenous entities. Throughout her work, Julie identified points of frustration when "*political expediency*" is the main consideration, and when things go wrong the person responsible for the decision will try to avoid admitting that they got it wrong.

Managerialism has become the dominant way of working in mainstream society, Clare stressed, and this "*top-down control is really, anti-consensus*". Reaching consensus is more difficult for people raised in her culture because, Tania believes, "*we are so focussed on our own individual things*", where efforts are based on individual rather than communal benefit. Jack reflected that consensus based working is not easily achieved because it is not part of his cultural upbringing. He thoughtfully commented that "*it is harder to work with what we get taught out of textbooks rather than what we get taught at our mother's knee*".

Consensus and Time

Consensus seeking is desirable but considered difficult because it links back to time-as-a-commodity. Tania exclaimed consensus "*simply takes too long … it is time consuming … and while we're doing this we're not getting other things done so let's just make a decision and then go on*". Many respondents identified time pressure as a significant obstacle to seeking consensus on decisions. Emily clarified this, saying "*we like to have it all cut and dried and cleared up and some kind of agreement in a quick space of time because we think we have this time pressure*". After some consideration, Tania submitted that maybe a "*compromise is as good as we can hope for*" because a consensus approach is an impossible ideal. On a positive note, Brenda sees management boards increasingly being encouraged to base decision-making "*on consensus rather than voting for and against*".

In the context of a mutual exchange, a meeting in the middle with both cultures learning, adapting and blending ways, suggestions about what Indigenous Australians and those not familiar with the mainstream Australian culture can learn from the Westernised mainstream ways of working were constructive yet also focused on adaptation to the dominant settler culture. Although many respondents identified and relished what they had learned from Indigenous Australian ways of working and finding ways to work constructively and respectfully together, the theme of adaptation, and or assimilation, centring mainstream cultural ways was evident.

Indigenous Australians were encouraged to look for opportunities to learn from these mainstream ways of working. Among recommendations for what people need to know about working within Westernised systems, was a request for tolerance towards non-Indigenous mainstream Australians for their inexperience and ignorance. Margaret explained that like herself, many people within her culture often have no experience of working any other way and slip into the embedded default Westernised position and that "*there are good things and bad things about it*". Supporting a mixed method approach to decision making, Margaret added that the best results could usually be achieved by mixing different approaches because there may be something that other cultures find useful in the "*authoritative model*" in certain situations.

Be Succinct

Once again relating to time as a commodity, Brenda recommended keeping things brief especially if "*you are in a position to discuss a matter with the person who is at the top, because you have very limited opportunity to do it*". CEOs or senior management "*often claim they are time-poor*", so if you have the opportunity to meet with them, the message conveyed "*needs to be succinct and clear*". The same advice applies even if writing a letter.

Chain of Command

Understanding the chain of command in government and semi-government organisations, Julie believes, is "*one of the hardest learning experiences for Indigenous people*" who have never worked in such environments before. Understanding and negotiating the unwritten chain of command is complex and confusing for the unaware, although Tania and Emily suggested that the nuances are more readily decipherable for those from the middle class. Julie reveals it centres on "*knowing who has the power and influence to get to do whatever it is you are doing*" and "*going through the immediate chain of command you'll get it but it's often not the most effective way*". Sometimes, she said, "*it's about knowing who you've got to get on side*" beforehand "*so that they are not a barrier*" to what needs to be achieved.

Citing the need to follow the "chain of command", "*having all these levels that people have to go through*", can also be used as a stalling technique, Marian noted glumly. Tania also mentioned that "*sometimes the steps up the hierarchy can be a barrier*", and sometimes bypassing the chain of command can be ideal. Offering a word of caution, Tania added, "*bypassing the chain of command can be seen as an insult to the person directly above them*" and is why people will usually only break that chain "*in extraordinary events*". Contemplating how this related to her partner's position, Tania also pointed

out that sometimes there are solid reasons for a chain of command because it follows where "*the legal responsibility lies*" if things go wrong.

In the upper echelons of management where Margaret works, "*there is an expectation people are supposed to know the correct procedure*" with the structure of the department clearly defined, and "*the only person you talk to is your boss*". Margaret gave an example of a letter of complaint sent directly to her most senior boss, on an issue the author had legitimate rights to raise. When it came time to action the letter "*the boss' secretary said: Oh! He just emailed it to the boss and you can't do that. She said he should know better, you can't do that and nobody has taken responsibility for it because it didn't go the right way*". Margaret was frustrated because, "a*pparently, if it had been mail it would have been a whole different story*". Little care was given to the responding letter because there had been a breach of the chain of command.

Negotiating the Chain of Command

Leoni offered an extensive response with tips for negotiating the chain of command in an organisation. This included clear direction about how each level of management has "*the delegated authority to deal with these issues, so you don't have someone at the pinnacle of an organisation making the decisions when these people down here are making decisions*". Additionally, Leoni described the way in which issues can be escalated up the chain of command, so that the most senior manager does not have to deal with issues that lower managers are expected to solve. After discussing how she insists on a strict chain of command in her current position in a large organisation, Leoni then contradicted herself and happily talked of previous instances where she had dramatically breached the hierarchy of command.

After initially saying she did not know, Brenda went on to give a clear and succinct account of working with and negotiating an organisation's chain of command. Brenda recommended first raising an issue to the immediate supervisor, and then if you are not happy you go up a level because success can be gained by individual persistence. She cautioned that going straight to the top is a gamble because "*you might get a change but you could make enemies*". Brenda's direction for negotiating the chain of command is below.

Brenda's Guide to the Chain of Command

> Patience and persistence is the way to go. It is worth following the basic organisational structure because if you have gone through the initial step of just following the rules, if you have to escalate an issue later on you tend to be treated better. When working up a chain of command if a response doesn't seem right, or somebody seems disinterested in what you have to say – go up a level, or find somebody else to talk to.

> Going straight to the top with an issue, can have either of two impacts. The first possible outcome is that you actually affect change because of going right to the top of the pecking order and for some reason the issue has sparked their interest and they respond. The second possible outcome is that if you do that and it doesn't work out you may have destroyed all of your chances of progressing a matter.

Brenda acknowledged "*that there is a different, cyclical conversation, decision making structure in Aboriginal culture, but I think hierarchy in some infrastructure in life is okay*". Hierarchical governance within an organisation does serve a purpose, Brenda believes, because by the time an issue gets to upper management, "*it's got to be well thought out with all options considered*". It is a way of gathering information, presenting it concisely to the person who makes the final decision, allowing much quicker decisions to be made than if the senior manager had to personally engage in protracted discussions.

One Line Advice

Adding to the practical advice above, the shared insight from some interviewees into aspects of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture was very brief. All provoke thought and were shared to assist Indigenous Australians, and those who are not fluent in mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture, gain a better understanding of mainstream Australian culture. Some of these are simple one-liner statements that were too good to ignore, and are set out in dot point below.

- "*Be mindful of the needs and requirements of working in mainstream*".
  Julie's advice reiterates the points she made about learning the importance of time in a workplace.
- "*Stay connected to, and use, supports. Build allies*". Sharna.
  "*Aboriginal people stick together, but people can be mean to each other regardless of who they are or where they are. Sometimes the whitefella system can chew people up and spit them out really badly and not take into account the importance of family and funerals and all that sorts of things*".
- "*Lateral violence happens; it is not just an Indigenous issue*". Sharna.
  "*In a group of people, sometimes the people you think will support you most, don't*".
- "*Our culture separates life from structures – it is about money, power, gender or strategic plan, – never about people*". Emily.
- "*My culture puts a premium on dishonesty – a priority on saying what you think the other person wants*". Vera
- "*Aboriginal people need to know we are ignorant – but they already know that*". Jack.

Social-Lies: Socialise

Social-lies, also referred to as "white lies", can be used to ease social interactions, but sometimes they rely on tacit cultural norms that leave those from another culture bewildered or offended. Some of these social-lies were identified in this research and other hidden cultural norms of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture were identified using a process of "observation, reflection and clarification" (Muller, 2020, p. 5).

Some social-lies are harmless, while others provide insight into possible pitfalls that can await the unaware. Below are a few examples of social-lies, but they are not exhaustive. There are many more such stories to be uncovered and shared in an environment of respect. Minor social-lies are common: when someone asks "How are you?" they are not expecting a reply replete with health or social problems, as the common response is something like "Good, and how are you?" Busyness as a social-lie can be a polite way of declining something, and as Tania suggested, it can also give an impression of importance.

Social-lies can be more complex, like the one that declares "hard work equals success" because it is based on the false assumption that everyone is actually equal, or starts with equal opportunities. Although the reality is that while it is true that if no effort is made to achieve a goal a person is unlikely to be successful, it overlooks that some goals are unachievable for any number of reasons, such as class, ability/disability, opportunity and so forth. It also ignores the fact that hard physical work is often required of the lowest paid employees.

Expert – Maintaining the Image

Professionals instructed in the Western British based education systems can become acculturated into believing that they must maintain the impression that they cannot be wrong. This need to maintain a professional persona of "expert" can be evident even in those who are not British but were educated in countries that have British based education systems. Of course, there are exceptions. In what appears to be a confidence in their knowledge and skill, some senior professionals admit if they don't know something, often with an offer to find out if needed.

George, who is mentioned earlier in relation to age, identified the imposter syndrome for his fear of being seen as inadequate, and his need to be seen as an expert. Explaining that it was his sense of not quite belonging to the academic class, George went to great effort to "fake" a professional persona. Although he had been a reputable scholar whose publications were conformist, a presentation after his retirement reflected an inspiring value driven academic. As with other inspired retired professionals I observed,

their audience rarely paid attention saying they are old, retired and easily disregarded.

This need to be seen as an expert is not something common for Indigenous knowledge holders. Sharing knowledge, actioning knowledge into activism for a collective purpose is more common among First Nations people. Highly regarded Canadian First Nations activist and scholar Cindy Blackstock maintains that academics are in a privileged position for activism and that advancing careers by writing academic papers is not enough when "eighty-five per cent of journal articles don't get read" (in Rynor, 2023). Rather than waiting for retirement to speak out, "academia and activism should co-exist" Blackstock insists. It's easy to get caught up in the mainstream academic culture that is self-serving rather than other-serving according to one retired non-Indigenous mainstream professor.

Politeness/Tokenism

Convention forms the basis for other social-lies. Politeness and good manners account for many social lies, as the discussion on respect discussed in Chapter 6 demonstrates. For example, police and other authority figures are often said to be worthy of respect, aided by an element of fear of their authoritative power, when it may essentially be politeness. Some people interviewed used the word "respect" to describe politeness and good manners towards the aged and elderly.

Social-Lies of Welcome to Country

Welcome to Country, a formal protocol where a First Nations traditional owner gives a formal welcome to their ancestral lands, is another of these social-lies in many instances. It can be a grudgingly given politeness at times, because many non-Indigenous people's respect for Indigenous Elders is false. Similarly, the formal Acknowledgement of Country, that is given by people (not necessarily Indigenous) with no established ancestral traditional ownership of the lands, is often considered a token politeness.

With insider knowledge of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, a few respondents relayed how the custom of having an Elder from the traditional owners give a Welcome to Country address before an event, is not based on respect – it is tokenistic. This is the "thinly veiled contempt" that is needed to be overcome for healing of past wrongs to occur, that then Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd (2008) referred to in his historic *Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples* speech.

However, it is worth noting that this is not always the case, and many of the informal research discussions with younger people indicate that they have embraced the reasons behind the custom of a "Welcome to Country".

Because it has become polite to honour the original peoples of Australia to open events with such a welcome, this social-lie is slowly transforming into a genuine demonstration of respect.

Christmas Party Etiquette

Many workplaces across Australia have an annual Christmas party, and some will occasionally have things like after work drinks. Such events are paid for by the employing organisation, or self-funded by the employees. Invitations to these events tend to be informal, unlike other invitations of hospitality, such as formal invitations to birthday or engagement parties or functions. As with any offer of hospitality, it is polite to contact the organiser to accept or decline. Work Christmas parties are one of those tricky social-lies, where while there may be no explicit demand; there may be an unspoken expectation for employees to attend.

Two Indigenous colleagues brought the social-lies of workplace functions to my attention.

CASE 1.

In a workplace review, a colleague did not have her contract renewed. One of the reasons given for her dismissal was her non-attendance at the workplace Christmas party, citing this as evidence that she was not "collegial".

CASE 2.

A colleague received snipes from non-Indigenous co-workers because she did not stay for Friday afternoon "drinks" with her department members. The only beverages were wine. Like the majority of Indigenous Australians she did not drink alcohol, so saw little reason to stay behind after work to socialise, but her simple "no", when asked if she was attending, was taken as an implied insult to her workmates.

Now here is the tricky bit … while attendance at such events is portrayed as optional, because they are rarely within paid work hours, some hidden protocols apply. A basic internet search shows many results for "company Christmas party do's and don'ts" along with suggested similar topics, and there is a tacit assumption that all workers are expected to attend, yet there

is little discussion on the social-lies that render a non-compulsory invitation, compulsory. Seeking the advice of a few non-Indigenous mainstream Australians with experience in this area, Ada and Gloria, confirmed the observation that there are hidden rules and social norms to these social gatherings, bearing in mind that while the social norms discussed below are widespread, they do not apply to all workplaces.

In the first case study, showing up at an event, "*even for a short while*" is important, explained Ada, unless there is an acceptable excuse given. Socially accepted pretexts for non-attendance can include unexpected family issues, such as no child minding, or another significant unmissable engagement. According to Ada, even with a brief attendance, a social-lie, like having another event to attend, can be beneficial because without a reason for non-attendance it could be interpreted as the worker being judgmental of their colleagues. Caution may be required if excuses are given regularly.

This discussion led to the insidious expectation for alcohol consumption, as the second case study demonstrates, and the double jeopardy of ignorance and stereotyping that Indigenous Australians can face surrounding social events that include alcohol. Although statistically, most Indigenous Australians do not drink alcohol, and Indigenous events often have no alcohol (Muller, 2020, p. 189), since the days of colonisation, alcohol has featured strongly in the wider Australian culture and social events.

Regarding alcohol, Ada and Gloria advised, "*people attending events, such as work end-of-year celebrations, should be cautious not to drink too much if they do drink alcohol, and ideally leave before others make a fool of themselves by drinking too much*". Gloria pointed out that this advice applies across the board, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers, and while work get-togethers are a good opportunity to forge friendships and get to know colleagues, poor behaviour can have a detrimental impact on a person's career.

Reflecting on the second case study, Ada recommended having a ready excuse if not drinking at these work related events, as "*there are dangers here too*", because some may assume that the non-drinker, or low-drinker, "*thinks they are too good to drink with them*". In addition, Ada suggests that others may think the non-drinker is assuming a "*high moral stance*" due to religious beliefs. Either way, it is taken as a slur towards the drinkers, hence the need for polite excuses.

NIMA: Love of Acronyms

In the process of exploring non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, I engaged in open conversation with people within this group and uncovered an interesting aspect. Non-Indigenous mainstream Australians love acronyms: they like using the initial letters of words to create what sounds like a

word, so that something named as the Australian Defence Force Academy, is pronounced as a single acronym – ADFA.

Realising this penchant for acronyms made me reflect on the continued use of "ATSI" despite it being identified on many occasions as being disliked by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I have little doubt that some people use this acronym because they do not care if they offend, or are lethargic to type the longer words, or, I began to wonder, could it be that this abbreviation is one of their cultural quirks.

Light-heartedly, I raised this in a few presentations and meetings where the audience was primarily non-Indigenous mainstream Australian, by suggesting they could be referred to as NIMAs – and it has been met with overwhelming approval. Other possibilities based on Anglo-Saxon (ASs), Anglo-Celtic (ACs) or Caucasian (Cs), were laughingly discarded. NIMA was well liked by non-Indigenous mainstream Australians. This surprised me.

Conclusion

Reflecting on this and the previous three chapters, the sentiment expressed at the start of Chapter 5, that "*Most people are kind*" and act with "*kind intent*", has been well demonstrated, although this in no way suggests that racist and intolerant Australians are not a significant feature. However, as this chapter shows, the people who shared their knowledge with me gave their advice sincerely and generously, about what they believed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would benefit from knowing about mainstream culture.

Having gathered the knowledge shared, and shared knowledge in return, the following two chapters reflect learning gained from this reciprocal exchange between non-Indigenous mainstream and Indigenous Australians.

9

HEALING AND HOPE

This chapter is one of healing and hope. Reflecting on the knowledge and understanding gained. Positive opportunities and a possible vision for the future are discussed these final chapters. "*We need to collectively work past this barrier if we are to work closer towards reconciliation*" (Forrest, 2012b).

There is positivity in "*people challenging the collective doctrine, and … a bit of bravery to challenge the way the world is, to try and make it better*" and credit must go to those who shared their knowledge in this research who were brave enough to "*challenge the way the world is*", and who "*try to make it better*" David (also in Chapter 6).

Healing and Reclaiming Well-being: The Ultimate Goal

Collaborating with me, the participants in this study demonstrated their commitment to change our society for the better. In sharing knowledge about the values and principles that inform their non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, they have provided a cross-cultural resource for Indigenous Australians, and an opportunity for mainstream Australia to integrate certain aspects of Indigenous Australian culture, to develop a truly Australian culture. After the gathered knowledge from this study was examined, and sorted, current events showed this knowledge has relevance to explain and understand the way that non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture is evolving, has changed, over time, diverging from its parent-colonialist culture. The information gleaned in this research continues to deliver insight and understanding. It has acted to affirm reclaiming well-being as a normative state for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

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I began this project with a main purpose of gaining an understanding of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture to assist Indigenous Australians better understand mainstream culture and protocols. In achieving that, I have also demonstrated that Indigenous research is inherently political. *Shifting the Lens: Indigenous Research into Mainstream Australian Culture*, is a political act of promoting harmony and well-being between coloniser and colonised peoples by stimulating mutual understanding and respect. This study adds to this knowledge design by contributing an understanding of the values and principles that make up how non-Indigenous mainstream Australians conceptualise their culture. Such blending of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge serves to enrich prospects in helping and healing professional practices (Marsh et al., 2016).

Reciprocity is an integral facet of the Indigenous research methodology and the circular learning process used in this research. The reciprocal knowledge gained from a mutual exchange of ways of understanding the world, exploring shared and different attributes of our respective cultures helps promote greater understanding and enhance working relationships between cultural groups by progressing cross-cultural respect and harmony (Healing).

Exploring non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture and theory, the values and principles that inform practice, and the knowledge shared by people belonging to mainstream Australian society, has provided a resource for gaining an insight into the majority culture. This is a resource for Indigenous people and people who feel they want to traverse mainstream society more easily, such as rural or socially isolated Australians, and new migrants to Australia and fills a gap in current tertiary curricula and training on cross-cultural type learning resources. Shifting the research lens to take an Indigenous perspective into what it means to belong to mainstream society, progresses a decolonised view of the way the Westernised academies position themselves as the normal by which any different standpoint is cast as "other".

Decolonisation as a framework for research delivers a way of conceptualising the stages non-Indigenous people encounter as they engage with the decolonising process, as discussed in Chapter 7. There are significant challenges for non-Indigenous people who choose to engage with the stages of decolonisation (Muller et al., 2022). However, those who persevere with finding a way to heal the wrongs of the past are rewarded with an opportunity to learn how to work respectfully alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Reciprocal Knowledge

Engaging in the circular learning process inherent in the methodology used in this project, fulfilled a secondary ambition for this study; to stimulate mutual respect and greater understanding between non-Indigenous and Indigenous

Australians. Using an Indigenous Australian method of providing information beforehand, layering knowledge by connecting and returning to earlier points, research participants had the opportunity throughout the interviews and focus groups, to learn while sharing their knowledge with me. The opportunity to learn more about Indigenous Australian ways of working was incentive for a few of the research participants.

Focus group members received an additional reciprocal benefit of the Dinawaan workshop, where Indigenous Australian Social-Health theory was shared in an interactive art workshop. The relaxed Dinawaan workshops demonstrated how, by creating a space of cultural safety and positioning the ideology of colonisation as a central adversary, negative emotions of shame, guilt, grief and loss can generate healing and reclaiming well-being. The success of the open-membership focus groups make further development of the Dinawaan methodology more compelling.

Creating a culturally safe space for people to speak openly about the inner workings of their culture was integral to the success of this project and the methodology facilitated this. Contributors to this study particularly appreciated what Julie suggested was a person-centred approach, where although a person is at the centre, they are not alone, but "*connected to people and their environment and the context in which they – are*". The method of reciprocal learning, being both teacher and learner, proved popular and Brenda, like most of the people interviewed, thanked me for being part of this research, saying she "*got heaps out of today*" and was "*really grateful for being involved*".

Reflections of Circular Learning

Education featured in the reflections on the circular motion of being both a sharer and receiver of knowledge in this research process. Emily identified a significant difference between how knowledge is valued and held in Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Where Indigenous Australians situate and value knowledge in their people, from her observations working in universities, Emily identified that in her Western-centric culture, "*knowledge is not seen to be resting in people except those who are academically or business-wise smart … knowledge is in books or in science*". Separating knowledge into discrete disciplines renders it into something that can be more easily controlled, "*and we are very good at it*" Emily explained, because "*Our culture is good at separating life from structures, and so we always remove people from the equation – it is never actually people*".

Towards the end of our research conversation Michael suggested that while there is an expectation for Indigenous Australians to "*walk in two worlds*", he could see that "*non-Aboriginal people need to walk in two worlds too*". Identifying a need for "*a genuine meeting halfway*" by both "*Aboriginal*

and non-Aboriginal people" each being conversant in the other's culture, will encourage a form of hybridity. However, for a genuine meeting halfway, non-Indigenous people must be open to a teaching and learning relationship about their culture, with Indigenous Australians.

Finalising her interview responding to what she thought should be known, Julie returned to reflect on a remark from a colleague about wanting Indigenous Australians "*to make a bit of an effort*" to understand their non-Indigenous culture. While not agreeing with the sentiment her colleague expressed, Julie agrees that Indigenous Australians "*need an induction into working in the Western way*", cultural training on non-Indigenous culture. Expressing frustration at having to work within extremely tight schedules, and knowing it is not possible to fulfil the expectations of Indigenous ways of working, Julie would appreciate some understanding of these pressures, why she cannot do it that way, to "*just help me out a bit*". Helping to develop a resource to promote a greater understanding of mainstream non-Indigenous Australian ways of working was the incentive for Julie to commit time for her interview, although she confided, "*I can only explain the little bit where I sit within it and that's only the bits I'm conscious of and not the bits I'm not conscious of*".

Speaking "*in terms of reflexivity*" a focus group member believed that belonging to "*a minority culture tends to foster a person to examine their role within their group*". However, being part of a majority culture, "*people don't have to question or think about what it means to be in a particular group*" because "*it's sort of a big comfortable us*". Belonging to mainstream non-Indigenous Australian culture, has led to many people saying "*that we don't have a culture*", and that it is a "*culture of no culture. That's the way it is – until you go to another country*".

Outside Looking In: Overseas Experience

Going overseas, even spending a few years overseas is "*a very mainstream thing for Australian people to do*" according to what Tania described as her "*middle-class outlook*". Travel outside of Australia has provoked greater consciousness of the social cultures at play in Australia for some people interviewed. An overseas experience can have the effect of making obvious the endemic racism in Australia where previously it had not registered in the traveller's mind (Kessaris, 2006, p. 350). Commentary in the afternoon focus group noted that "*people like to say we don't have a culture … and until you go overseas you don't have to be reflective about Australian culture … because if you fall comfortably in the middle there is no need, it simply is the way it is*".

Stepping out of Australia and returning a number of times, Sharna found that "*we go 'oh my goodness is that how we are as a country – that is just*

awful.' But white fellas can be totally oblivious about it". Observing Australian society from another country while travelling with an Indigenous colleague, highlighted "*that a lot of white fellas – we don't need to look at our whiteness because we sit in a majority white society*" because "*we are sitting there happily living our lives and we don't see it*".

Leaving Australia helped Kylie gain an inkling of understanding of the connection to Country that Indigenous Australians know. It was not until Kylie had been overseas a few times that she experienced a "*quite profound feeling of returning home to where I come from*". Expanding on this, Kylie said she felt so different away from Australia and "*I guess that's the closest I've come to feeling a real connection to country*".

Paradox of Australian Culture

> There's something about the system and the way Aboriginal society was structured and happened that non-Aboriginal people could learn from.
>
> *(Michael)*

Marcia Langton's observation that "from the inside, a culture is 'felt' as normative, not deviant" (2003, p. 121), referred to in Chapter 2, proved true for people who paused to reflect on being born into, and grown up belonging to, mainstream Australian culture. The process of engaging with this research was a learning experience for those who shared their knowledge with me, as they worked to explain aspects of their culture that previously had not needed explanation. Views expressed here were often presented as insider knowledge of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture, with interviewees mostly distancing themselves from their responses, by saying that it was not their personal view.

Articulating their culture does not appear an easy task for mainstream non-Indigenous Australians. All interviewees had to be reminded on occasions that the focus of this research was on their culture and not Indigenous Australian culture due to the pervasiveness of their culture being considered the normal. This was particularly evident in the initial interviews, where the respondents tended to focus on what they knew about Indigenous culture. By sharing this insight with subsequent interviewees, people were more conscious of focussing on their understanding of their own culture, and reminders were less, but not absent.

Wry humour and exclamations of surprise were common responses when awareness dawned in some participants that there was a subtle lesson to be had from this research, usually just after assuring me that non-Indigenous people are not all the same. This awakening mostly occurred during preliminary discussions about the study to prospective research participants. It was however, very encouraging when realisation dawned that this study was

examining non-Indigenous people in the same way that Indigenous people are often researched and that Indigenous people are also very diverse is a point often overlooked by mainstream society. Participating in this study helped reinforce that non-Indigenous Mainstream Australian culture is not homogenous, just as Indigenous Australian culture is not uniform. People, regardless of culture, are complex beings, so it was not surprising that different and sometimes contradictory responses were given.

Occasionally, in the interviews, people gave inconsistent responses, sometimes saying the opposite of what was said earlier. Because of the relaxed nature of the informal research conversations, both conflicting versions appear to be what the person saying them believed to be true at the time of speaking. It is possible that some of the statements were given out of politeness or good manners. Earlier, I used an example of how Leoni talked about the need for a strict adherence to a chain of command, and then approvingly told how she had successfully breached the structural hierarchy. Interpreting this seemingly incongruent view was made possible by reflecting on the stages of her life each view was taken from, and an understanding of how central individuality is to Western culture. As a younger ambitious person, Leoni was pleased with her success in "going to the top" and bypassing the chain of command, whereas in her current very senior position she expected adherence to the structural hierarchy for very practical reasons. Leoni's account is about how her experiences affect her, as an individual.

Individualism was also evident in some of the subtle contradictions in the discussion about time. Time is valued as a commodity and discussed as a personal resource that could be saved, spent or wasted, according to those who shared their knowledge in this study. From a non-Indigenous Australian perspective, time is broken into orderly segments to be spent wisely, that can be vastly different from the multidimensional and multifaceted time-rich approach of Indigenous Australians (Muller, 2020, p. 9).

Time was also suggested as a concept that needed to be learned by Indigenous Australians. Examples of the concept of individual ownership and value of time, such as Vera's frustration at having her time wasted when waiting to see her medical practitioner, were provided in the way research participants talked about their time being precious and somehow more important than other people's time. Of course, some individuals consider their time is more valuable than others depending on their position in the social structure. For example, it is assumed that the demand for a medical specialist's skillset means their time has greater value than many of their patients. Vera's expression of frustration at having to wait to see a doctor because her time was also valuable, suggests there is competitiveness in the valuation of time; it is a case where "my time" is worth more than "your time". Putting the wages value of a person's time to one side, for non-Indigenous mainstream Australians, the valuation of a person's time also appeared to be influenced by perceived

social-stratification based on power, class and racism, as well as who is, or is not, deserving of an individual's respect.

Respect, Power, Class and Racism

As a broad concept, racism is much like the class system because it is a form of social stratification. Using class strata when discussing racism in an Australian context can demonstrate how racism is not a black and white issue but a structural issue whereby Indigenous Australians continue to be classified as being the lowest class of citizens. As new settlers arrive, most strive to fit into mainstream "white" Australian culture and it is not uncommon for non-white, non-Indigenous Australians to take up the pervasive racism/classism of mainstream society, resulting in some being overtly racist towards Indigenous Australians (Muller, 2020, pp. 130–133).

Categorising people into deserving or undeserving, and ascribing respect according to worth, as described above, reflects power. That is, respect from a non-Indigenous mainstream Australian perspective is based on power, who has it and where one fits in the scale of power. Respect is power, and where one is positioned in the social power structure determines to whom one is expected to show deference, courteous regard and compliance. Respect, in non-Indigenous mainstream culture, is considered to be an earned entitlement that can be bestowed by an individual or the social group. It is individualised and person centred.

There are some attributes of respect that Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream Australians have that are similar. Holders of knowledge can have an additional layer of respect granted them in both cultures, as do people of exemplary character. There are some fundamental differences however. One major difference between concepts of respect is based on power, and individual versus collective worldviews.

Non-Indigenous mainstream Australians' concept of respect is based on individual person centred power, who has power over another, the power to determine if another is worthy, and the power to deny a person's worth. Power is also an aspect of Indigenous Australian concept of respect. However this is lateral geosophical power that is gained from respecting relationships with Country, kin and all creatures and features that surround us. It is not person centred, or based on power over another.

Generalising, to shrink down the differences, and acknowledging that there are many variables, the difference in respect is "power over" as opposed to "power from". Non-Indigenous mainstream Australians "respect the law" – whereas for Indigenous Australians "respect is law". "Power over", is based on who has power over another, meaning that respect is selective and conditional in non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. "Power from" is based on the strength and harmony that comes from respecting the

inter-relatedness and connectedness of an individual to their Country, knowledge and environment.

In Australia, power is held and regulated by members of non-Indigenous mainstream Australian society. The narrative of Australia being an egalitarian society, as Julie explained in Chapter 5, is a "*useful myth*" that acts to reinforce the existing state of social inequity whereby people can be blamed for their circumstances and structural imbalances can be ignored. Australia is not an egalitarian society, although the research participants considered it to be more so than most other countries.

While a class system is not as evident in Australia as it is in places like England, there is a clear structure of social stratification; a position in society where a person and their peers consider themselves to belong. In this study, five participants identified as being from upper or middle-class families. Australia's social stratification was particularly evident in discussions surrounding equality, equity and egalitarianism. Inequitable access to opportunities was a theme that contradicted the notion of egalitarian Australia. For example, while Theresa stated she was "*passionate about social justice*" and "*equal opportunity*", she went on to explain that she does not believe that all individuals can be considered equal – some are simply less equal as determined by their behaviour and actions. All people are not considered equal in Australia, and nor is there equity in opportunities.

Conditions apply to whether an individual is worthy of respect or even equality. A person can be considered worthy, or unworthy, based on such things as individual behaviour, actions, class and race. The myth of egalitarianism suggests that equal opportunity exists, yet as Margaret noted in Chapter 4, this is not the case because "*from that very first breath onwards*" Indigenous Australians "*have very unequal opportunities*". Everyone being born equal and having equal opportunities in life reflects a colour-blind approach and is part of the myth of an egalitarian Australia. Kylie explained how her colleagues use a colour-blind approach when they say that they treat Aboriginal people the same as anyone else "*because we're all the same*" when that is obviously not the case.

Ignoring differences in history and lived experience and assuming that "we are all the same" reflects an expectation that Indigenous Australians assimilate and comply with the dominant culture's social norms. It does not address the causes of inequity or encourage examination of the effects colonisation has had, and continues to have, on the lives of Indigenous Australians. Adopting a colour-blind approach acts to white-out the racism that is endemic within the Australian social script and gloss over the past government policies that sought to breed out the colour of Indigenous Australians. These past eugenic policies, that attempted to eradicate Indigenous Australians through selective breeding, are often forgotten when non-Indigenous mainstream Australians encounter fair-skinned Indigenous Australians.

Identity – Complex, Contested and Fluid

In Australia, questioning fair-skinned Indigenous Australians' identity appears to reflect an assumption that identity is based on skin tone. Why a fair-skinned person would identify as Indigenous when they could "pass as white" can be a vexing issue for some non-Indigenous mainstream Australians. Linking identity to a person's physical attributes ignores or downplays the values and principles, shared and inherited knowledge that contribute to a person's cultural persona. However, a culture is not static; cultures have porous boundaries because the beliefs, knowledge, customs, attitudes and behaviours, that are learned, shared and inherited within a culture's membership change and adapt over time. Given the permeability of cultural boundaries, particularly in multi-cultural Australia, the identity of a member of a particular culture is complex, fluid and for Indigenous Australians – often contested.

Since colonisation, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' histories, lives and families have become intertwined; inevitably there has been some blending and adapting of these cultures, and over time this process will continue to evolve. The people who identified as mainstream non-Indigenous Australians in this study were primarily "white" of European heritage. Kylie highlighted this when she identified herself as a "*white Australian*" and not that of Australians from different background, "*because Chinese or Indian Australians' culture is different*". Although this research can only discuss the view of the respondents as they were expressed at the particular time of interview, analysis of the knowledge shared with me in this study into mainstream culture identified beliefs, customs, attitudes and a worldview that make it distinct from Indigenous Australian culture.

Discussing culture is another feature of difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream Australian peoples. Many non-Indigenous people interviewed struggled to explain different aspects of the values and principles that informed their way of seeing and understanding their world. This contrasts with the clarity and detail provided by Indigenous Australians when yarning about culture. The centrality of Indigenous Australian culture is clear in Jackamos' (2015) statement that "*Culture is not a 'perk' for an Aboriginal child – it is a life-line*".

Illegitimacy

During the research conversations, as people relayed what they understood about mainstream culture, quite a few mentioned a sense of not-quite-belonging, of being somehow a little-bit-illegitimate as Australians because of the history of colonisation. They expressed a yearning for something they couldn't explain; a yearning for some way to heal the past to gain a sense of

legitimacy in being Australian. This feeling could be due to a sense of impostorship due to expecting themselves to have the ability, but being unsure of how to address past wrongs (Brookfield, 1994; Jenkins, 2015). However, a few like Michael demonstrated a strong respect for and rejoiced in Indigenous Australian culture, and did not discuss any insecurity or illegitimacy in their identity as non-Indigenous Australians. The difference between people like Michael, and those who expressed yearning and illegitimacy, in conjunction with the knowledge gained throughout this research journey, made me aware of the significance of the process within the Dinawaan workshops and the stages non-Indigenous mainstream Australians encounter when they engage with the stages of decolonisation.

Spirituality: Yearning for Connection

When viewed from a Western academic perspective, a person's feeling of being a legitimate, or illegitimate, member of a group can depend on whether they conceptualise themselves as belonging (Lahire, 2008). With growing knowledge about the history of colonisation in Australia, it is possible that this feeling of not belonging and yearning reflects an awareness of exclusion from belonging to the original culture of Australia, and echoes a desire to heal the complex and sometimes contentious relationship. From a negative perspective, the feeling of not quite belonging can engender resentment in some non-Indigenous mainstream Australians towards Indigenous Australians. This is an issue that must be acknowledged and managed. Fortunately, such negativity was minimal in this study because of the selective recruitment method used. There is however, another explanation for the feelings of not belonging.

"Yearning" for connectedness expressed by non-Indigenous mainstream Australians, resonated with my earlier yarning with Indigenous Australians about a person "coming into their spirituality" (Muller, 2020, pp. 145–152). I was somewhat surprised at hearing similar stories of yearning from non-Indigenous people who suggested that their desire for a stronger sense of belonging to Country is not attainable, whereas Indigenous Australians feel that such connectedness is vital for well-being. Feelings of illegitimacy appear to be linked to connectedness to Country when non-Indigenous mainstream Australians experience an inkling of how Indigenous Australians know Country as a sentient being.

Luke Briscoe, Kuku Yalanji journalist and co-founder of Indigi Lab, an enterprise that advocates for wider inclusion of Indigenous science in the curriculum, suggested that white Australia should be encouraged to connect with an Indigenous mind. Briscoe (2016) suggests that engaging with decolonisation can help white Australians "connect with their own Indigenous identities rather than just ours". This sentiment reflects Kevin Gilbert's (1996) suggestion, in Chapter 4, that "we have to grow the Whitefella up".

Opportunities

Opportunities presented themselves in the process of seeking similarities and identifying differences between the two studies as I return to previous knowledge to build on it and compare both. Although there are many learning points in this text, a few are worth reiterating, and are highlighted in this closing chapter.

Relearning Respect

One opportunity emerged in the way non-Indigenous mainstream Australians regard respect, discussed in Chapter 6, as being related to value and worth. While manners and politeness towards older people were seen as the right thing to do, respect was somehow linked to an older person's value and worth.

A post interview feedback provided an example of how things can be different. A while after I had interviewed Erica she commented that participating in this research was a positive and life changing event for her, especially our discussion on age and Elders. The research conversation caused her to examine and think about the way she thought about and interacted with her mother. Excitedly, Erica said that "*I realise I have treated my mother disrespectfully without really comprehending it*". Now, Erica sees her mother in a more positive light and is benefiting from listening and learning from her aging parent; hearing stories that she had never bothered to ask about nor listen to. Erica directly credits participating in this research for helping her develop a strong and respectful relationship with her mother.

Another example is the way that respect for knowledge held by older people waned when no longer linked to waged employment. This loss of respect was particularly noticeable for retired academics free from constraints of employers, who were able to speak powerfully on their topics only to have younger professionals disregard their knowledge because they were aged. If the Indigenous understanding of respect were to be integrated into the national story, the wisdom of Elders, unfettered by constraints of employment would not be discarded. Relearning respect, integrating Indigenous knowledges, can play an active role in shaping and informing the diverse cultures in Australia, help unravel and challenge the ideology of colonisation, and build an Australian culture that recognises, values and respects differences and cherishes similarities. Such a change could help create a truly Australian culture.

10

AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

Under Construction

Finally, returning to the snake story, the same-yet-different pattern of the regrown tail of the snake begins to be revealed.

As stated at the very start of this text, "Culture is not static. A society's culture evolves and adapts as its members' experiences and understanding of the world develop and change". In this chapter, signs of a nascent uniquely Australian culture are explored. Signs that Australian culture is evolving, started to raise hope for positive change during this study on non-Indigenous mainstream Australian culture. This evolving Australian culture, with its distinctive difference from similar British-European culture based countries, is still a work in progress.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began to become an issue of concern in Australia, early in January 2020, comparison of the early reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic around the globe made visible the way mainstream Australian culture was changing. It has moved away from the colonialist "dollar dreaming" British values and principles that formed the dominant social structure and is beginning to develop into a unique culture with characteristics and attributes identifying Australians as a distinct group of people. Noting that the research informing this book was conducted prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 it highlights the cultural shift and gives insight into why and how Australia dealt with the threat in the early days of the pandemic.

A major shift towards a unique Australian culture happened when the population was faced with a choice of open borders, based on individualistic monetary values so heavily promoted by the Federal government, or a closed and controlled border based on a time-rich community approach that prioritised lives ahead of the economy. This community valued approach is, in

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part, reflective of the values and principles of Indigenous Australian culture discussed in earlier chapters.

Myth of COVID-19 Herd Immunity

As the devastating effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on countries around the world at the start of the outbreak began to be revealed, Australia had some forewarning of the gravity of the looming threat while there were only a small number of cases in the country. Initial considerations put forward by the conservative Morrison federal government centred on the notion of the population developing "herd immunity" in what was referred to as "the Swedish Model" (Holden, 2020). Epidemiologists warned that letting COVID-I9 run freely throughout the community with only minimal prevention, in the pre-vaccine early stages in the unproven hope of herd immunity, risked up to four million people contracting the virus in the first six months (McKilroy & Margo, 2020). There are four million Australians aged over 65. Acknowledging the experts' warnings about the inevitable high death rate of vulnerable people in the let-it-rip minimalist approach of the Swedish model, it was proposed as having less economic costs.

With alarming scenes of overwhelmed hospitals and emergency mass graves, public attention turned to the options available until vaccinations became available. Scrutiny of the imprecise science, and eugenic underpinnings, of herd immunity, rendered it politically unviable. From the 1930s "Herd immunity" became part of epidemiology discussions and literature on infectious diseases in Western based academies, linked to "eugenic racism" and an "implication of weak being 'culled' – sacrificed" (D. Jones & Helmreich, 2020). Early in the pandemic Mark Mosley (2020), a USA medical doctor was challenging the herd immunity rhetoric questioning how "government-led infection policies" could be prevented from "systematically harming disadvantaged people" to no avail. While ultra conservative United States of America President Trump declared that by "going herd" COVID-19 would "just go away" without a vaccine, despite rising deaths (Mosley, 2020) and other anglosphere leaders placed great focus on their economy, such a tactic was being rejected by the citizens in Australia.

Meanwhile, in Australia the community values set the parameters for public health policies that the settler-colonialist right winged government could not ignore, putting lives and community ahead of individualism and the economy.

In January 2020, as reports of what is now known as COVID-19 began to be reported, Aboriginal health councils started to develop responses and plan for any possible outbreaks. The high risks to the elderly, marginalised and vulnerable, were known by Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders and health professionals as they planned the course of action against COVID-19.

Existing health and social inequities, set amid the "public health emergency" of racism, were known to increase the risk of catastrophic outcomes in a pandemic for First Nations people (Yashadhana, Pollard-Wharton, Zwi, & Biles, 2020, p. 1).

After convening a group of ACCHO (Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation) members and Public Health Officers, National Chief Executive Officer, Senior Aboriginal woman Pat Turner (2020), outlined how they successfully advocated for "border closures and protective biosecurity measures" in February 2020. Indigenous Australians acted rapidly to isolate communities and vulnerable people from COVID-19, and early in March 2020 began restricting access to remote communities, independent of government regulations (McCalman et al., 2021). At the time of writing, December 9, 2020, there had been zero deaths of Indigenous Australians, with 147 cases in total (Turner, 2020). The federal government restricted border access to Australia for non-residents on March 20, 2020. With an emphasis placed on protecting the Elders and vulnerable in a community centred way, where lives took precedence over the economy, Indigenous Australians appeared to be leading the agenda in dealing with the threat of the pandemic (Crooks, Casey, & Ward, 2020).

Sociologist, Bronwen Lichtenstein (2020), compared the way age and ageism influenced COVID-19 government policy and community rhetoric in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America between April to June 2020. Lichtenstein's snapshot study covered the period of horror and dread as the media shared stories of overwhelmed health systems and mass graves in countries hard hit at the pandemic's beginning. Although Older people were known to be at heightened risk and although the let-it-rip proposition would mean "uncontrolled illness and death" of the vulnerable "until (or if) immunity is achieved" herd immunity featured in the deliberations of all three of the focus countries (Lichtenstein, 2020, p. 209). An evaluation of the Swedish herd immunity approach to the COVID-19 pandemic saw a death rate ten times that of neighbouring Norway, and reported that "many elderly people were administered morphine instead of oxygen despite available supplies, effectively ending their lives" (Brusselaers et al., 2022).

Decisions on how countries chose to confront the coronavirus epidemic were inherently political and embedded in that country's cultural value system. The United Kingdom chose a "herd immunity" policy "on ideological (libertarian) grounds with a caveat to protect older adults through self-isolation" (Lichtenstein, 2020, p. 209) before adopting a form of lockdown when faced with alarming death rates. Delays in enacting a policy resulted in the virus being allowed to run freely in the United States of America, due to "bureaucratic delays, lack of testing, and official temporizing" that saw astonishing number of deaths. Australia rejected the proposed herd immunity "on moral grounds" (ibid), as the Morrison government realised that the leadership stand taken by Indigenous communities and health organisations

was the only option the community would accept. National and state borders were closed in Australia to successfully reduce transmission.

As the national discussion played out in mainstream and social media it was clear that the Australian public rejected the notion of certain people being considered disposable, or less worthy of life, and insisted on putting people first. State and national border closures were introduced instead, with testing and community controls implemented to cut any spread. Proponents of herd immunity argued for the economy to take precedence, with one suggestion that the cost was too high and "older Australians over 70 aren't worth as much as younger Australians" (Smith, R., cited in Lichtenstein, 2020, p. 209). Eugenics based survival of the fittest arguments put forward for the culling of the elderly, sick and vulnerable, were not supported by the Australian public. During this public discussion, when members of the then conservative Federal Morrison government attempted to justify the Swedish model of herd immunity, it became clear that Australian mainstream culture had shifted away from the colonialist value system.

In Australia, the early decisive actions by Indigenous peoples to protect the Elders and remote communities, that had limited health care services, by implementing preventative measures such as closing borders, set a clear option to the one initially proposed by the federal government. Two possible courses of action were available to the Australian political leaders; the Swedish model with the elderly, ill and marginalised sacrificed for the economy, or, the Indigenous Australian model that valued every life, with Elders held in high regard. Rapid decisions were needed by governments in Australia so it soon became evident then that the early indications in my research were validated. When faced with an existential choice, public discussion began to reflect the values and principles of Indigenous Australians.

Undoubtedly there were breaches and mis-steps in the isolation procedures, yet going against cultural norms of anti-authoritarianism, the high level of compliance to the strict lockdown rules demonstrated widespread community commitment to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The values of Indigenous Australians (slowly and somewhat imprecisely) began to be espoused in everyday rhetoric. Mainstream Australians are beginning to embrace the inherent value of each person, and the notion of being an egalitarian society has shifted from vague tokenism to a cultural aspiration. Mainstream Australian culture, when tested, is clearly becoming a cultural bricolage from the fusion of Indigenous Australian and settler-colonialist culture. Still in its early days of creation, this cultural evolution is not without detractors and opponents. Restrictions and prevention protocols were not always followed with a few protests and non-compliance being reported. I witnessed one such incident where, despite face-masks being mandated in hospitals, a food server in a COVID-19 quarantine hospital ward went patient to patient with their mask under their chin – laughingly ignoring demands to wear it properly.

Incremental change has been occurring with changing attitudes towards events such as Australia day, or Survival – Invasion Day. The annual argument about the appropriateness of a day for celebrating the start of British colonisation has transformed as support for alternative events to Australia day, such as Survival Day rallies. Protests grow. Even the media commentary has started to shift to include education about colonisation and embracing truth telling. These are small but hope engendering changes.

Although the emerging uniquely Australian culture is far from being complete, the affirmative stance taken in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, provides clear indication that the changes observed in my research were correct. As time has progressed from the early days of the pandemic, the changes to mainstream Australian culture are being challenged by those favouring the individualism and social stratification of the colonialist social structure. There is however, a growing number of people actively protesting against individualist divisive protestors.

A comparison of the original mainstream settler-colonialist culture in this study, with Indigenous Australian culture of the foundation study, indicates we are in the process of creating a truly Australian culture. At the start of the pandemic, as social restrictions took place, people looked forward to things returning to normal. Having made some progress in dealing with the COVID-19 era, there are calls for a "new normal" (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2020) because the old "normal" was not good for Indigenous Australians.

This work-in-progress on the evolving distinctive Australian culture gives hope as the Australian community works towards healing from the damage caused by colonisation. The invitation of a pathway to healing, commonly referred to as the "Uluru Statement", was presented as a gift to the Australian people to signify that it is a "gesture of good faith" to join in the healing process (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2023, p. 8).

Uluru Statement

In May 2017, Australia's Referendum Council's Indigenous steering committee delivered the historic "*Uluru Statement from the Heart*" that rejected the proposed simple acknowledgement of constitutional recognition and proposed constitutional reforms instead (Davis & Williams, 2021). These reforms include a need to establish a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution, and a "Makarrata[1] Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations that includes truth-telling about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's history" with the aim of establishing a treaty or treaties (Referendum Council's Indigenous Steering Committee, 2017a, 2017b).

As non-Indigenous mainstream Australians respond to the invitation to the Australian people in the Uluru statement the stages of engaging with

decolonisation offer a framework for the difficult task ahead – that of healing and uniting Australian society based on respect of difference.

Talking about respect in both studies, exploring Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding of it, proved useful in building greater inter-cultural understanding. Inter-cultural respect grew as participants developed a greater understanding of Indigenous culture and humility in their knowledge of their own culture. As one stated: "*I feel like I understand a bit more* [about their non-Indigenous culture] *but before I never really thought about it*".

Racism

However, healing cannot be achieved until the social stratification based on race is confronted and diminished. Racism is so deeply embedded in the social script of Australian society that it can lurk, unknown and unwanted, in the minds of Indigenous Australians' staunch allies, but they confront it and work to eradicate it from their thinking. Overt racism is easily recognised and confronted or ignored. On the other hand, the craftily hidden sophisticated racism needs to be identified and dealt with before healing as a nation can be achieved. While racism and racist continue to be somewhat offensive words that are skirted around in polite society, discrimination based on race will remain and fester.

Opportunities for the Future

Looking forward to the future Australia that my grandchildren and their grandchildren will inherit, I hope this book offers an opportunity to contribute to an Australia that is inclusive and respectful. It provides a resource to explain some of the basics of mainstream culture for Indigenous Australians and those who seek greater understanding of certain aspects of mainstream Australian society. Sharing insight into their own culture assisted mainstream Australians engage in the decolonisation process so necessary for generating inter-cultural respect. Decolonisation and inter-cultural respect challenge the acceptance of mainstream non-Indigenous culture as being the norm that everyone is expected to know and abide by, where other cultures are viewed as deviant, wrong or inferior. In turn this will contribute to policies in areas such as child safety, education, health and social harmony. It offers a framework for all of Australia to work on the issues identified in the "*Uluru Statement from the Heart*", as it incorporates the narrative of how non-Indigenous mainstream Australians are also impacted by colonisation.

The Snake Story: Renewal

Earlier I shared the snake story, told to me by a "Clever" man, about a snake's tail regrowing with a slightly different pattern after it had been cut

off. He used it as an analogy to explain how our culture and knowledge has regenerated "*the same as the old one, with a slightly different pattern*". In his story, colonisation and invasion metaphorically "cut the tail off the snake", and contemporary Indigenous culture/knowledge is depicted as the new tail regrown as vigorous as before, yet wiser and knowledgeable of its assailant and its ways.

A yet-to-be-told story of healing and harmony, based on knowledge and respect, promises to be a story of renewal. Just as colonisation and invasion cut the tail off the snake (our culture) – the outcomes of this research indicate there are ways to stop the aggression towards the snake, and create healing in the Australian future for our grandchildren's grandchildren.

Healing based on respect.

Note

1 Makarrata is a Yolngu word meaning "The coming together after a struggle …" (Referendum Council's Indigenous Steering Committee, 2017b).

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