



Country is calling: by Savannah Travis-Dann 2020

**“If you’re Kaarty and you know it clap you hands”:
Mental wellbeing and Aboriginal youth: an examination of the
attitudes and beliefs of 18-25 year olds residing in Perth WA**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) –updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number #R36/2012 and Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee # 415.

Signature:

Date:.....



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Acknowledgment of Country

This thesis is a result of the collaboration and commitment of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, community members and young people living and working on Wadjuk Noongar Boodjar and I honour and respect their wisdom and courage. I acknowledge all of the traditional owners of the many lands and language groups of Western Australia. I pay my respects to the wisdom, strength and resilience of our Elders and the strength and capacity of our young people who continue to nourish and maintain these connections.

Country is calling - Savannah Travis-Dann

The painting on the cover of this document was created by Nyul Nyul artist Savannah. Savannah is 23 years old and her traditional connections are to the Nyikinya, Bardi, Punuba and Kija Country on her grandmother's side. Her family's history has instilled a determination within her and has guided her to grow into the woman she is today. With both of her grandparents affected by the Stolen Generations, she was determined to keep her culture alive and to find out more details of culture and language so to pass onto our future generations. Savannah has always been passionate about combining her love of mental-health awareness and art and believes that art can be a powerful way of healing and removing stigma around situations community members' experience, as well as creating forums where we can openly discuss topics that some people might feel shame around. She has always been passionate about breaking the stigma around mental health and allowing people to express how they truly feel without any judgement or fear, as well as raising awareness of some situations that haven't been discussed openly within the community.

Her dad always taught her proper ways and to only paint in the styles of places she has connections to. For Savannah, the importance of this lies in these connections- "we know who we are and where we come from as that's the only way to know our future."

The picture depicts the importance of these connections to people, place and to your cultural and spiritual identity. It is through these connections that we stay strong and well. Savannah has given permission for this image to be used.

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The Stories could not have been shared without the support, encouragement and patience of the Storytellers and their families and communities. The strength, courage and humility of the young people in this thesis motivated and nurtured me throughout the very long process. Retelling their Stories has been one of the most profound privileges I have experienced.

The Stories came from the community and have been retold across many different contexts. This was the outcome we desired- that the Stories be shared and that our young people be seen as strong and successful. The Stories have changed my personal and professional life- opening up spaces for me to be a Storyteller, advocate and Aunty for our young people and for this I am eternally grateful. The importance of these Stories and the young people who shared them cannot be underestimated- these are the voices and hearts of our future.

My family have been through this process with me- every step, every edit, and every page. While many of them are unsure what it is I have been doing- they have always been supportive- even if a little confused.

My partner Lee and our grown children Damien and Shani have always been my motivation and staunchest allies. They have supported me through the grief and loss our family has experienced in the process of completing this project. Each time I felt the pain of grief or that I wasn't smart enough or good enough they helped me out of the hole and held me as I picked up the pieces.

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Go gently and with the strength of all of our Ancestors.

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Terminology

Aboriginal is used only to refer to the Aboriginal peoples and cultures of Australia (and is not inclusive of Torres Strait Islander peoples/cultures).

Indigenous is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

Aboriginal language- The spelling of any Aboriginal words/phrases or concepts is the preferred spelling of the young people who told their stories. (Footnotes are provided)

Country is capitalised throughout the thesis to denote the fundamental place, connections to and with lands in Indigenous cultures.

The terms Storyteller/s and Ourstory/stories are capitalised throughout this thesis as a form of personal and academic de-colonisation. The role of Storytellers in Indigenous cultures is central to cultural survival, revival and strength. These stories, Ourstories and our voices have often been absent or misrepresented in dominant narratives. Capitalising these terms is about honouring and acknowledging their importance and value.

Racism is another word that has been capitalised throughout the thesis. The impact of Racism as an ideology and as an action was not a surprising finding of this research. It was a very sad reminder of the insidious and very visceral impact that Racism has on the daily lives of many Indigenous peoples. The importance of capitalising Racism, for me, is to remind both myself and the reader that Racism is a determinant of health and wellbeing that impacts on all aspects of life and that structural changes are needed to address this.

“If you’re kaarty and you know it clap your hands” was the title suggested by some of the young people involved in the project. In Noongar, the language of the Country in which the research took place, Kaarty, can mean mad or sick in the head. This title, the young people felt, provided a bit of light relief or blackfella humour to yarns about mental health and resilience in our communities.

The idea was that every time I presented or talked about the research, I had to sing and clap my hands – this did break the ice in many settings and provided a very important talking point around the use of language and humour, Noongar and English in telling our Stories.

Cultural Positioning

In order to honour my role as an instrument and an active respondent in the research process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), my cultural, social and political positioning has been made clear to all the participants and to the wider community members involved in the project. I have lived and worked within the Noongar communities of Perth and have been teaching Indigenous history and health in the tertiary sector for over twenty-five years. My experiences have informed the values and beliefs that I hold and that are evidenced in the approaches taken.

Indigenous methodological approaches to research are closely aligned with what Moreton-Robinson (2013) describes as research standpoint bias. The standpoint or positioning of the researcher is not seen as that of an objective, detached observer. The position, subjectivities and standpoint of the researcher need to be made explicit and are acknowledged as a part of the research process. The researcher is one of the research instruments. Clearly identifying who I am, where I come from and the motivations and personal and professional gains that the research project has potentially offered me are essential pieces of information for participants, community members and other readers.

Cultural introductions are a standardised form of initial communication between Aboriginal people. Stating who you are and where you come from takes the place of Westernised introductions that often rely on who you are and what you do. The privileging of Country and family over occupation is an important part of my Indigenous practices, protocols, and values and aligns with the core components of Indigenous approaches to research.

I am the seventh daughter of Daphne May Brockman (deceased) and Donald Clyde Webb (deceased) and have familial connections throughout Southern and Eastern Tasmania. I have a brother/nephew and I am an aunty and nanna to over fifty nieces and nephews who are almost all living on Country in Tasmania.

As a child I grew up knowing and to some extent practicing some aspects of my culture and was part of a large extended family network that had survived the near genocide of Palawa people during the Colonial Wars.

Tasmanian Aboriginal people - Palawa - have suffered enormous cultural loss. As a result, many of us are missing vital pieces of our culture, language and, in turn, identity. I grew up in an era when the dominant discourse around Aboriginality in Tasmania was that Palawa people and culture were extinct. We were taught in school that all of my people had died during the colonisation of the state and that the rich heritage and culture was lost. This overarching 'story' served to limit, hide and to render invisible our family, connection to each other and Country and our cultural identity as a whole. This story of dispossession was experienced across all of Australia. All Aboriginal people share the reality of loss of land, children, culture and language, and ongoing health, social, cultural, emotional and political issues are the general result for most of us.

Growing up, I dealt with family violence, abuse and breakdown. As an early teenager I engaged in high-risk behaviours that led me to be involved in the juvenile justice system by the age of fourteen. It was within this very marginalised and frantic space that my adolescent identity was formed. Like many young people who are in contact with the justice system, my sense of self-worth, identity and place in the world were severely compromised. I dropped out of high school and was pregnant at sixteen with my son Damien. I was eighteen when I had my daughter Shani. Their father, Mark, who was in and out of prison from a young age was, like me, struggling to deal with both personal and intergenerational trauma, poverty and family violence.

The pain, frustration and sense of desperation that was part of our lives overwhelmed Mark, and he took his own life when our daughter was only a few months old. The impact of this was and still is very profound and it has changed my life trajectory completely. Understanding the impact of teenage pregnancies, suicide, family violence, contact with the juvenile justice system and lack of education at a very personal level has informed all my life choices since that day.

At 23, I came out to family as a lesbian, which led to ostracization, anger and rejection. I left Tasmania shortly after that, partly to escape a very shattered family, and partly to be somewhere that no one knew my children or me.

We, Damien, Shani and my partner Lee, came to Perth and set about changing our place in the world. One step at a time. One short course at a time. One counselling session at a time. The turning point for me in terms of finding support, cultural acceptance and a new community happened when I enrolled in an Aboriginal Bridging Course. It was here that I realised the enormous potential of culturally safe and relevant educational spaces and the importance of relationships and connections for healing. I went on to complete an undergraduate degree, then a Masters – and became the first in our Family Story to graduate from university. The story continued with my eldest sister (rest in peace) and my niece both completing degrees. My children also went on to complete undergraduate degrees. Having the confidence and capacity to engage in education fundamentally changed my family and through these experiences we grew, learning to navigate with much less trauma the experiences we all shared. This flowed into the next generation and opened up our very insular and fractured family to a range of opportunities and realities that we had never imagined.

It is from this space that I came to this research, from a starting place of little or no opportunity and hope, of little education, of a damaged cultural and spiritual identity. Education and connections to people and place provided me with the intellectual, spiritual and, importantly, cultural place to heal and grow. I, in turn, would like to be a part of that for others. My biases are made explicit in this Storytelling. I believe in the capacity and tenacity of Aboriginal young people to overcome and thrive if the appropriate support mechanisms are available. It is through this lens of experience and appreciation that I see Aboriginal youth not as problems but as young people who have often not found a safe place in the wider mainstream community. Within their Stories and experiences of resilience, hope and often overwhelming disadvantages, there are rich, complex and deeply relevant answers, ideas and thoughts that can support real and sustainable change. Understanding my position, clearly articulating it and owning my Story, is an important part of this research process. So too is the process of continually undermining and challenging my own authority and perspectives-as an Aboriginal academic, as a researcher.

Abstract

The aims of this research were to explore and share how Indigenous young people (18-25 years) define and understand the broad term 'mental health' and to explore what they needed to grow up and stay strong and well. The research process aimed to provide opportunities for young Indigenous adults with a space that is culturally secure and safe in which to explore this. This approach is centred on giving primacy to voices from our communities and framing them in ways that support and nurture our strengths and capacity.

What the Storytellers shared in relation to growing up and staying strong and well are centred on the importance of connections to people, Place and Culture and are shared in chapter seven. By identifying existing strengths within families and individuals, these Stories highlight the core importance of relationships for the young people in the project.

The challenges to these core strengths are shared in chapter eight and highlight the ubiquitous impact of Racism and ongoing grief on the social and emotional wellbeing. The Stories also highlight the ongoing trauma of fractured families and communities and the importance of holistic and wrap around services and programs that support and nurture families to reach their potential.

The way in which the Storytellers understood and defined mental health was also a core aspect of this project. The Stories shared provide perspectives and understandings that are highly relevant to informing programs, policies and importantly broader discourses. Mental health for the Storytellers is a complex, nuanced and changing concept that is informed by history, families, culture and communities. The threads shared tell us how young people are thinking and enacting ideas around own mental health in a broader sense – within own families and communities.

Organisation of Thesis

Chapter overview

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the overall aims of the thesis and the rationale behind the project. The ongoing disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal young people in Australia continue to impact across all of the social determinants of health and severely limit young Aboriginal people's potential and capacity. Underscoring this is a constant and damaging deficit discourse that often fails to understand or acknowledge the strengths and resilience that exists in our families and communities. The foundations of this project are embedded in a community-identified need to hear these Stories of strength and resilience and to understand how our young people stay strong and well despite the many challenges that they face.

Chapter 2 examines current literature that speaks to Indigenous understandings of mental health, culture, identity and resilience. It provides an overview of the position of Aboriginal young people in Australia and identifies many similarities between the Australian experience and other colonised nations. For Indigenous young people, the importance of connections and relationships with people and place is a strength that runs through research in Australia and internationally. Specific determinants such as intergenerational trauma and Racism are also part of the global Stories of Indigenous young people and the context around these issues are discussed and provide a foundation for understanding the Stories shared.

In the third chapter, the positing and theoretical approaches of the researcher and the research are discussed. The conceptualising of the project and the approaches undertaken throughout the project span are explained in this chapter. The framework for understating how research is informed and enacted from subjective positions has been made clear for research authenticity. The importance of adding this research to a growing body of work by, for and with Indigenous people is unpacked and explained.

Chapter 4 provides an account of the research process, participants and importance of hearing and sharing the Stories from a position of strength and wellness. The prioritising of strengths was chosen in contrast to the prevalence of deficit discourses that fail to see the capacity and potential in Indigenous

individuals, families and communities. The consultation, collaboration and recruitment processes are central to culturally safe and secure research methodology and are explained in this chapter.

Telling Ourstories is the analysis section of the thesis and introduces the concept of Ourstories as well as the Storytellers. Each young person is given context in this chapter so that a foundation is provided for further reading. The thematic approach used to identify the Threads of each Story is explained, as is the role of the researcher in 'giving voices' to the Storytellers. The implication and responsibilities of the researcher are implicit in Indigenous research methodologies: who you are impacts on how you see and understand the Stories, as does how they were gathered, analysed and shared.

The responses or threads to the open-ended questions around what you needed to grow up and stayed strong and well are explored in Chapter 6. The importance of Connections to people and place, identity and family came through the Stories and are shared as many of our young people function within an intercultural space. Ideas of success within the Indigenous cultural context are also shared by the Storytellers and shine a light on the importance of obligations and responsibilities in many Aboriginal families. The value of Mooridtj people and maintaining your shield, your resilience in the face of often traumatic experiences, are shared and explored in relation to its core role in growing up strong and well as a young person.

Chapter 7 looks at the challenges to the strengths identified in the previous chapter. The overarching and ubiquitous presence of Racism in young people's lives is profound and has long lasting impacts. These threads reveal the frequency and severity of Racism that young Aboriginal people experience at a personal, community and systemic levels. The ways in which Indigenous youth is represented and how that affects their daily lives and long-term aspirations provides profound insight into the very real impact of Racism on social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB).

Grief, suicide, loss and the fractures that are felt in families add to this and the Threads shared in this chapter reveal not only the impact of these but also the hope and resilience of our young people.

The intersectionality of identities and cultures of many of our young people is also looked at as a challenge by some but also as an important strength by others. These threads speak to the complex challenges to overall SEWB that these young people experience.

Chapter 8 unpacks the ideas, understanding and experiences of mental health for the cohort. The ongoing trauma experienced in and by families, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation on mental health are shared. From a position of strength, the threads shared also offered perspectives into how mental health is viewed and experienced by Aboriginal young peoples. Cultural and familial understandings shape and define these experiences and the importance of Connections to people and place, concepts that are carried through all of the Stories, highlight the wraparound and 'holding' capacity of these as core strengths in overall understandings of mental health.

In the final chapter the threads are pulled together and the Stories given context in the bigger Australian and global context. The importance of the Connections that are threaded throughout the thesis is validated and the profound impact of systemic Racism made explicit. The importance of our strengths as central to sustainable healing and the obligations that we, as Indigenous people and the broader community, have are explored.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Health for Aboriginal people cannot be conceptualised as just one aspect of life, and reductionist interventions that focus exclusively on particular body parts or diseases often fail. Empowering Aboriginal Australians to determine how health programs and preventive services can best support their health outcomes is an important endeavour in contributing to the closing the disparity gap with non-Aboriginal people. There is, however, a paucity of available programs designed and implemented by Aboriginal people themselves. (Vallesi et al., 2018, p. 2).

In Australia, as with other colonised countries around the world, the social determinants of health and life chances for Indigenous people are way below acceptable national or international standards (Shepherd, 2012). Indigenous people live with the reality of a statistically significant shorter life expectancy and chronic health problems. Aboriginal children and youth make up over half of the overall Indigenous population (ABS, 2010). Addressing these glaring disparities is imperative if we are to support and enable the drastic changes needed to improve the lives of Aboriginal young people and help ensure that all Australians have access to and enjoy fundamental human rights and social justice in all aspects of life. Understanding cultural differences in how mental health is viewed and understood is essential for addressing the generational social and health disparities in Australia (Westerman & Vicary, 2000). Culturally informed and safe diagnosis and treatment as well as a clear understanding of what mental wellness looks like from Aboriginal perspectives is essential if there is to be any major shift in these disparities or closing of health gaps (Holland, 2018).

There are many factors and issues that have been identified in national and international literature that impact detrimentally on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) outcomes and experiences of Indigenous young people globally, including: lack of access to treatment and services, reluctance to use medical model, social and cultural stigma, cultural incompatibility of services offered and institutionalised Racism (Coffin, 2008; Durey, 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2000; Vicary, 2005). Added to this context are the issues of shame and fear, lack of agency, remoteness and issues of identity and culture that impact on Indigenous youth as an identified group within the larger Indigenous populations or communities (Westerman, 2010b).

Research has established a clear relationship between the social inequalities experienced by Aboriginal youth and their current health status (Carson, 2007; Dudgeon & Pickett, 2000; Westerman, 2010b; Zubrick et al., 2005). While some of the inequalities may be historical in origin, it is the perpetuation of social and structural disadvantage in key areas of health and wellbeing that impact heavily on Indigenous individuals and communities (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Schoon et al., 2004). This impact is heavily felt by one of the most vulnerable cohorts within these populations - Indigenous young people.

The 2018 Overview of Indigenous Health Status Report (AIHW, 2018) considered education, housing, access to good healthcare and other social and cultural areas to be the key markers of wellness and social competence, and published evidence related to trends and patterns in education, employment and other key areas that clearly highlight the ongoing disparities between young Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Urquhart (2009) also points out the clear relationship and implications of continued poor health outcomes. The consequences of long term unemployment, poor educational outcomes and poor health outcomes are clear and direct targets of many government and community initiatives aimed at addressing health and social inequality (Hodges et al., 2008; Holland, 2014; WHO, 2008). These disparities, when placed into a larger social determinant context, highlight the extremely disadvantaged position of Indigenous young people in all of the major areas that impact on an individual or community's capacity to be healthy, strong and resilient (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2010; Price & Dalgleish, 2013; Priest et al., 2011).

There need to be opportunities within research, as well as at a community and program level, to culturally contextualise what wellness may or may not look like and what young people themselves see as markers of success or wellness. Understanding the importance of this cannot be underestimated. Developing frameworks that facilitate this kind of collaboration and relationship building can provide a more informed and shared approach and provide opportunities to hear different Stories or narratives that are often absent in the broader discussions.

In Australia, in all areas of SEWB, there are clearly identified needs for more collaboration with Indigenous peoples and communities (Adams, 2009; Holland, 2018; Johnson, 2019; Reid & Taylor, 2011). Current and previous approaches have failed to adequately address these disparities. Given that younger people make up the majority of the overall Indigenous population, continuing along the same path has profound ramifications across health, social, cultural and economic contexts (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018).

The way we understand processes that promote resilience must be contextualised and meaningful to those involved. This means that the emotional and physical context in which people live and the assets and resources that promote resilience need to be understood within their space/ context. Resilience cannot just be based on an individual's abilities, skills and deficits, but needs to be assessed and understood within structural, social and cultural contexts (Ungar, 2009).

Addressing these disparities and changing the systematic cultural and individual impediments to strong SEWB and facilitating and/or enacting/ promoting resilience is a priority for Aboriginal individuals, communities and families and requires social and a cultural shift in Aboriginal *and* non-Aboriginal domains. This project endeavours to tell the Stories of the barriers to and facilitators of SEWB that a small cohort of Aboriginal young people experienced and encountered in their lives. Hopefully, this research will generate and support further conversations and ideas around culturally safe ways to address discrepancies that are institutionally and socially embedded at all levels of Australian society.

A barrier that was identified as an area of inquiry for this project was Indigenous understandings of mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as

"A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease". It is related to the promotion of well-being, the prevention of mental disorders, and the treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by mental disorders
(http://www.who.int/topics/mental_health/en/ accessed 17/09/10).

While this definition has resonance with many Indigenous individuals and communities, it does not fully encompass the cultural and social differences and beliefs relating to mental health and wellness.

The concept and definition of mental health in Indigenous Australian cultural contexts, in the 18-25-year young adult bracket, is an area largely unexplored.

Australian society has undergone significant changes in the last few decades in terms of mental health and the way in which it is understood and enacted medically, socially and culturally (Cunningham, 2012; O'Brien, 2007). Contemporary discourses attempt to move away from the previous one-dimensional Western biomedical model that laid the foundations for pathologising of mental health diagnosis and treatment. Currently, there is more understanding of the need for a multi-layered and informed approach to understanding the concepts of mental health from varying cultural and social perspectives. The importance of understanding that health and wellbeing are inextricably linked to social, cultural, spiritual and community sense of wellbeing is becoming more prevalent (Dudgeon, 2018). This whole of person/community definition has been used as a guide for over 30 years in the Aboriginal health arena but has not easily been transferred into clinical or primary care settings (Lutschini, 2005).

Despite these broader conceptual changes in thinking about mental health, the overall impact that mental health has on us as a country, community, family and individual is devastating. Around one in eight young people experiences multiple stressors while over 65% across remote and urban areas experience low to moderate psychological distress (AIHW, 2018, p.11). The chronic deficits outlined above dominate research and heavily influence clinical and non-clinical practices and policy setting. However, this approach has had only a limited impact on social and health outcomes for Indigenous young people and has reinforced racist stereotypes and narratives of hopelessness and despair (Fforde, 2013; Fogarty, 2018; LaBoucane-Benson, 2005). Our young people can and often do overcome serious adversities to develop strong and long lasting mental, social and cultural wellbeing and successes (AIHW, 2018; Gubhaju et al., 2019). The skills and the strengths or resilience that young people draw on and how they stay well in adverse situations is an area that is gaining some traction in international research literature (Adams et al., 2006; Chandler, 2008; Flanagan et al., 2011). Some of the areas that are identified within this research discourse internationally include resilience that is fostered and supported by cultural identity, and culturally derived protective

mechanisms and strengths that support and nourish young Indigenous people in contemporary society (Adams et al., 2006; Chandler, 2008; Flanagan et al., 2011).

These ideas of cultural strength, identity and resilience, and the subsequent development of protective mechanisms and solutions need to be further explored and discussed in terms of solutions to the problems that our young people face daily. More importantly this discussion needs to be grounded in a strengths-based approach that identifies our strengths and tells these Stories from a place of wellness with clear and culturally sound understandings of what those strengths are and what may be needed to build them (Fogarty, 2018).

In this research context, the above-mentioned gaps, suggestions and needs were to be addressed by building collaborative and respectful relationships with a small cohort of Aboriginal young people. This meant developing partnerships based on trust, integrity and reciprocity, grounded in appropriate cultural values. It meant sharing their Stories - the challenges and barriers that Indigenous young people face - but also importantly focusing on young people's strengths, skills and resilience.

Rationale for conducting this Study

Formal and anecdotal consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal people has identified that there is a real and valid need to understand and articulate how young Indigenous people create and recreate their own experiences and own understandings of success, resilience and good mental health. This understanding can lead to the development of measures and prevention and risk management processes that are not the privileged and dominant ideas of others but are the processes, definitions and actions that young people themselves identify and experience.

Aboriginal young people are disproportionately at higher risk of developing emotional and mental health problems in all age groups than their non-Indigenous counterparts (AIHW, 2018). Early detection, diagnosis and treatment are essential for long-term mental wellness and to achieve equitable outcomes across all social determinants of health and wellbeing.

Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, social pressures are recognised as being applicable to Australian youth in general; however there are risk factors that are experienced specifically by Indigenous young people: issues such as inherited trauma/intergenerational trauma as a result of government policies of assimilation and removal, intergenerational poverty as a result of dispossession from country, and the impact that personal, intracultural and institutional Racism continues to have on the overall health and wellbeing, are experiences that only Indigenous young people go through in their lives. Many of our young people are at real risk of experiencing stress, distress and poor psychological health, making the need for a closer examination of cultural understandings of mental health - a priority if we are to change the lived realities of our young people. An important step to addressing this is valuing and implementing ideas and frameworks that facilitate cultural safety and understanding and enable a safe place from which to explore the culturally nuanced understandings of what mental health is.

The concerns outlined above place youth at increased risk of behavioural and environmental health issues and problems than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Priest et al., 2011).

Ongoing anger, loss and grief felt by Indigenous people from their original dispossession following colonisation still dramatically affect wellbeing... that forced separation and institutionalisation of Indigenous people resulted in health problems and a range of emotional distress including anxiety in adults. (Adermann & Campell, 2007, p. 75)

One of the clear and major indicators of this trauma is the number of youth suicides. For Indigenous young people, the rate of youth suicide may be as high as 40% greater than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018). In 2007, approximately one in four 16-24-year-olds identified as having a mental health disorder. Only one in four sought professional support (ABS, 2007). This leaves the vast number of young Australians unsupported by medical or social systems. For Indigenous young people this number could be significantly higher (Westerman, 2010). These statistics highlight the importance and necessity of finding new and innovative ways to address not only mental health issues, but the overall social and emotional wellbeing of young Aboriginal people.

The diversity of Indigenous cultural differences and protocols that exist across Australia needs to inform any and all research, programs or policy development. This exploratory study focuses on Western Australian Aboriginal young people, both regional and urban, who identify as mentally strong and well. Many identify across several with Western Australian cultural groups and have strong ties and connections to places and peoples. All of the Storytellers are engaged in higher education or employment.

The tendency to look at Indigenous health issues from a deficit perspective has restricted exploration of resilience from a position of strength and wellness. This project was developed in collaboration with young people to examine and to articulate the feelings, realities and lived experiences of young Indigenous people who identify themselves as strong, mentally well and resilient:

A resilience focus counters a dominant research trend of “what is wrong” in Aboriginal communities; it ensures research is framed in a positive manner and results in practical benefit for Aboriginal peoples. This shift has several effects: it increases relevance and acceptability of the research to Aboriginal peoples, and it increases immediacy of solutions. (Andersson 2010, p. 3)

Indigenous cultural identity, intergenerational similarities and community, familial and individual mechanisms for mental wellness and resilience are all areas of relevance and importance that can add to and inform dialogues, programs and policy.

“the paucity of culturally derived empirical models of effective practice which can be applied with Aboriginal youth, regardless of their geographical location and tribal affiliation, contributes to the resistance within the field to depart from mainstream practice.” (Westerman, 2010, p. 212)

There is little research-based evidence that provides a space for young Indigenous adults to define and conceptualise what mental health is (Cunningham, 2012). The very real lack of data has meant that progress towards achieving an understanding of how Aboriginal people, in particular youth, view, understand, enact and conceptualise mental health and resilience from a place of strength has been very slow and, in many cases, ineffective in making sustainable change to national statistics.

Changing the way we hear the Stories, changing the deficit narratives to ones that talk about our strengths, can not only change health outcomes but can and will change the overall way in which we understand and appreciate the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands' cultures and peoples. The current bias that is embedded within mental health theories, practice and treatment can only be remediated if Indigenous young people have a voice within the discourse. The value of inclusive and responsive youth-led research is clear: research that is responsive and inclusive, not reactionary and exclusive (Auger, 2018).

Thus, finding ways to approach mental health from a community and strengths-based context, and using the skills and mechanisms that Aboriginal youth identify, is clearly an important and necessary paradigm shift (Oliver & Leblanc, 2015).

Aims and Objectives

This research explored the means by which young Aboriginal people, in Wadjuk Boodjar, Perth Western Australia, define and understand mental health and SEWB, and to identify their strategies and processes that build resilience. This research provided the opportunity for young Indigenous adults to explore some of own ideas, definitions and understandings within a space that is culturally secure and safe. Central to this research was the contribution of young Indigenous adults' discussions on Indigenous mental health through own lived experiences and successes. The overall aims and objectives are to:

- Explore and understand how young people (18-25 years) define and understand the broad term mental health;
- Explore and articulate mechanisms and strengths used by young people to ensure the continuation of good mental health; and
- Understand and articulate the impact of identity on overall mental health and wellbeing.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter provides background and context to current research that speaks to the cultural understandings of mental health, culture, identity and resilience in an Indigenous context. The similarities of the issues, themes and findings across national and international literature suggest that it is essential that Indigenous peoples and our knowledges, worldviews and experiences inform and direct both research and action that relate to us. It is through Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing that we can understand, support and facilitate both good mental health and resilience in Aboriginal youth (Martin, 2008; Nakata, 1995).

In Australia and in other colonised countries such as Canada, New Zealand and the USA, where the health and social determinants for Indigenous people are also below national benchmarks, the conversation is starting to include approaching Indigenous mental health and wellness from culturally informed and culturally appropriate contexts (Reading, 2009). The strong relationships with and between Country, culture and identity and a holistic approach to health are common and connecting threads between Indigenous populations, as are the experiences and consequences of colonisation (Kirmayer et al., 2003). These factors interconnect and impact across all areas of life and are central to understanding and addressing social and health disparities. To understand issues such as mental health, success, resilience and identity for Indigenous youth, it is important to paint a picture that provides not only statistical data but also describes the nuanced and culturally informed determinants that impact the lives of our young people on a daily basis.

Indigenous youth profile

The health profile of Indigenous adolescents differs markedly from that of non-Indigenous Australian adolescents, with high rates of communicable, nutritional, and reproductive diseases; non-communicable diseases; and injuries. Policies and programmes designed for the broader Australian population might be inadequate to address the health needs of Indigenous adolescents. The early onset of health risks, high adolescent birth rates, and heavy disease burden suggest that without a priority focus on adolescents, Australia will not redress Indigenous health inequalities (Azzopardi et al., 2018, p. 767).

The overall Indigenous population in Australia differs to that of the non-Aboriginal population in that it has a younger age structure. Indigenous young people under 15 make up approximately one third of the overall population (AIHW, 2018, p. 3). Within this group, the majority, 91%, identify as Aboriginal only, with a further 4% identifying as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Only 4% identify as solely Torres Strait Islander peoples (AIHW, 2018, p. 3). Indigenous youth aged 10-24 account for approximately 5% of the overall Australian youth population (AIHW, 2018, p. 3). It is important to note that our young peoples are consistently and systematically disadvantaged in the area of health, education, political and other determinants. The marked differences in these populations and the very real impacts of disadvantages need to be a priority for addressing the overall health and other inequalities experienced across all age domains.

Specific data for Western Australia published by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (2017) shows that almost 38% of Indigenous population is under 18 years of age. Young Aboriginal people experience increased vulnerabilities in relation to juvenile justice. In WA, young Aboriginal Australians account for almost 66% of all young people under juvenile justice supervision despite comprising only 6.2% of the overall youth population (AIHW, 2018, p. 3). The same level of extreme disparity can also be evidenced in 'out of home' care numbers, where Indigenous children represent more than half the children in care nationally (AIHW, 2018, p. 3).

Given historical ramifications such as the intergenerational trauma that results from the Stolen Generations (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018), these numbers are a real cause for concern in terms of their future health, welfare and cultural ramifications. It is also important to remember when talking in numbers and percentages that

each number, and every data set, represents real people, daughters, sons and grandchildren.

Country and cultural connectedness

Country, in an Indigenous context, is the interconnection and interrelatedness of all aspects of our traditional or historical connection to place and people. Country refers to our familial, historic and ancestral lands and encompasses all aspects of physical and spiritual wellbeing. Connection to Country is diverse, multifaceted, and complex and can play a central role in ensuring good health and resilience (Ganesharajah, 2009).

Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with. Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, and feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy. (Rose, 1992, p. 7)

Country is strongly associated with cultural connectedness. Cultural connectedness is knowing where you come from and understanding the importance of Country. It can be knowing the ancient and contemporary stories, sharing the values and beliefs of your community and family, and knowing who you are and where you fit and belong (Gray & Cote, 2018).

Country is a source of protection and strength for Indigenous youth in terms of mental health and resilience (Auger, 2016; Chandler, 2008; Dudgeon & Holland, 2018; Gray & Cote, 2018; Hopkins et al., 2014; Kingsley et al., 2018; Kirmayer et al., 2000; Kirmayer et al., 2009). With over 60% of young people recognising their traditional Country and over 50% identifying with their specific cultural group (AIHW, 2018, p.7), these connections are extremely important for young Indigenous people. International research with Indigenous youth in colonised countries like Australia has also shown links to Country and place works as a protective factor against the intergenerational trauma and poor SEWB outcomes that are the legacy of colonisation (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008; Dickerson et al., 2014; Dudgeon & Holland, 2018; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Gray & Cote, 2018; Snowshoe et al., 2017; Westerman, 2010b).

Knowledge of, and engagement with, aspects of [Indigenous] culture', is indeed associated with a range of positive outcomes, including better mental health, less substance use, more prosocial behavior, more school success, and lower suicide rates (Gray & Cote, 2018, p. 2).

Gray (2018) reiterates and expands on the idea that understanding the role of cultural connectedness as a mitigator against suicide, mental health and other social and health issues can “broaden the conceptualization of the protective nature of affiliation to one’s own ancestral culture” (p.159). Snowshoe (2017, p.4) found that connection to culture and land are components in both positive mental health and resilience and may help explain why some of our young people manage to not only survive but also thrive in the face of significant adversity (Kirmayer, 2011, p.607). Prioritising and investing in Indigenous communities, families and individuals to strengthen, re-vitalise and rebuild connectedness is fundamental to reducing the health disparities experienced and to bringing sustained change across social determinants of health and wellbeing (Gray & Cote, 2018, p. 5).

This cultural connectedness and connections to Country are interrupted when people move away from their countries for various reasons. The data shows that approximately 39% of young Indigenous young people reside in major cities, followed by 24% in inner regional areas, 24% in outer regional areas- and approximately 17% live in remote or very remote areas (AIHW, 2018, p.4). These area classifications¹ follow the Australian Bureau of Statistics definitions that are centred on access to and restriction of goods, services and social interaction (ABS, 2017, p. 12).

¹ ABS definitions to classify remoteness.

Major cities of Australia are defined as those areas where geographic distance imposes minimal restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.

Inner regional Australia is defined as those areas where geographic distance imposes some restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.

Outer regional Australia is defined as those areas where geographic distance imposes a moderate restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction. (ABS)

Remote Australia is defined as those areas where geographic distance imposes a high restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.

Very Remote Australia is defined as those areas where geographic distance imposes the highest restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.

The geographic dispersion of young peoples is impacted by many factors including cultural and historic connections to Country, education, forced removal, incarceration, and voluntary migrations (Greenop, 2013; Peters & Andersen, 2013; Taylor, 2013).

In terms of very remote areas, almost 70% of young people are Indigenous (AIHW, 2018, p. 4). This is associated with many challenges of accessing services such as education and health care and highlights the vast diversity that exists, culturally and socially in relation to geographic location. Boulton (2016) examines the complexities of remoteness in detail and raises serious and very difficult questions around the ineffectiveness and the inability of decade-long programs to impact positively on the outcomes for children and young people in remote and very remote communities (Boulton, 2016, p. 2). 'Catastrophic rates' (p.2) of preventable disease, suicide and incarceration and continued lower education and employment attainments limit opportunity and stifle potential (AIHW, 2018).

Boulton (2016) also points out the media depictions of these two geographically and culturally distinct groups to highlight various other issues. He states almost every week in the national media there are reports of events concerning catastrophic rates of disease, youth suicide and lack of engagement in school in remote Aboriginal communities. These stories run in parallel with uplifting ones about young Aboriginal men and women getting a job in the mining industry or of young Aboriginal people from a regional town achieving an academic first for the family and community. The contrast in the state of social and emotional welfare remote and regional of Aboriginal young people reflects the emergence in the past few decades of two separate demographic layers of Aboriginal society. (Boulton, 2016, p.1).

The scope of this project does not permit a close examination of the impacts of geographic remoteness; however, several of the Storytellers have relocated from remote and regional communities to pursue their own education. The intersectionality of Indigenous identity means that these young people have connections to people and places across cultural and geographic areas. The urban/remote binary is too simplistic to appreciate the very complex challenges faced and the disparities between the "two separate demographic layers of Aboriginal society" (Boulton, 2016, p. 1) that can be 'heard' in some of the yarns

shared. Issues of Racism, identity, expectations and negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media, and in some case by us- Aboriginal people, are some of the major challenges remote and regional young people face when young Aboriginal peoples move to urban or city areas.

Cultural identity

Our cultural identities are reflective of our values, beliefs, worldviews and histories. To understand Indigenous identities within Australia we need to be cognisant of the legacy of policies and practices that have regulated and controlled how we are defined in all aspects of our lives (Bodkin-Andrews, 2016, 2010.) Diverse cultural groups, identities and the complex relationships that are central to us were reduced to the generic terms of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians, resulting in a false homogenisation of Indigenous cultures and practices.

...despite the existence of hundreds of self-identifying and named autonomous groups across the continent, the original inhabitants of Australia have always been understood and named by Europeans as a singular group. (Bourke et al., 1994, p. 269)

From this imposed understanding of our identities, a narrative of deficiency and hopelessness emerged.

Assumptions and accusations of Indigenous deficit have saturated the history of cultural relations in Australia since contact and are a key component of Racism and prejudice. There has been substantial research to show that colonial ideology adhered to constructed 'truths' about Aboriginal people that were underpinned by notions of deficiency and had very little to do with how Aboriginal people saw themselves (Fforde, 2013, Page 164.)

The dominance of negative and Racist narratives and representations are key reference points for many non-Indigenous people in terms of their knowledge, values and experiences, with us (Dodson, 1994; Langton, 1993). The negative stereotypes, deficit narratives and Racism on identity can have profound impacts on the formation of a strong and resilient cultural identity.

If being surrounded by deficit discourse associated with identity affects performance across a range of groups, there is significant reason to believe that its saturation in the Australian Indigenous context has substantial impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Fforde, 2013, p. 16).

Flanagan et al (2011), working with Naskapi youth in Quebec, have identified clear links between strong cultural identity and decreased levels of both physical and relational aggression and clarify ‘the essential role of positive cultural identity in the development of adolescent well-being’ (p.159). The formation of a strong cultural identity is also a key factor in developing and maintaining resilience (Flanagan et al 2011),

Many young Indigenous peoples live in cities and/or regional areas (AIHW, 2018). Access to education, employment, health care and training opportunities has facilitated the movement of some young people from traditional or cultural spaces to a predominantly non-Indigenous area. Wexler (2009) articulates the complexities around this clearly:

As Indigenous young people negotiate these different (sometimes contradicting) notions of selfhood, they are engaged in a creative endeavour. They are constrained by ideas of the past and the present—those found in their traditional culture as well as those embedded in the dominant society. The outcomes of these processes—the development of a clear sense of self—can be fundamental in supporting healthy development. (Wexler, 2009, p. 269)

These cultural connections play an important part in a young person’s ability to cope with external and internal pressures and to the development of strong and effective resilience. In Australia, a body of growing but limited literature is becoming available to explore our ideas of identity, culture and resilience in urban or city-based contexts (Azzopardi, 2018; Greenop, 2013) and the Storytellers in this project are contributing to an emerging narrative grounded in strength and connection. Understanding the dynamic interconnectedness of culture, spirituality, identity, family and community and Land/Country as defining, influencing and impacting on the other is central to appreciating how this actualises in daily life (Ypinazar et al., 2007).

Social and Emotional Well-Being

The impact of culture and cultural identity on understandings of health and well-being are profound and multidimensional (Hart et al., 2009; Ungar, 2008). Indigenous definitions or understandings of health are holistic in nature and

grounded in culture and Country. The idea of wellness and health is seen in relation to all other aspects of your life (Reading, 2009; Kirmayer, 2003).

Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) as an encompassing term recognises and is tied intrinsically to a holistic approach to health that is grounded in connections to Country and culture, spirituality, family and community (Dudgeon, 2018). The term SEWB also encompasses the historic and contemporary policies and practices that have impacted profoundly on Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous scholar Professor Dudgeon and others (2014) have defined SEWB as a concept that is inclusive of culturally defined relationships with Country, family, community, Elders, Ancestors and spirituality. The concept includes ideas of self-determination and an embedded understanding of the socio-historical consequences and ongoing impacts felt in our communities. It brings together the major components of our overall place in the world, and is predicated on Country, culture and identity as central to positive health and wellbeing. The importance of people and place to this understanding of health and of possible interventions and supports is fundamental.

Supporting strong community functioning indicated by the effective exercise of collective self-determination and cultural continuity was proposed as a critical community-level focus for any successful Indigenous suicide prevention activity (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018, p. 168).

This broader understanding of SEWB takes into account a social and cultural determinant model and is in contrast to more reductionist and medically derived models that have severe limitations to address the population-wide health disadvantages experienced by Indigenous people (Durey, 2010)

The National Strategic Framework for Indigenous Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing (2017-2023) is based on a whole of life definition of health and they define SEWB as:

In broad terms, social and emotional wellbeing is the foundation for physical and mental health for Indigenous peoples. It is a holistic concept, which results from a network of relationships between individuals, family, kin and community. It also recognises the importance of connection to land, culture, spirituality and ancestry, and how these affect the individual. (Gee et al., 2014, p. 55)

Respectful and authentic engagement with Indigenous people and frameworks will facilitate more positive, and appropriate outcomes and provide for more informed, safe and collaborative intercultural spaces that can facilitate real change in health disparities and inequalities (Ypinazar et al., 2007).

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)

Inequalities in health arise from inequalities in society. Small differences in society result in small health inequalities; large differences result in large health inequalities. Differences in access to health care matter, as do differences in lifestyle, but the key determinants of social inequalities in health lie in the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age (Marmot, 2006, p.512)

The social and environmental conditions in which we all live are major drivers of our overall health and well-being (AIHW, 2018, p.15; Carson, 2007, p.3). Social determinants of health include social, economic and physical environments as well as individual genetics, characteristics and behaviours. Systemic disadvantage has resulted in entrenched inequalities and consistently compromised outcomes and opportunities for many Indigenous Australians across a range of determinants (AIHW, 2018, p. 14)

Education and employment are two key determinants that have seen some improvements, with year 12 or equivalent qualifications raising from Aboriginal Terms 47% to 65% over the last decade (p.18). In terms of geographic location, these standards were experienced primarily in cities or large regional centres. National literacy and numeracy in very remote areas are only being met by 4 in 10 Indigenous young people (p.16). Statistics on employment follow a similar pattern in terms of remoteness, with substantially higher unemployment experienced in remote areas where only 22% of the population is in the workforce. Unemployment is one of the most common stressors young Indigenous people experience (AIHW, 2018, p. 20).

The consequences of other factors that are interconnected and interrelated such as chronic health conditions and the burden of disease, high levels of family violence and poverty and extremely high levels of incarceration experienced by young people are also major stressors that have devastating consequences on the immediate health of youth and the longer-term impact on Indigenous health overall (Hopkins et al., 2014).

The impact of this is recognised in the inclusion of incarceration rates in the national Close the Gap Strategy 2020, with a target to reduce the number of incarcerated young people by 30% (<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au>).

Disparities in SDoH account for:

more than half of the health gap (53%) could be explained by 11 factors— 5 socioeconomic factors (employment and hours worked, level of schooling, qualifications, housing adequacy and household income) and 6 health risk factors An estimated 11% of the total health gap could be attributed to the overlap, or interactions, between the social determinants and health risk factors. This is because the 2 sets of factors influence each other (AIHW, 2018, p. 24).

The following table provides comparison across a range of determinants between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth:

Health and wellbeing	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Health status – Percentage of 15-34-year old who reported health as excellent or very good	54	69
Mortality – Percentage of 10-24-year-old- all causes Per 100,000	70	27
Personal Stress-Percentage of 15-24-year-old who experienced personal stress in the last year	70	58
Psychological distress- Percentage of 18-24-year old with high or very high levels of stress	33	13
Education- Percentage of 20 - 24-year old who have completed year 12 or equivalent	65	89
Employment - Percentage of 20 -24-year-old not in employment and /or training	42	13
Housing – Rates of homelessness 10-24-year old's (per 100)	4	0.4

(AIHW, 2018)

The current outcomes experienced are profoundly felt on all levels of our young people's lives and unreasonably require of them high levels of resilience and strength to survive.

Specific determinants for Indigenous young people

Despite Australia's adolescents having one of the best health profiles globally, Indigenous adolescents have largely been left behind. Adequate responses will require intersectoral actions, including a health system responsive to the needs of Indigenous adolescents. Without a specific focus on adolescents, Australia will not redress Indigenous health inequalities. (Azzopardi et al., 2018, p. 776)

In order to understand the role of social determinants on overall Indigenous wellbeing, it is important to acknowledge that these determinants are predicated on Western cultural and social norms and often fail to include issues such as socio-historical factors (Boulton, 2016; Fogarty, 2018;). These additional and specific factors need to be examined and where possible measured and articulated to provide a more culturally contextualised understanding of the social determinants at play in an Indigenous context. These additional determinants are discussed below.

Intergenerational Trauma

A recent Coroner's Report into the deaths of Indigenous children and young people in the Kimberley Region, WA (Foglian, 2019) highlights the complex and multiple stressors that young Aboriginal people face and the distinctiveness of intergenerational trauma, knowledge and connection to previous suicides, poverty and hopelessness that impacts on Aboriginal youth. (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018; Foglian, 2019; Westerman, 2010b). These issues have been clearly identified as mitigating factors in contexts where colonisation and subsequent assimilationist, isolationist and racist policies have continued to have profoundly detrimental impacts, and where addressing these impacts requires personal, cultural and systemic change (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018; Gray & Cote, 2018; Hopkins et al., 2014).

The intergenerational transmission of the effects of historical trauma involves a multitude of physiological, psychological, and social mechanisms, and collective recovery from this trauma will require an equally broad set of strategies (Gray & Cote, 2018, p. 2).

The Coroner's Report highlights the ongoing impact of disadvantage and past government policies on young people and on the ability of young people and adults to connect with culture as a means for both strength and healing.

...for Aboriginal people, disadvantage is shaped by the accumulated life experiences of social, economic and cultural inequality and exclusion. Disadvantage is also shaped by historic experiences such as the loss of lands and languages, and the forced removal and relocation of children from family and cultural settings, the trauma of which continues to affect individuals and families today. This impacts on the ability to draw on the cultural and collective strength of family and community to enable self-determination (Foglian, 2019, p. 11).

This report clearly articulates the very dire situations that are impacting on young Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and paints a very stark and sobering picture of the scale of physical, emotional and cultural ill health that is often 'normalised'. While the Coroner's Report focussed on the Kimberley, the impact of intergenerational trauma and loss on Aboriginal youth, their families and communities at a national level is profound. The unacceptable suicide rate is a very real barometer of the SEWB of Indigenous young people (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018).

Racism

While there are many risk factors that contribute to psychological distress, Racism, like intergenerational trauma, is a specific determinant for Indigenous people. Racism impacts on over a third of young Indigenous young people and is a significant negative contributor to overall health and wellbeing (Priest, 2011). The most common forms of Racism experienced include racial comments or jokes, racist name calling, and lack of trust based on Aboriginality (AIHW, 2018 p.10).

Racism was a part of the founding ideology of colonial Australia and has informed our laws, practices and policies as well as our sense of national identity. Inherent in the colonisation of Australia was a belief system that devalued, dehumanised and dismissed Indigenous Australians as less than human. These beliefs are at the very core of our institutions and have been part of the Australian narratives since European invasion (Dudgeon, 2000; Purdie, 2010).

Three main forms of Racism commonly described are institutional, interpersonal and internalised. Institutionalised Racism occurs when the production and control of and access to resources within society maintain unequitable and unequal opportunities across cultural/racial groups are based on perceived racial superiority. These inequalities are then reflected in interpersonal Racism and in the experiences mentioned exacerbating and maintaining inequality at an interpersonal level (Berman, 2008). Internalised Racism is the internalisation of the negative stereotypes, values and views of the dominant culture.

The consequences of Racism for young Indigenous people can be far-ranging and include implications for both physical and mental health as well as a range of other issues including education, negative engagement with the justice system and other government agencies (AIHW, 2018; Paradies, 2012; Priest et al., 2017). Late adolescence and early adulthood have been identified as times of heightened vulnerability to psychological distress resulting from experiences of Racism (Priest, 2011). Evidence also indicates that the mental health difficulties that develop at this stage of life are likely to persist and adversely affect educational, social and health outcomes in subsequent years (Priest, 2011, p. 548).

Data from various sources around self-reported experiences of Racism shows that young people who experienced it were twice as at risk of developing anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation and/or actualisation and over three times more likely to have their overall health compromised (AIHW, 2018, p.91, Azzopardi, 2018). Indigenous youth simultaneously function in many social, cultural and political spaces within the dominant society. These young people attend educational, employment and social institutions that are historically and foundationally non-Indigenous. The fact that most of the Racism reported by young people occurred in educational settings (33%) highlights the institutionalised normalisation of Racism in Australia (AIHW, 2018, p.91).

The everyday experiences of Racism and negative stereotyping are a substantial risk factor; thus, addressing Racism is a critical aspect of overall SEWB and a core determinant of Indigenous health that is beyond our control (Bodkin-Andrews, 2016; Priest, 2011).

Racism is a recognisable upstream determinant of poor health and while it is necessary to support the development of strategies for young Indigenous people to build resilience around Racism, any initiatives, programs or policies that do not take into account the necessity of challenging institutional and interpersonal Racism will produce limited, if any, sustainable change in health and wellbeing outcomes (Browne-Yung et al., 2013; Larson et al., 2007).

Connection to place and land

The centrality of Country and place, people and the spiritual, cultural and physical connections to Indigenous young people are the foundations of strong SEWB (Snowshoe, 2017, Kirmayer 2011; Gray, 2018, Hopkins, 2014). Many of the key factors identified in this project confirm the findings of other research looking at overall SEWB in Aboriginal youth and include:

- Connection to culture and Country -
- Strong connection to family
- A strong sense of self and cultural identity
- Ability to navigate complex intercultural spaces such as education and employment (Fogarty, 2018; Hopkins, 2014, 2018; Walter, 2017; Young, 2018; Zubrick 2014).

The central role of cultural connectedness has been well identified in national and international literature and is widely understood as a determinant of health for many Indigenous peoples (Auger, 2018, 2016; Chandler, 2008; Dudgeon, 2018; Gray, 2018; Hopkins et al., 2014; Kirmayer, 2011; Kingsley, 2009, 2018. Lines, 2019; Young, 2019). Connection is grounded in a sense of belonging to and with Country. This strong connection to place is evident in the yarns and in the current data around Aboriginal youth wellbeing (AIHW, 2018; Lines, 2019; Young, 2019).

The role of Country and connection to it as determinants of health from a youth perspective is validated in the Stories shared. Gaining more insight into this youth-centred perspective is “particularly important, as it reflects both current and future health determinants” (Lines, 2019, p. 9).

Understandings of mental health

...there will be similarities across cultures, differing constructs of mental health and wellness may also result in differences in presentation of some symptoms, importance placed on symptoms and the meaning attached to symptoms. It is, therefore, essential to explore Indigenous constructs of mental health and well-being.... (Adermann, 2007, p. 75)

Conceptualisations of mental health are informed and enacted through lenses that reflect the worldviews, values and expectations of specific cultural and age groups and communities (Ganesharajah, 2009). In Australia, dominant understandings and definitions, and therefore, diagnosis and treatment, have been historically enacted through Eurocentric lenses that have been developed and articulated through colonised spaces (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Disciplines such as psychiatry and psychology developed within these spaces. As medical disciplines, they were part of a process of colonisation and as such were 'complicit' in the process of dehumanisation of Indigenous populations in colonised nations (Dudgeon et al., 2014; Durey & Thompson, 2012; Durey et al., 2014).

As a society, in Australia, there have been significant changes in the way in which mental health is understood and enacted medically, socially and culturally (O'Brien, 2007). In national and international contexts, contemporary discourses around mental health are attempting to move away from the previous one-dimensional Western biomedical model that laid the foundations for the pathologisation of mental health diagnosis and treatment (Clark, 2014, p. 13; Geia et al., 2013a). A growing awareness of the need for a multi-layered and informed approach to understanding concepts of mental health from varying cultural and social perspectives is currently informing both research and practice and is being led by many Indigenous scholars and practitioners. (Baba et al., 2014; Dudgeon & Holland, 2018; Vicary & Westerman, 2004; Westerman, 2010a).

Issues of cultural understandings of mental health that recognise the ongoing impact of risk factors, such as colonisation, Racism and cultural loss as well as acknowledging and working with the strengths or facilitators of health such as cultural renewal, individual and community resilience and strong connection to identity and Country should be at the core of discussions around and between Indigenous people,

mental health and well-being (Auger, 2018; Dawson et al., 2017; Dudgeon & Holland, 2018; Gray & Cote, 2018; Kirmayer et al., 2003).

Despite the shifts that have occurred, continued health and social disparities and inequities show a failure to provide adequate and appropriate care for and of Indigenous Australians (Azzopardi et al., 2018). These disparities are a legacy of colonialism. Thus, any attempt to define Indigenous mental health needs to be grounded in Indigenous worldviews and to be inclusive and respectful of cultural and historical contexts and experiences (Azzopardi et al., 2018; Vicary & Westerman, 2004). Non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners are an important thread in this.

In Australia, a racialized social structure underpins the model of care in both health and criminal justice systems that reflects white, Anglo-Australian cultural dominance. This dominance is often normalized, invisible and unquestioned and subjugates Indigenous knowledge, beliefs and values. (Durey et al., 2014, p. 3).

Understandings around concepts such as mental health must be inclusive of self-reflective practice and a willingness to address the structural Racism that is normalised and often invisible to those who do not experience it. Researchers must be prepared to be self- and socially reflective, apply critical approaches to research and practice and have the courage to “focus on moments within institutional rules and parameters where real and lasting change can be achieved” (Sandercock, 2004, p. 123).

Indigenous youth and understandings of mental health

... it is necessary to continue to explore and listen to the voices of Indigenous people to further understand both their cultural beliefs and their lived experience concerning mental health and mental health problems. (Ypinazar et al., 2007, p. 468)

Literature has highlighted the needs for understanding mental health within the Indigenous Australian youth populations. Westerman (2010b), for example, recommended that Indigenous youth as a specific group need to be examined through a holistic and culturally informed lens that encompasses social, cultural and emotional wellbeing (Westerman, 2010b).

Despite being only 5% of the overall Australian youth population, this relatively small population of young people experience the worst health outcomes.

Indigenous people under 18 years of age accounted for about 30 percent of suicide deaths in that age group over 2007–2011, despite...only

representing 5.5 per cent of the national population ... Indigenous 15–24-year-olds were over five times as likely to die by suicide as their non-Indigenous peers. (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018, p. 166)

One or more personal and major life stressors, such as death, unemployment, serious illness and Racism were experienced by two out of every three young people, with one in eight reporting three or more stressors experienced (AIHW, p.9, 2018). Young Indigenous Australians are also experiencing high levels of psychological distress, including depression and anxiety symptoms:

In 2014–15, most Indigenous people aged 15–24 (67%) experienced low to moderate levels of psychological distress in the previous month, while 33% experienced high to very high levels of psychological distress (AIHW, 2018, p. 11).

Numerous interventions have failed to effect sustainable change and issues such as access and the lack of cultural understanding and safety require community-led interventions to be prioritised.

It is currently estimated that up to 40% of Aboriginal youth (aged 13–17) will experience some form of mental health problem within their lifetime. Of greater concern is the evidence that indicates that Aboriginal youth fail to access mental health services commensurate with this need. This is due, in part, to the characteristically monocultural nature of service delivery of existing services. (Westerman, 2010b, p. 212)

Staying strong and well: Indigenous resilience

Resiliency is being strong on the inside, having a courageous spirit. One cannot teach resiliency with words or posters. What we need are transformative experiences. (Brokenleg, 2012, p. 4)

The many risk factors associated with being young and Indigenous in Australia are all understood to impact negatively on social, emotional and physical growth. Yet over half (58%) of our youth who are living in high family-level risk contexts have been identified as being resilient (Zubrick et al., 2005). Understanding the strengths and adaptations of young people, their families and communities who are managing in very adverse contexts can inform broader and more culturally relevant and nuanced definitions of resilience and strength and build on the obvious strengths and capacity of communities, families and individuals (Rudzinski et al., 2017, p. 3).

There is little work done in the Australian context that looks at the perpetual state of crisis that some Aboriginal young people experience and their coping and resilience strategies. There needs to be closer examination of how culture, identity and

community impact on resilience and what specific skills, circumstances and experiences shape responses to crisis and adversity. There also needs to be a critical exploration of the impact of issues such as Racism and intergenerational disadvantage.

Multiple definitions of resilience in the literature include a person's ability to maintain good developmental outcomes despite risk, being able to remain strong under stress and recover from stress, positive adaptation despite adversity and the capacity and ability to navigate a way towards the people, places and experiences that build your strengths (Fleming & Parker, 2007; Luthar, 2015; Ungar, 2012). Some of these definitions provide little or no room for the dynamic and culturally defined ideas of both meaning and operationalisation in Indigenous contexts (Rudzinski et al., 2017). The how, why and when of resilience within a cultural context is often absent or limited, and these accounts have tended to produce more outcome-focussed and static definitions (Brokenleg, 2012; Dawson et al., 2017; Rudzinski et al., 2017). The attainment of wellbeing or of positive outcomes is not a universal fixed idea but rather influenced heavily by sociocultural values and ideas and needs to be understood and assessed with this understanding. Resilience, as a personal or individual trait, conforming to dominant cultural expectations and outcomes, has been challenged and questioned (Teti, 2012; Ungar et al., 2008), and resilience is now being understood as a whole-of life-approach that accounts for the factors and forces that shape us (Wexler, 2009, 2014). Looking at resilience from this multi-dimensional perspective holds great promise, especially if the domains are selected in the context of what is socially and culturally relevant for the population under investigation (Rudzinski et al., 2017, p. 23). The ability to cope or be resilient is a culmination of current and past circumstances, experiences and developmental history and can be an indicator of future wellbeing (Burack, 2007).

Resilience, then, is a fluid and dynamic process that is not necessarily carried through into all life domains or into developmental stages.

The multidimensionality of wellness and resilience ensure that it cannot be viewed or understand as a monolithic construct but rather as a fluid and dynamic process that must be evaluated within specific contexts , stages of development and domain of functioning (Burack, 2007, p. 20).

As a process, resilience is defined as being able to navigate towards and negotiate with internal and external mechanisms that can offer or provide support during stress. The concepts of navigation and negotiation figure strongly in this definition and signal a departure from static understandings of resilience as a defined set of outcomes or culturally neutral processes (Ungar, 2008, p. 225).

Ungar (2008) lists seven interrelated and culturally informed tensions that are found across cultures. The differing levels of influence is contextual and how or if these tensions are navigated impact on the capacity to cope, succeed, develop and sustain resilience individually and collectively (Ungar, 2008, p.231). The cultural and contextual relationships and tensions between people and place, family and communities need to be part of understanding Indigenous resilience. Ungar's tensions are:

- Access to material resources: Availability of economic, health, education, food, clothing and shelter
- Relationships: Relationships with significant family, peers, community – and in the case of the young people in this thesis -connection to place.
- Identity: Personal, cultural and collective.
- Power and Control: Ability to affect change in social physical environments in order to access health resources and the capacity to care for self, family and community
- Cultural adherence: Knowledge of and adherence to cultural practice, values and beliefs
- Social Justice: Experiences and actions related to community and social equity and finding a meaningful role in the ongoing process
- Social Cohesion: The ability to balance the cultural, personal and community/family responsibilities with individual interests and aspirations and the belief in being part of a collective cultural identity. (Ungar, 2008, p.231)

Young people who see themselves and who are seen by others in their family and community as strong and well or resilient are those who can successfully navigate these tensions (Ungar, 2008, p.231). Resilience as a process is the everyday work and energy of families, communities and individuals that strengthens and supports our minds, bodies and spirits (Ungar, 2011).

It is the bonds of family, culture and community that pull together to protect and promote the strength and growth of our young people into healthy adult life (Dudgeon & Holland, 2018).

Understanding resilience from a cultural, geographic and age-specific position can support alternative ways of addressing the social, emotional and mental health issues that are currently confronting Indigenous Australians.

Research in this area is still very limited (Dawson et al., 2017) and we do not fully understand the factors that build strength and wellness or resilience in our young people who live “side-by-side with their ‘mainstream’ neighbours in western settings” (Ungar, 2008). A scoping review on resilience and Canadian youth also found limitations in the definitions that have been largely developed without Indigenous youth input and that may “fail to incorporate unique characteristics of Indigenous perspectives”(Toombs, 2016, p. 4).

In terms of resilience from Indigenous perspectives, there are multiple culturally similar, yet unique understandings and concepts that have been identified as impacting on resilience (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2011). For young Indigenous adults the familial, cultural, social and individual factors that support the development of resilience are only one part of the story.

The impact of structural deficiencies on how you develop and sustain resilience must also be taken into account (Seccombe, 2002).

The widely held view of resiliency as an individual disposition, family trait, or community phenomenon is insufficient. . . resiliency cannot be understood or improved in significant ways by merely focusing on these individual-level factors. Instead careful attention must be paid to the structural deficiencies in our society and to the social policies that families need in order to become stronger, more competent, and better functioning in adverse situations. (Seccombe, 2002, p. 385)

Issues such as systemic Racism, intergenerational trauma and deeply entrenched health disparities across all social determinants are barriers and challenges that have had devastating impacts on Indigenous people, culture and Country.

Additionally, in terms of resilience, the impact of western worldviews has seen the individualisation of collective responsibilities that detract from the power, capacity and potential of a community-based understanding (Dawson et al., 2017; Rudzinski et al., 2017).

The colonial history and reality of Australia has failed to give any real recognition to the strengths and skills that are inherent in Indigenous societies. This post-colonial approach has led to the development and implementation of paternalistic, culturally inappropriate and deficit-based healthcare, housing, employment and education system and policies that are grounded in a myopic and racist discourse (Fogarty, 2018). A shift in research focus to encompass community as well as the personal

dispositions associated with young people and resilience places emphasis on the existing strengths and knowledge of Indigenous young people and communities and widens perspectives on who or what enables or disables resilient behaviours (Toombs, 2016).

Indigenous community or family ability to nurture and prepare young adults for entering into the wider community is dependent on several factors, which include human, social, natural and physical capitals. When these are compromised, threatened or inadequate, the full potential of a community to cope and recover from crisis, chronic stress and prolonged exposure to multiple life stressors are severely compromised, too.

A community's resilience is its social capital, physical infrastructure, and culturally embedded patterns of interdependence that give it the potential to recover from dramatic change, sustain its adaptability, and support new growth that integrates the lessons learned during a time of crisis. (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011, p. 174)

Trauma, stress and crisis are not simply a one-off event but rather a way of life for some Indigenous communities. Individual or even community-based approaches to address this will continue to fail if there is no real attempt to understand the systemic and institutional issues that continue to impact heavily on individuals, communities and cultural groups. Community, cultural and individual resilience are intrinsically linked to the social determinants of health and resilience is not just the individual's capacity to withstand adversity. (Seccombe, 2002).

Catastrophic events, ongoing lack of resources, infrastructure and the inability to access services and goods inhibit and impede a community's ability to nurture and support its young people and to provide the necessary skills to develop strong and lasting social and emotional wellbeing and resilience within its members.

In very practical terms, a community's capacity to provide resources will predict far more the success of individual community members than any singular Herculean effort by one hardy young person. (Ungar 2011, p.1743)

Research has suggested, (Walter 2007) that well-conceived interventions for individuals within family groups and that have community and familial support have the potential to promote and advance the wellbeing of everyone in the family.

Families sit within the wider social and cultural constructs and contexts and have the greatest potential to change realities (Walter, 2007).

Globally, Indigenous young people are living in communities that have been severely depleted of formal and informal resources (Lewis, 2005). This depletion has occurred for various and diverse reasons. In Australia, the emotional, cultural, physical and political landscape created by the colonisation process and subsequent government policies have left many Indigenous communities severely compromised and in a constant state of stress and crisis. Understanding and acting on systematic disadvantage and recognising the pressures it places on the resilience within Indigenous communities is fundamental (Fogarty, 2018; Lewis, 2003; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011)

There is a need to move the conversations around resilience and SEWB to a more political and social context that considers and addresses systemic and prolonged oppression and disadvantage and to “reframe contemporary discourse ... to challenge the dominant narrative around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. (Fogarty, 2018, p.1)

The way we predict processes that promote resilience must be contextualised and meaningful to those involved. Predications of resilience cannot just be based on an individual’s abilities, skills, deficits or other factors, but need to be informed by an understanding of the structural, social and cultural constraints (Fforde, 2013; Fogarty, 2018).

Applying a cultural lens to identify risk and protective factors around resilience can provide a broader context for understanding and supporting the development of resilience in the Indigenous youth population (Hopkins et al., 2014). Defining resilience that takes into account the cultural, social and environmental constraints allows for “more nuanced and hidden forms of adaptation to adversity to be considered as practices of resilience” (Rudzinski et al., 2017, p. 3).

Chapter 3

Theoretical Orientation

These scholars sought to disrupt traditional ways of knowing, while developing 'methodologies and approaches to research that privileged indigenous knowledges, voices, and experiences' (Smith, 2008, p. 8).

Before articulating the theoretical and methodological approaches taken in this research, it is important to understand the cultural, political and academic reasoning informing how this research project was conceptualised and enacted. When researching in an Indigenous space, the historical, social and cultural contexts in which the research takes place need to be both critically and personally examined as part of a critical and decolonising approach to research (Kanuha, 2000, p. 79). As an Indigenous researcher, this decolonising process is nuanced, challenging and transforming and is central to the approaches taken as part of this research.

Culturally safe and critical Indigenous methodological approaches and principles have guided and informed the process and formed a safe and appropriate foundation from which qualitative data were gathered for this research (Denzin et al., 2008; Smith, 1999). The centrality of Indigenous voices and the culturally informed methods for collecting our Stories are fundamental to decolonising approaches (Martin, 2003). This project is grounded in these voices and the research centred on the hearing and retelling the Stories that are reflective of the cultural and social concerns of Indigenous youth.

The growth of research methodologies or practices that actively embed Indigenous voices into the research, not as reference group members or collaborators, as instigators and drivers of Indigenous research, are gaining traction (Mooney-Somers & Maher, 2009; Viswanathan M & et al., 2004). The use of research approaches that build relationships, capacity, trust and importantly provide a culturally safe and secure place for Aboriginal people to begin the dialogue with researchers is an important step.

Current research context

The history of research in Australia sits alongside the history of colonisation, dispossession and Racism – all of which are still the key inhibitors of social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (Holmes et al., 2002).

The historical implications that are embedded within any research done with, for and about Indigenous people are heavily influenced by the prevailing scientific, medical and social narratives and more deeply embedded within ideological standpoints that have created the systematic discrimination and false representation of Indigenous people and issues. This historical legacy has been created at a distance from and without the agency of those who were 'objects' of the western gaze (Rigney, 1999, p. 109). The current health disparities point to research and social processes and practices that have failed to fully consider the voices and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples (Carson, 2007). The consequences of this are felt daily: shortened life expectancy, higher rates of suicide and incarceration, poverty, low education and employment, poor housing -- in fact, across all of the recognised social determinants, Indigenous Australians continue to experience disadvantages (Carson, 2007). The very real and devastating impacts of these disparities experienced by Indigenous Australians have not been adequately addressed by existing approaches and are, in fact, in some key areas, going backwards (AMA, 2018). The importance of finding new or alternative ways of representing Indigenous interests through appropriate research epistemologies and methodologies is more than just theoretical or academic approach. It is also a means of finding culturally safe and appropriate ways to address intergenerational disadvantage.

The multi-dimensional issues, factors and processes that have led to the current reality experienced by many Aboriginal young people began during colonisation and developed over the last two centuries. Limited access to services and resources, past policies of exclusion and segregation, and continuing social, health and economic marginalisation impact heavily on individual and community social and emotional well-being (AMA, 2018; Cunningham, 2012). There is a real need within Indigenous research spaces to apply methodologies that articulate Indigenous youth voices and experiences from a success-based view rather than from the deficit approach that is often taken. Success-based approaches have been taken in this research to provide a framework for recognising, understanding and privileging the capacity and resilience of Indigenous young people.

The basic principles and processes of this research project are aligned with and underpinned by the following multi-theoretical decolonising research frameworks:

- Cultural safety and Aboriginal Terms of Reference
- Critical Indigenous approaches
- Success-based approach
- Primacy of Young Aboriginal voices (Stories) - Yarning

These are described below:

Cultural Safety and Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR)

Cultural safety, a concept first developed in Aotearoa, can be defined as:

An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening. (Williams, 213, 1999).

Cultural safety is about understanding and recognising both past and present issues and factors that have resulted in the health disparities evidenced. It is about reflecting on both individual and insitutional power imbalances and relationships that have resulted because of that historical past.

When applied in an Indigenous research context, culturally safe research practice begins with building relationships with Aboriginal people based on trust and respect.

Neville (2009) builds on this in a research context:

cultural safety begins from the inception of a research idea when relationships are established ..., and extends to the dissemination of the findings. It is about research participants feeling included, respected, and that they can trust the researchers and what they will do with the information shared with them. (p. 72)

In the past, research around Indigenous health has more often than not been driven by and conceived within dominant epistemologies with colonising socio-cultural norms, values and beliefs (Barnes, 2018; Denzin et al., 2008; Sonn, 2012; Swadener et al., 2008).

Vulnerable populations are exposed to research that is driven by dominant epistemologies, research methodologies, and socio-cultural lenses that can exacerbate their vulnerability, negating their socio-cultural reality.... populations are at risk of experiencing inequalities in health experiences and health outcomes, and research beneficial to those being researched is crucial to address disparities.... (Neville, 2009, p.66)

Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) are a culturally informed, developed and designed framework that provides a set of principles and core values to ensure that Indigenous viewpoints, knowledges and experiences are honoured within a research approach (Oxenham, 1999). ATR encompasses the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences associated with a commitment to Indigenous ways of thinking, working and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Indigenous standards are derived, validated and practiced. (Oxenham, 1999). ATR is also a process that incorporates Indigenous core values and principles to establish and to determine Indigenous viewpoints on issues and concerns can be contextualised within an Indigenous context.

This encompasses the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences that are associated with a commitment to Indigenous ways of thinking, working, and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Indigenous standards are derived, validated and practised. These standards will and can vary according to the diverse range of cultural values, beliefs and priorities from within local settings or specific contexts. (Oxenham, 1999, p. 25)

Designing and implementing frameworks or methodological approaches for researching in an Indigenous context has in the past occurred within an academic vacuum. This means that the research, in the past, was mostly conducted within a context that was geographically and culturally distant from the research issues and the appropriate population base. In an Indigenous context, this kind of dislocation between the researchers and researched has had a profound impact on the social, cultural and political discourses that have constructed how Aboriginal people are viewed, understood and treated. Utilising both ATR and culturally safe approaches can help facilitate the conceptualisation and enactment of a culturally safe research project formed within a community and collaborative space. In that space, honours, values and primacy are given to Aboriginal voices and experiences and the relationships are primarily determined by those who are researched, not the researcher themselves (Neville, 2009, p. 72).

The process of decolonization requires new, critically evaluated methodologies and new, ethically and culturally acceptable approaches to the study of indigenous issues. (Porsanger, 2004, p. 104)

Culturally informed and enacted decolonising research approaches are a vehicle for the transformative, institutional and personal change that is required to shift the discourse of deficiency that underpins Indigenous health research.

Cultural awareness, safety and security

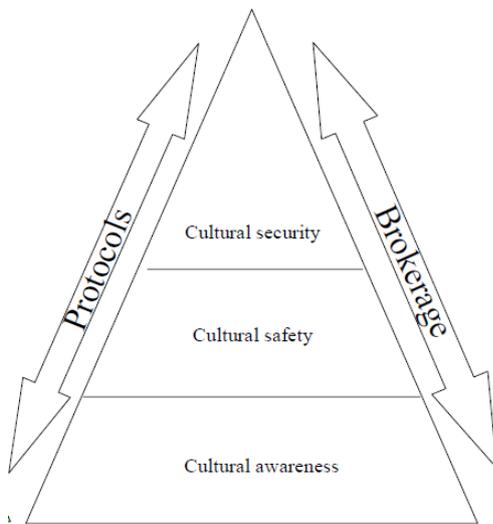
The increasing awareness of the importance of cultural security and safety at an ideological, program and policy level has allowed for more nuanced, culturally appropriate and informed understandings and actions around ideas of mental health and wellness for Indigenous peoples and communities. Cultural safety and security are the enactment of holistic and cultural understandings of Aboriginal health and SEWB. In her cultural security model, adapted from Maslow (1943), Coffin (2007) shows the process of building up cultural security from a solid foundation of awareness. Cultural awareness is a common term in and out of the health arena. Cultural awareness is about obtaining cultural knowledge and involves learning about cultural values and beliefs. Having cultural awareness does not imply or lead to any actions on the ground that will promote changes (Coffin, 2007; 2008).

Cultural safety is about the consumers' experience, the care they are given in accessing the services, and the approaches taken while providing services. It is about examining power and cultural differences in terms of the rights of the patient and requires a level of self-reflection by the practitioner (Territory, 2016).

In relation to Indigenous health, cultural safety provides a decolonising model of practice based on dialogue, communication, power sharing and negotiation, and the acknowledgment of white privilege. These actions are a means to challenge Racism at personal and institutional levels, and to establish trust in health care encounters. (CATSINaM, 2017b, p. 11)

Cultural security is a commitment to the principle of self-determination for Indigenous people within the health care system and in other institutions, such as, education and justice. Cultural security provides legitimacy and a framework for Indigenous cultural rights, values and expectations. It is not just about service provision or providers:

Cultural security refers to the embedded structures, policies, workforce attributes and other elements required to enable health consumers to experience cultural security (Northern Territory Department of Health, 2016, p.7).



(Coffin, p.22, 2008)

Cultural safety and security are essential components to working effectively in any health or research context but are of particular importance when engaging with historically marginalised groups (Coffin, 2007; Westerman, 2004; Westerman, 2010b). Many of the mental health services and practitioners that Indigenous youth come in contact with are Non-Aboriginal health practitioners and many lack basic cultural awareness and have little or no understanding of the practice of cultural security and safety. This can compound problems in an already inadequate use of services.

It is the cultural safety and security in the research process that also needs closer examination (Neville, 2009). As clearly identified by Coffin(2007) and others, cultural safety and security at all levels of service development and delivery need to be identified and embedded through the specific cultural protocols and practices of the communities and age groups that access or, in some cases, fail to access services or programs.

Westerman (2010) places emphasis on increasing access to mental health services by Aboriginal youth by integrating cultural competencies at organisational and practitioner level, in line with the clinical competency frameworks. How this might look and operate is dependent on how young people themselves value, define and identify areas of cultural need and concern based on cultural values, beliefs and

experiences (Reid & Taylor, 2011). In a very practical and operational sense, there is very little literature that provides practitioners with the ideas, beliefs and views of how young Aboriginal people view cultural competency and safety (NACCHO, 2019). To achieve cultural competency in a mental health care setting and to provide a safe and empowering healing environment that intergrates the cultural values and world views of the individuals and communities that they service, there needs to be open and valued collaboration, not just consultation, with young people from identifying needs through to research, policy and program development (Auger, 2018; Walker & St Pierre-Hansen, 2009).

While there has been much work done on raising cultural awareness within the health context, there is a real need to go beyond the notion of being aware. Focuses should also not on just establishing a code of practice and conduct that fosters high levels of cultural safety in services and in research but the operationalisation and evaluation of those initiatives are critical (Berry & Crowe; Brown, 2006; McClelland, 2011; Pacquiao, 2008; Shahid et al., 2013; Smye, 2002). Westerman (2010) sees this deficit in culturally competent services as one of the major factors preventing Aboriginal clients from accessing services.

Westerman also reiterates the need and ability to measure and define cultural competency in the same way as clinical competencies, ensuring minimum standards of behaviour and practice (2010.) The measurement of these is another area that needs close attention from both researchers and practitioners - how can we understand basic needs without full and open discussion of what that actually means from an Indigenous perspective?

Westerman (2010) and Coffin (2007) are strong advocates of a process that is both informed and enacted through a model of cultural competence and it is essential to be able to develop this framework or model in consultation with age-specific groups. What may be culturally secure and safe for older Aboriginal people may not be appropriate or safe for youth seeking support from mental health services. The need for research that specifically addresses the needs of the youth demographic is imperative to establishing services grounded in a process that enables young people to feel both safe in accessing services and secure in the spaces - culturally, physically and psychologically.

Critical Indigenous Approaches

Critical Indigenous inquiry begins with the concerns of Indigenous people. It is assessed in terms of the benefits it creates for them. The work must represent Indigenous persons honestly, without distortion or stereotype, and the research should honor Indigenous knowledge, customs, and rituals. It should not be judged in terms of neo-colonial paradigms. (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 6)

The basic premise of a critical Indigenous research approach outlined in the quote above is echoed in Australian context also. Indigenous Australian Academics have very similar foundational components as core of their definition of Indigenous methodology - the importance of Aboriginal voices, perspectives and experiences and that Indigenous research frameworks are “socially situated, partial and grounded in subjectivities and experiences of everyday life” (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 2). There are four principles identified that have placed importance on cultural values, beliefs, experiences and knowledge as central (Martin, 2003, p. 205):

- Recognising Indigenous worldviews, knowledges and realities as distinctive
- Honouring Aboriginal protocols, values, beliefs, Spirituality and Connection to Country as essential social and cultural mores
- Understanding and emphasising the historic, social and political contexts and experiences that resulted
- Privileging of Aboriginal voices and experiences.

Critical Indigenous methodologies are dependent on localised, culturally specific and transformative knowledge and practices throughout the research process (Smith, 1999).

Indigenous researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) identified eight key questions clearly aligned with the principles mentioned previously.

What research do we want done? Who is it for? What difference will it make? Who will carry it out? How do we want the research done? How will we know it is worthwhile? Who will own the research? Who will benefit? (Smith, 2000, p. 239).

These questions can and should be asked of all researchers but specifically of researchers involved in Indigenous research. These key questions form part of the political and cultural responsibilities of doing research using critical Indigenous methodological approaches.

Smith (1999) links these approaches and responsibilities to working within cultural, human-rights and social-justice frameworks to reclaim, revitalise and to support the struggle for self-determination of Indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999, p. 142). This approach holds researchers accountable to community, to participants and to understanding that the ethics, values, cultural protocols and overall worldviews of Indigenous peoples must be considered as part of the methodology (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010, p. 2).

In practice this means that researcher or practitioner must locate or position themselves, understand and reflect on their own role in both the consumption and production of new informed knowledges. Understanding the positions that you as a researcher hold in your community, in the academy are core components of the research methodology that seeks not only to represent and articulate experiences and realities but also to explicitly require researchers to examine their own inherent biases and unearned privileges (Mertens, 2010). Relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal communities and individuals are also fundamental components of this research approach. The research process is grounded on the important and essential roles that communities have in owning and controlling how and why research is conducted within their cultural and social space (Neville, 2009).

The issues of health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities is well-documented; however it is these kinds of fundamental changes to the 'doing' of research that can provide new lenses to view entrenched and chronic SEWB disparities experienced by Aboriginal young people. Critical Indigenous methodological approaches act as a clear pathway for community-identified issues or concerns to be centralised, prioritised, researched and articulated.

Giving voice to those who are otherwise silenced in the production of knowledge contributes to a deeper understanding of the localized discourses of resistance that permeate disadvantaged communities. Researchers, academics, students, policy makers, and other community members, who become the audience to the lived experiences of research participants, are forced to consider the truth claims of others through these 're-presentations'.(Ungar, 2003 , p. 94)

Indigenous critical social research approaches actively seek to challenge and redefine scientific approaches and to provide a space within the research landscape for the voices, lived experiences and realities of Indigenous people while maintaining academic rigour and accountability (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010; Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2012). The growing number of Indigenous voices and the collaborations that are being developed make it clear that researchers, practitioners and, more importantly, Indigenous peoples and communities are demanding greater representation and input into defining and understanding our specific cultural, health, research and social needs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Rigney, 1999; Ungar, 2005).

Critical Indigenous and qualitative approaches provide a good match in exploring the diversity and cultural realities of Aboriginal youth living in an urban context. Critical Indigenous methodologies provide a legitimate space for research that demands Indigenous people to be the investigators rather than the investigated, and they allow the young Indigenous peoples, families and communities to create and form own realities (Porsanger, 2004; Ungar, 2003, p.92).

Success-based approaches

The disparities between the SEWB outcomes experienced by our young people and their non-Indigenous counterparts have been clearly articulated and provided context to the overall picture or story; however, there is a growing trend in both research and practice to start looking at our strengths (Fforde, 2013; Fogarty, 2018). We need to shift the current gaze of practice and research from the deficit approaches that have clearly not been effective (Fforde, 2013; Fogarty, 2018).

This perspective has done little to change real outcomes and has created large inventories of deficits, with limited tools or resources for families, individuals or communities to make long-lasting and effective change. The negative and often distressing view of Aboriginal youth paints landscape often depicted or read as oppressive, hopeless and dimensionless (LaBoucane-Benson, 2005). This reinforces conflicting and contradictory portraits of our young peoples as living seriously disturbed lives in dysfunctional communities. The cultural instability, marginality and hopelessness that dominate these narratives fail to take into account cultural strengths and validity (Waldram, 2004).

Such narratives have a devastating impact on our communities and are often normalised as the only story (Crooks et al., 2010; Fogarty, 2018). Deficit discourses dominate Aboriginal health, and Aboriginality in general and greatly reaffirm colonial ideology around race in Australia. Our Aboriginality has become problematised and Aboriginal people and culture became a problem to be solved or a people to be saved.

Discourses of deficit, ... occur when discussions and policy aimed at alleviating disadvantage become so mired in narratives of failure and inferiority that Indigenous people themselves are seen as the problem, and a reductionist and essentialising vision of what is possible becomes all pervasive. (Fogarty, 2018, p.2)

Moving away from this narrative requires a shift in our thinking and practice. Strengths-based approaches are an attempt to both counter and reframe the dominant deficit narrative in terms of strengths, resilience, cultural identity and knowledge. In an Indigenous youth context, these are approaches that centre the individual, family and community and recognise the importance of the multiple factors and environments that have influenced our lives. As the investigators of our own stories, Indigenous peoples offer unique yet diverse perspectives and narratives to counter the dominant deficit discourses. Having lived the reality of the gloomy statistics that hundreds of years of research has helped to perpetuate, finding ways to explore our strengths, cultural and personal, is fundamental to challenge the stories *about* us. Ecologically and culturally grounded ways that recognise and focus on our resilience, our abilities, our knowledge and capacity rather than continuing to see us as a problem to be solved or an issue to research, is an exciting and challenging approach to research (Crooks, 2010). It is challenging in that this change of approach requires institutional level support and action. Research projects on or about Indigenous peoples or cultures need to be led by people and approaches that support challenging systemic and individualised discourses of defeat and hopelessness (Fforde, 2013; Fogarty, 2018). Privileging Indigenous voices in this is the foundation of the research process, from concept to fulfilment.

Fogarty (2018) sees success-based approaches to Indigenous people's "set of conceptual frameworks for Indigenous health development" (p.9) not as a uniform set of policy or protocols or as an answer and antidote to deficit approaches.

Scerra (2012) and Saint-Jacques (2009) suggest that the following six key principles underpin a success-based approach:

- Every individual, family, group and community have strengths- move the focus to strengths rather than pathology
- The community is a rich source of social and cultural capital- community driven responses to issues and factors
- Interventions are based on client self-determination – in an Indigenous context this must also address issues of overall self-determination
- Collaboration is central – building valued and lasting relationships with Aboriginal people and communities and acknowledging the knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal people
- Outreach as a preferred mode of intervention- relationship and community driven and located services
- All people have the inherent capacity to learn, grow and change- a belief in and acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples' ability to continue to adapt and change. (Scerra, 2012)

Acknowledgment of the strengths and positive assets or cultural capital inherent in Indigenous peoples and communities has been largely absent in dominant narratives. Aboriginality or Aboriginal culture is often seen as less a protective factor than a risk (Priest, 2017); however, the principles outlined above are grounded in prioritising personal and community cultural knowledge, strengths and successes and using those to facilitate positive outcomes and sustainable change. Achieving the principles outlined is predicated on more inclusive, collaborative and culturally safe approaches.

These kinds of approaches have the potential to broaden the narratives and to provide positive frameworks that are based on the strengths and protective factors, such as culture and cultural identity, family, Country, environmental factors and encompassing holistic views of SEWB. These, in turn, will support healthy development and capacity of the individuals, families and communities to build resilience when faced with adverse factors or risks (AIHW, 2018). They can enable a closer examination of both the protective and harmful processes and practices that Aboriginal young people encounter in their everyday lives.

Yarning/storytelling

Storytelling or yarning in Indigenous Australian cultures is central to passing on cultural knowledge, practices and Stories of family and Country (Geia, 2013, p.15).

Stories span the Creation times through to historical and social realities of the present and is widely respected as a source of knowledge, wisdom, and affirmation of identity. It is used in everyday life interactions, in ceremony and in building and maintaining relationships to people, place and culture. (Bessarab, 2010; Geia, 2013; Kirmayer, 2011).

Yarns shared in life or in research are not an “individual construct; they carry within them the shared lived experience of their families, and communities” (Geia, 2003, p.15) and as a way of collecting data offer unique opportunities and insights into nuanced and layered understandings of Indigenous experiences. Using approaches that uphold the centrality of Storytelling or yarning is a culturally safe, contextualised and appropriate ways to conduct research.

Yarning then becomes the medium of interaction in the research partnership; where learning becomes a storied two-way process on a research journey for both the researcher and participant. (Geia, 2013, p.16)

This, in turn, can provide deeper and more explicit understandings of how young Aboriginal people perceive strengths and resilience, contributing to, rather than being absent from, the production of knowledge on Aboriginal youth. This can challenge or destabilise the inherent power in the position of the researcher and is more closely aligned with Aboriginal cultural and social values and norms (Bessarab, 2010; Geia et al., 2013b). Yarning is both culturally relevant and creates a safe environment for the hearing and gathering of stories and ideas. The fundamental difference between yarning as a data collection tool and the more traditional open-ended questions or interview technique is the establishment of relationships between the researcher and the participant (D’Antoine, 2019). This relationship has the capacity to transform the inherent bias in academic research processes that are predominantly constructed by and through Eurocentric lenses and paradigms into research approaches that challenge ‘epistemological domination’ and embrace the different ways of being, knowing and doing (Martin, 2003).

Yarning is a comfortable and safe research process for many Indigenous people and

its strength is in the cultural security that it creates for Indigenous people participating in research. Yarning is a process that cuts across the formality of identity as a researcher and demands the human-to-human interaction where both are knowers and learners in the process. (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 47)

Qualitative research paradigms such as critical Indigenous research and success-based approaches allow for Stories to be told and provide opportunities for rich and detailed explanations related to success and resilience that are contextualised within cultural, demographic and geographic contexts (Ungar 2003). Rather than simply positioning Aboriginal youth as a risk or problem, yarning provides young people an opportunity to explain themselves and supports strengths-based approaches to Aboriginal youth and resilience (Priest, 2017).

This close examination also provides the opportunity and space for Aboriginal youth to offer and define own counter constructions of identity and of the social and cultural contexts in which young people's function and often thrive (Priest, 2017). Unger (2003) and Thoits (1995) both advocate for a plurality of methods that can capture knowledge and understanding of detailed contextual circumstances of young people and their multiple roles within the society. These roles combine both positive and negative experiences that impact on young peoples' resilience, overall social and emotional wellbeing and therefore own ability to develop and grow.

A methodological framework that allows scope and space for a discussion and revelation of diverse roles that are enacted daily and not be simply captured within a purely quantitative approach. The uniqueness of experience is not able to be captured with purely empirical data that often counts or categorises events or experiences rather than discussing as them as distinct experiences. (Thoits, 1995, p. 79)

Yarning as a methodological framework provides the participants some power over defining good or bad outcomes, risk factors and resilience processes (Priest, 2017; Thoits, 1995). The richer and thicker layers of data tells the Stories from the sociocultural contexts in which the practice of resilience occurs and provides opportunities for young people to define themselves, their own ideas of success, risk and resilience (Fine, 1994; Ungar and Nichol, 2002).

Using methodological processes that are grounded in Indigenous knowledges, ways of being, knowing and doing (Martin, 2003), offers transforming and rights-based research processes with and for Aboriginal youth. This process has the potential to provide spaces for multiple meanings and truths.

All the approaches discussed are heavily embedded in collaboration and in privileging Indigenous voices and experiences. The relational aspects of both the approaches taken and the use of yarning as a data collection tool as congruent to decolonising and Indigenous methodologies is a point clearly articulated by Kovach (2010). The aim of making Indigenous young people's voices and experiences visible is fundamental to both the cultural and theoretical underpinnings of this research. Exploring positive and strengths-based approaches is the driving force that facilitated this research process and puts Indigenous young people's realities into the centre. These kinds of approaches encompass the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences associated with a commitment to Indigenous ways of thinking, working and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Indigenous standards are derived, validated and practiced.

Decolonising frameworks and methodologies provide insights into the need for a decolonising approach in the academy and also the need for researchers to personally and politically examine their own positions and subjectivities (Martin, 2003). Indigenous research is more than simply adapting existing processes to suit a specific cultural situation. It is about developing new or, as in the case of Indigenous knowledges, bringing in old ways of relating, sharing and building relationships that have the potential to provide alternative approaches and perspectives (Martin, 2003).

The approaches taken in this project are built on the values and principles outlined and provide potential for new ways of seeing and challenging current conversations and actions around the deficit lens through which Aboriginal youth are consistently viewed. Multi-theoretical approaches provide the required space to the researcher to question my role in contributing to and finding other ways of researching the chronic disparities in health experienced by Indigenous young people.

This young bunch of Aboriginal peoples very clearly identified the importance of hearing their ideas and thoughts on mental health from a broader framework, and also preferred the use of qualitative research methods such as yarning as the medium of data collection. Within this framework, the research facilitates the furthering of human rights, cultural protocols and social justice within an Indigenous research context (Mertens, 2010).

As an Aboriginal woman, the research approach taken aligns with both my cultural and personal values around the centrality of voices and relationships, self-determination and social justice. In order to honour my role as part of this process, my cultural, social and political positioning has been made clear to all participants and to the wider community members involved in the project.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Research setting and process

This research project was based in Perth, Western Australia, Wadjuk Country, and as such, the protocols and procedures, the research process and methods and approaches have been developed and implemented with advice and support from local community members. The participants in the research, however, were drawn from all over the state and have diverse cultural, linguistic and social realities, so the foundation of the project rests firmly in and on the conceptual and practical frameworks discussed in the previous chapter.

Stories of strength

An examination of Indigenous wellness and resilience from a strengths-based approach, rather than from the deficit of illness or dysfunction, provides a different narrative - a story that talks about the strengths of family, and culture, rather than the dysfunction that is widely researched and articulated. It provides a lens that emphasises strengths- not perceived weaknesses - and takes into account the mitigating factors that are unique to colonised peoples (Dawson et al., 2017; Kelly, 2009).

A strengths-based approach in this research context is framed by providing a culturally safe research space for young Aboriginal people to yarn about and identify factors that promote their own mental wellness and build resilience. While not limited to these factors, the current literature supports both the approach and design of a strengths-based model to provide a positive lens through which to view Aboriginal youth. This view of Aboriginal youth as strong and successful can provide opportunities to draw on what is working for some young people and honours each young person with the capacity to achieve good mental health and develop resilience if provided with the appropriate support and resources (Nelson & Wilson, 2017; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011; Wright, 2011; Zimmerman, 2013).

As mentioned previously, the initial yarns around this project began informally with other educators, community members, young people and their families. My position as an Indigenous researcher and educator allowed me to utilise my academic and cultural knowledge and networks to inform, guide and view Western and Indigenous perspectives in relation to this research. My complex positioning as the researcher in this space is an interesting and very relevant part of the overall research process. This is not a scientific or pseudo objective look at the 'other', but rather an informed, invested and 'deeply situated' investigation of me within this research space (Kanuha, 2000).

Aboriginal people in the communities that I am connected to feel strongly and passionately about the SEWB of young people and see youth issues and concerns as an important area to address, particularly young people's health and education. One of the major issues expressed by the young people who guided the process from the start was the importance of articulating their experiences within a process that honoured and prioritised own success and resilience. Many times, during the initial phase of consultation, young people and their friends and families expressed their firm opinion that understanding and dealing with youth mental health issues required a shift from the dominant discourses of mental health to a new yarn of mental wellness and resilience. In the words of one of the participants, it required '*a paradigm shift*'.

Several points were raised during these informal yarns that included:

- the need for young people to have some control over their Stories
- the provision of support after the interviews, if needed
- the importance of relationship-building
- the absolute value in hearing and writing upon these Stories from a positive and culturally secure space

These informal yarns developed into a smaller group of people who became the critical reader and reference group (CRRG) for this research project that provided advice, support and encouragement through the initial research process. The CRRG consisted of Aboriginal academics (women) Ms Jeannie Morrison and Cheryl Taylor who offered advice and guidance in both cultural and academic spaces, and several young people over the course of the project.

Moreover, Mr George Hayden and Dr Darren Garvey also provided support and advice at different stages of the project. The CRRG provided advice on the following areas:

- Appropriateness of the questions
- Cultural/gender sensitivities
- Phrasing of questions
- Appropriateness of the recruitment process
- Use of digital recorders
- Use of “yarning” as a data collection method
- Need for specific recruitment of diverse groups
- Cultural diversity/ Living off Country
- Importance of not imposing on traumatized or grieving families and communities.

There were also many yarns with students, families, including my own, about how to record the Stories of strength that we were privileged enough to hear daily. My various roles in Indigenous education provided many opportunities to work with young people and their families to achieve personal, cultural and academic successes. What came out of these was that many yarns developed into the core research focus areas of:

- the value and importance of finding out how Aboriginal young people understand and define mental health
- the impact social and cultural identity has on your overall well-being.
- resilience and success.

The collaboration and cooperation at this crucial stage of developing a research focus provided the project with authenticity, authority and validity. The research project was formed, developed, discussed and enacted within a shared academic and cultural space that allowed for the Indigenous methodological framework to not only provide the theoretical structures for the project, but also to provide a solid cultural foundation to grow and nurture the knowledge, information and stories shared by participants or storytellers in a respectful and meaningful way.

Selection of Storytellers

Who would be the Storytellers or the participants for this research project was also discussed during this initial consultation with the young Aboriginal peoples and also the CRRG.

Cultural identity, education, employment and positive self-esteem were considered key markers of success and resilience and provided a firm set of criteria for the selection and recruitment process for this project that was defined by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people.

Accordingly, the target group for this project was Aboriginal young people-18-26 who identified themselves as mentally well and resilient and who were involved in education, employment or training. This approach immediately placed the participants in a positive and empowered position that in turn provided a unique platform for hearing and retelling their stories. It was evident by the number of young people wanting to be involved that there are many Aboriginal young people who clearly see themselves as well and strong and are able to articulate this. In keeping with the methodological frameworks chosen to enact this research, a smaller sample size was decided to allow for the rich and layered stories of their experiences to be the primary focus of the project (Durey, 2010).

The importance of having a diverse and representative cohort of participants was identified in the early stages of the research planning. Initially, there were plans to travel to several regional and Country areas in Western Australia to interview participants. After much discussion, it was clearly articulated that while some research is best conducted in communities, there was no real benefit to this research project of this approach. Many young people from around Western Australia come to Perth to continue or complete schools for further study, training and employment, providing the opportunity to talk to a diverse range of young people without visiting their areas/ communities. Thus, Perth was chosen as the site for the collection of yarns. Perth can provide these young people with Western education and mainstream or opportunities than may not be available in their own rural, regional and remote areas/communities. These young people operate in a predominantly Western world and bring with them the knowledge, skills and practices from their cultural group, family or community that provide strength, resilience and empowerment in often very challenging spaces. Many examples of this are demonstrated in the Stories. It is also important to note that being on Country, learning cultural ways of being knowing and doing from Elders and others is also a position of empowerment and strength.

The choice of Perth as the site of the research provided a level of diversity within the small sample size. Other considerations were: the imposition of researchers on communities and the use of limited research money to travel to regional or remote areas and the lack of community benefits from research projects. Sandercock (2004, p. 122) likens this kind of research on and about Indigenous people to the “modernist version [of the] colonial practice of robbing the graves of ‘the natives’ and bringing their skeletons to Western museums and scientific laboratories.” As an Indigenous researcher, these considerations were an important part of being an ‘insider outsider’ or ‘walking the margins’ (Fine, 1992) in this research process. Being an insider/outsider, a community member and a researcher in this space, offers unique insights but also obligations and responsibilities to challenge how and why research is done and to ensure that your conduct and processes honour and privilege Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing (Martin 2008)

Providing equal space for both young men and women in the research was also identified as an important issue to address. As with cultural diversity, the issue of gender was addressed by actively seeking specific gendered participants by attending and in some cases running young women’s and men’s groups.

The small sample group provided an opportunity to get a glimpse of the thought processes, perspectives and belief systems of young Aboriginal people in Perth, who, despite the often hostile and risk-laden environments in which they live, have developed skills and behaviours to find a space within dominant culture. The participant group cannot accurately reflect all Aboriginal youth; however, this project, like many qualitative projects, does not prioritise the transferability of results to bigger cohort but focuses on the details and depth of individual experiences to provide a more layered and rich account of the young people’s realities (Seale, 1999). The family yarning session transpired after the father of a young man I had set up a yarning session with approached with his son and asked to be a part of the research. I had known this family for many years and had a trusting and respectful relationship with all of them. I spoke with the son alone to make sure he was comfortable with the idea and spoke with his brother and father privately as well. Although this deviated slightly from the predominantly individual yarning sessions, it had a place in the overall approach.

The importance of Family and the relationships, strength and capacity that support good mental health is evident in all of the Stories. This yarning session gave voices to that strength and, as such, is discussed separately. The family yarning session provided a very unique opportunity to hear from Noongar men about their experiences as individuals and, importantly, as a family.

Ethics approval

Conducting research with and for Aboriginal people is an essential part of addressing the sociocultural disparities and inequities that exist (NMHRC, 1999); however, ascertaining what community needs and values are can only be achieved if an open and honest collaboration with people on whom the research will impact can occur. Research ideas and projects that have been formulated with little or no input from Aboriginal people will fall short of addressing community needs and aspirations. This perpetuates distrust and denies the agency of those for whom the research is being undertaken. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) identify an approach that, by contrast, prioritises the implementation of community-defined research needs as best practice. Fundamental to this research approach is the connection to community and reflection on community advice, concerns and direction.

This community-driven conceptualisation of research ideas, questions and the processes is gaining real traction and is in direct contrast with how research has been done in the past within an academic context. The community led approaches can raise some questions in terms of the processes and approaches that must be undertaken to get a research project off the ground in terms of ethical clearances.

The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC), 2007 (updated 2018) provides guidance and protocols for research involving people and has specific guidelines for disadvantaged populations, including Indigenous Australians (NMHRC, 2018).

The following six core values are provided to embed cultural safety and respect and to ensure that the research process and product benefits Indigenous people and communities (NMHRC, 2018, p.2).

- Spirit and Integrity
- Cultural Continuity
- Equity
- Respect
- Reciprocity
- Responsibility

Spirit and integrity are the central core value that connect all the other five values. Research that demonstrates spirit and integrity is research that gives primacy to Aboriginal peoples and cultures and provides a safe and encouraging space for Aboriginal peoples to become part of the research processes, rather than the object of research. Integrity is also cognisant of the processes that the research approach takes and the collaborations, negotiations and connections that are made and respected.

Connections can be made between the values of **cultural continuity** and the processes undertaken for this research. This is particularly relevant in terms of research processes and community collaboration. Examples of demonstrating cultural continuity in research with Indigenous people and communities could include:

- establishing a community advisory group and respecting the community's decisions regarding the way the research is to be conducted from project conception to conclusion; and
- considering the use of Indigenous standpoints and methodologies when developing research proposals, where appropriate (NMHRC, 1999 , p.5).

The cultural concept of reciprocity was central to this research and was used as part of the data collection process as well as informing the overall approach taken. For many Aboriginal people, the idea of reciprocity is core to social and cultural relationships. This research implied a mutual obligation between the researcher and the Storytellers that was based on an understanding of sharing of resources and skills. In terms of honouring researcher's obligation to reciprocity, I endeavoured to find skills or resources that were valuable to each individual participant. As many of the participants were students, I was able to offer academic support.

This included essay editing and practice runs with oral presentations. For one participant, the resource that was most valuable to them was help with moving some furniture with my ute. The sharing of knowledge or resources was valued by the participants and helped to build a relationship between me and the participants. This relationship was grounded in shared experiences that built trust and rapport and will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter. Kickett (2011) in her PhD thesis on Aboriginal adult resilience also found that the cultural connections, obligations and benefits associated with reciprocity at a community or interpersonal level could be moved into the research space with ease, comfort and cultural credibility. The guidelines clearly identify the importance of reciprocity in ethical research with and for Aboriginal people.

Reciprocity should enable agreements where all groups or people have equal rights and power in relationships, although in the context of research, this often involves unequal power relationships. Reciprocity recognises all partners' contributions and ensures that benefits from research outcomes are equitable and of value for Indigenous people and communities. Benefit in this context describes the establishment or enhancement of capacities, opportunities or outcomes that advance the interests of Indigenous Peoples and communities (NMHRC, 2018, p.7).

The value of equity is enacted within this project through the use of success-based approaches to understand and to articulate experiences of Aboriginal youth and in the primacy of Aboriginal people and voices as experts, knowledge holders and facilitators of change. The ability to define and negotiate meaning, parameters and methods used in the research project positioned the researcher as the storyteller, not the knowledge holder (p. 5).

The values of respect and responsibility are inherent in the approaches undertaken for this research. Respectful and open yarns initiated this project, defined the key terms and objectives of the project, and supported the development of a research approach that attempted to embed these core values as the foundation on which the project was conceived and enacted, not just part of the process.

Two layers of ethics clearance were sought to conduct this research project - the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC) Reference number: 415 and Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) HR36/2012. Obtaining ethics clearance for research with and for Aboriginal people is not a process that should be taken lightly, and the agreed national values are not merely a tick box for researchers. These values have the potential to prioritise and safeguard collaborative, safe and community-driven research that can support the articulation of Indigenous views, perspectives and issues that impact on us and our communities.

After the ideas and focus of the research were identified, a proposal was written, and ethics applications made to begin the project. It was also at this time that the title for the project was decided. This proposal was refined with the support of groups of young Aboriginal people and peers who had offered to support the project by being both critical readers and a cultural reference point during the initial research. Their ongoing role will be discussed later in the chapter.

Recruitment of Storytellers

As mentioned earlier, the recruitment of participants was undertaken in consultation and collaboration with the CRRG, community teachers, leaders and advocates and young people themselves. As per their advice, posters were placed in Aboriginal Centres at universities, TAFEs and community organisations, and emails were sent and re-sent around Aboriginal networks and organisations that were supporting young people. Key relationships were established with mental health services and practitioners to provide back up and support for both the participants and the researcher. As with the reference group, the recruitment process used existing contacts within the community to identify and connect with potential participants. This approach can capture the diversity of cultural groups from throughout the state who are currently residing, studying or working in the Perth area. Neville (2009) discusses this in terms of viral sampling, which utilises existing networks, friendships, employing this rich cultural connections and organisations as an effective means of recruitment.

A core component of the recruitment process was getting out into the wider community to recruit participants and to ensure that there was a level of transparency around the research. I presented the research proposal to around 15 different groups of Aboriginal young people in Perth. These included community organisations that worked directly with young people, several education spaces including Aboriginal units at three universities and several TAFEs. These visits began simply with an introduction of myself, who my mob is, my Country or cultural place of belonging, and what I had been doing in Wadjuk Country (Perth). This is a standard protocol when meeting, working and relating to and with Aboriginal people. This cultural positioning allows others to place you within your social and/or cultural networks.

I tried my best to be very clear and detailed about the criteria for participation. Over the course of several visits, I was given opportunities to both earn trust and to participate in a co-operative and reciprocal relationship building based on what I could offer rather than what could be taken. This included running workshops and participating in community events around areas of interest and their needs identified by Aboriginal young people. These included:

- academic and social skills,
- education opportunities
- financial literacy
- organising lunches and other informal gatherings
- participating in student activities
- attending graduation ceremonies and family gatherings.
- discussions on school attendance and retention.

All these activities were a part of a very simple approach to reciprocity as explained in the ethics section. For many Indigenous people, the obligations and responsibilities of reciprocity are taken seriously and are integral to contributing to cultural and community experience, economies and social, cultural and personal growth.

Young people contacted me either after these events or via email or text message and times were arranged to meet up with them and have a more detailed yarn about the project. These initial conversations took place on university campus, fast food restaurants, parks and at Storytellers' homes.

Once the gender and cultural diversity requirement had been reached, the recruitment process stopped and posters, flyers and other information about the research was removed.

Participants were offered a \$25 store voucher and light refreshments for their time. Before each Storyteller participated in the yarning session, there was a conversation regarding my own in kind or reciprocal payment for the participant's time. As mentioned previously, this included utilising my academic skills, furniture removal, providing transport for regional young people around the city and, for others, the voucher and feed were enough. In terms of honouring the epistemological and ontological approach taken for the project, building relationships with the Storytellers was foundational to the whole research process; so too was establishing a reciprocal arrangement that clearly identified the value and importance of the sharing of personal stories.

The development of relationships within any research project has, in the past, been seen to compromise the objectivity of the research (Wright, 2011). For the young people of this project, the development of relationships provided the foundation for building trust and having honest dialogue that resulted in the collection of open, honest and at times painful stories. The commitment to collaboration in Aboriginal qualitative research has to be more than just a reference group or cultural consultant and should be an ongoing process that needs to be nurtured and supported. For some, this approach maybe counter-intuitive to research paradigms that have, in the past, the insisted-on levels of objectivity that are neither achievable nor desirable.

However, understanding and articulating where, how and why you are positioned socially, culturally and academically can open up new ways of seeing and understanding our own levels of bias and subjectivities. For Indigenous people globally, research has historically been something that was done to us, often with little regard for the cultural protocols involved in sharing something as deeply personal as your own story (Kanuha, 2000). The sharing of my own skills and expertise with others who in turn share their expertise and knowledge with me formed the basis of all of the relationships that were integral to this research.

Listening to stories: Data Collection

As mentioned before, the young people involved in the conceptual phases of the research articulated the importance of an approach that was culturally comfortable, non-confronting and where the relationship between the researcher and the participant was based on mutual trust and respect, and the idea of yarning with young people as the choice of method for collecting stories was clearly articulated by the CRRG. This personal and cultural connection to the participants facilitated a research process that enabled insights and opportunities for the project, participants and the researcher.

Thus, the two main approaches to gathering stories or data were individual and group yarning sessions. Initially an interview questionnaire was prepared to guide the yarning session².

Interview questionnaire

The interview questionnaire was designed to gather basic demographic, cultural and educational and employment information about each participant and was developed with input and advice from the CRRG. It provided a foundation for the yarning sessions, giving the basic information needed to personalise the open-ended questions in the yarning sessions. The demographic questions elicited the following information about the storytellers.

- Gender
- Age
- Do you consider yourself strong and well?
- Where do you call home or where is your Country?
- Are you living on Country?
- Who do you live with?
- What level of high school did you complete?
- Further study started or completed
- Number of children
- Identification with cultural groups

Yarning sessions

Members of CRRG were the first to participate in the gammin³-pretend yarning sessions, which were digitally recorded, offering feedback and advice to more

² See attached

clearly articulate the questions, focus and areas that they believed needed to be discussed in the research yarning sessions. The open-ended questions for the one-on-one yarning session and the Family or group sessions were scrutinized and several of the questions were reworded to better suit the participant group and to more clearly identify the aims of the research. The open-ended questions were designed to illicit responses in relation to the core research focus and included:

- What do you believe you need to know to grow up well and strong?
- What does success mean to you?
- What do you do to get through the hard times?
- Family/school/work
- How do you describe people who grow up well despite the many problems they face?
- What does the word resilience mean to you?
- What kinds of things were most challenging for you growing up?
- As a young Aboriginal person, what are some of the difficulties that happen in your life that you think maybe different to non-Aboriginal young people?
- What about some of the good things?
- What do you think Aboriginal families and communities need to be strong and well?
- What do you do to keep healthy, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually?
- What does being Aboriginal mean to you?
- How important is culture and cultural knowledge to you?
- Can you tell me if and how your identity impacts on your overall social, emotional and physical wellbeing?
- What does land and home mean to you?
- How do you think being on Country or off Country impacts on your overall health?
- Can you tell me three things you think of when I say mental health?

Individual, family and group yarning sessions were arranged with young people who had volunteered to be part of the research project. The yarning sessions were held at tertiary and TAFE educational institutions, workplaces and in the homes of the participants. Each session was usually started with a drink and something to eat while getting comfortable with each other, the physical space and the Storytellers. We were each provided with the research information sheet, consent form and a copy of open-ended questions⁴. Any concerns or questions regarding the paperwork, process or any other aspects of the research were discussed and once the two forms had been read and signed, I requested permission to start the digital recorder.

³ Gammin is an Aboriginal English word for pretending, playing etc

⁴ See attached appendix- attach all documents

The use of the digital recorder to ensure accuracy was also discussed and it was more often than not the participants who sorted out the technology needed for the interview.

Once written and verbal permission was received, the recorder was started. Each recorded session started with social yarning that led into a research yarn that followed the open-ended questions previously decided. This allowed the yarn to be loosely structured and directed towards the research topic, providing talking points of interest to both researcher and the participant. During the interview the researcher took down notes and flagged key points, observation of behaviours, body language and hand signals as well as tone and modulation. The movement between Aboriginal English and Standard English was also noted.

The individual sessions went for approximately 1.5 hours including time spent without the recorder for debriefing or relaxation after the session. The family yarning circles went for around 2.5 hours, stopping for a tea break during the session. The physical spaces where the sessions took place were mostly in a private and quiet space, with two being conducted outside and one in a kitchen. Although anonymity was ensured as part of the research process, several of the Storytellers were happy to be identified however, all of the Storytellers have been de-identified. This decision was made to ensure the anonymity of the families and communities that the young people belong with and to. Embedded in all of the Stories are the Sprties of their families and communities and given that many shared connection in the Aboriginal communities in Perth there was a real risk of identifying them. This also complies with ethical requirements. The Family yarning session was held in a private meeting room on a university campus large enough to accommodate the four Family members and the interviewer.

A total of 15 people participated in the yarning sessions. Three of the men involved participated in the Family yarn and two young women had a yarning session together. The remainder participated in individual, one-on-one yarns with the researcher. The Storytellers, their place of employment and education and, in some cases, the communities or towns they grew up or come from have been de-identified to protect their privacy.

The notes taken during these sessions, along with the digital recording and transcription of the yarning session, and interview questionnaire are interpreted and retold, in the Ourstories chapter of this thesis. These Stories of resilience, positive mental health and the barriers that impede and facilitators that promote staying mentally well have potential to inform policy and program direction. The stories collected as part of this project, although on a very small scale, contribute to a narrative that in many ways defies the dominant deficit approaches to young Aboriginal people.

Cultural responsibility and care

Throughout the yarning process, all Storytellers were made aware of the availability of counselling and/or support services if our yarns raised any concerns for them. This was clearly articulated at the start of each session and reiterated during the session when sensitive or painful issues were talked about. Experiences of Racism, identity concerns and family trauma were part of life for the Storytellers and having appropriate people in place to support them was both an ethical and cultural responsibility. The support services were provided by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal counsellors, and male and female. Although none of the participants took up the support, knowing that there was a support in place gave both the researcher and the Storytellers a level of safety and, importantly, an understanding of the potential impacts of these issues.

Chapter 5

Telling Ourstories (Data Analysis)

Ourstory is a term used to differentiate Aboriginal experiences and perspectives of Australian history and life from dominant Western views and perspectives. Western views are made up of multiple stories that have been shared and transmitted through generations; so too are Ourstories.

Ourstory is not one story. There are shared stories around the invasion and colonisation of our homelands. There are also different strands....within these strands are the stories of our families, communities and nations (Fejo-King, 2015).

The importance of Ourstories as both a concept and practical application is imperative and fundamental to a decolonising approach to research. The traditional practices of oral and visually based transmission of culture, knowledge and practice (art, song and dance) have, in many parts of Australia, suffered greatly as a result of colonisation and assimilationist practices and policies. However, the growing body of Indigenous research, by and for Indigenous peoples, is starting to provide another avenue of transmission of Ourstories.

The approaches used to find Ourstories in the data, interpret and articulate them in a culturally safe, nuanced and respectful way are aimed at reflecting on and enhancing a deeper and richer analysis. This is more than simply coding and organising data according to themes and requires a commitment by the researcher to identify their own positioning, values and cultural biases. When we analyse qualitative data, we are not simply giving the participants a voice that is neutral and unaffected by our own values. We make choices and retell stories based on the arguments or points that make up the broader research project (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fine, 1992). My personal, cultural and academic reasons for this project and my beliefs, values and ideas are heavily embedded in the approaches and the subsequent analysis of the stories shared. Some of these values and beliefs are common across cultural groups, while others are significant because of the differences from dominant ideas and experiences.

The strengths-based approaches that this research project has taken is followed through in the analysis of the stories shared. Fogarty (2018) in work around the deficit narratives in Aboriginal health clearly articulates that these narratives not only inform understandings of health but are foundational to policy development and direction. These deficit narratives reproduced via health research are grounded in Racism and colonial ideology and continue negatively to impact on Indigenous people. Fforde et al. (2013) define a deficit discourse as a way of thinking that represents and frames Indigenous people in a deficit, negative and failing narrative. The researcher suggests that 'the prevalence and social impact of deficit discourse indicates a significant link between discourse surrounding indigeneity and outcomes for Indigenous peoples' (Fforde, 2013, p. 162). In attempting repudiating this deficit narrative, it was important for me to not just simply look for success and /or positivity but rather to understand how young people navigate risk from a place of wellness and strength.

Retaining the integrity, power and truth of people's personal stories is a very humbling and challenging experience, particularly in a research context. Choices are made at each and every level or layer of the data analysis processes and explicitly naming these choices is fundamental to reading and understanding the stories. Braun (2006) speaks of the importance and value of understanding that researchers are not unbiased and neutral and that our theoretical, and epistemological beliefs and commitments actively influence and inform how we use and present the data. The prioritising of themes in this particular project was negotiated during the writing of the open-ended questions. The questions did provide a point of connection for starting conversations, having yarns about the issues that were prioritised by the participants and community members. The data analysis process was centred on Aboriginal worldviews, respect, reflexive practice, and inclusivity.

Threads

The focus of this research was to explore and articulate Aboriginal young people's ideas and understanding of mental health; to explore and articulate mechanisms and strengths used by young people to ensure the continuation of good mental health; and to examine the impact of identity on personal and community mental health and wellbeing. The open-ended questions aimed at addressing the core aims of the research and are broadly organized into three main areas or threads, using the questions as a flexible coding framework. Although the main areas of interest and relevance were clearly identified, simply relying on these themes without further, deeper analysis and discussion would be doing a disservice to those who shared their Stories.

Three main tools have been used to unpack and present the narratives shared in this project: Thematic and Discourse Analysis and the qualitative software NVivo. Initial analysis of the yarns collected involved getting to know the stories and individuals intimately: listening to the digital recordings several times before taking notes or working with a transcription of the data, reconnecting with the participants to clarify and check in regarding very personal revelations, and familiarising myself with the cultural and geographical ties and connections to provide broad context. Issues such as language use, hand and facial gestures and levels of cultural security and safety were examined and discussed in order to get a clearer picture of not only the dialogue, but also the more nuanced and subtle communication methods employed by some of the participants.

Some of the participants switched between Aboriginal English and Standard English as well as using words or phrases in Aboriginal languages, which revealed nuanced layers and complexities around language use, code switching and identity that will be expanded on in later discussions. The analytic methods used aim to uncover and explore the Stories and experiences rather than simply coding and organising data according to pre-identified themes. Thematic and Discourse analysis require a commitment by the researcher to identifying their own positioning, values and cultural biases.

When we analyse qualitative data, we are not simply giving the participants a voice that is neutral and unaffected by our own values. We make choices and retell stories based on the arguments or points that make up the broader research project (Braun, 2006; Fine, 1992).

A thematic analysis, along with other approaches such as Discourse analysis, can help to make sense of the stories shared and not only to acknowledge how individuals, in this case, young Aboriginal people make meaning of terms such as mental health and wellness, resilience and success and their experiences of these, but also to provide an insight into their 'reality'. Again the importance of understanding one's own position in relation to analysis is essential, as data is neither collected nor coded "in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun, 2006, p. 84). The selection of themes, and the privileging of certain narratives and stories, are not coded or themed without bias, but rather influenced by the values, beliefs and experiences of the researcher and, in this project, by the participants and community members.

My own personal, cultural and academic reasons for this project and my beliefs, values and ideas are heavily embedded in the approaches and the subsequent analysis of the stories shared. Some of these values and beliefs are common across cultural groups, while others are significant because of the differences from dominant ideas and experiences with Aboriginal youth and offer alternative interpretations or perspectives.

The use of both Thematic and Discourse analysis enables the Stories to be developed at both the explicit and latent levels. While the surface meanings are readily identified within the pre-determined themes, a deeper and more semantic-based approach allows for broader meanings, underlying assumptions and self-conceptualisation around issues such as SEWB.

Discourse Analysis (DA) as a tool is interested in what is said, what words are used and how they are strung together. Important sociocultural meanings are attached to choosing what part of your story you are willing to share, what words, phrases or language are used in description and in the way in which accounts of mental health and resilience are constructed and articulated.

What words are used to define your wellness and strength- what words are left out. This deeper look at how young Aboriginal people make meaning of terms like mental health and wellness can potentially provide some insight into cultural differences, strengths and areas of need. Different social and cultural understandings of mental health, SEWB and success result in “different social actions and therefore the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences” (Jørgensen, 2002).

All of our social lives are primarily made up of talk, and text reflects multiple realities and experiences. Cultural differences and understandings about ‘reality’ are often very obvious in that we use, interact in and understand social and cultural situations. For example, Aboriginal children are labelled and read, talked about and interacted with based on a set or sets of cultural discourses about Aboriginality. The way people interact, teach, expect and relate to are all based on ideas of Aboriginality. Ideas of Aboriginality based on dominant discourses are often negative, deficient and based on historical and cultural racism and domination. How Aboriginal people experience and understand Aboriginality is very different to non-Aboriginal people. Consequently, no discourse is culturally or socially neutral. Advocates of discourse analysis claim that it is crucial to examine and explain how language is used in such contexts in order to reveal aspects of social and political processes that were previously obscured or misunderstood (Ockwell & Rydin, 2010). Discourse analysis is a mechanism for “exploring patterns in and across the statement and identifying the social consequences ... different discursive representations of reality.” (Jørgensen, p.91, 2002)

Several major themes emerged from the research that showed that any examination of identity, mental health and culture needed to be undertaken with a firm understanding of the lived experiences of Racism, as well as the structural and institutional impact that Racism has on all facets of Aboriginal people’s lives. Racism, along with grief, education, culture, family and identify were the main themes identified by all participants as influencing both their understanding of and lived reality of mental health. Multi-dimensional issues, factors and processes have developed over the last two hundred and thirty years and have led into chronic and serious deficits across the range of social and health determinants.

The impact that positive identity, culture and family connections provide will be examined, as will the challenges to strong mental health such as Racism and grief.

Understanding the influence and impact of identity on mental wellness was a core aim of the research and was not going well as a separate theme to the flow of the yarns. Identity ran across all the thematic areas and is discussed in relation to how it interacts and interplays within the main domains as both a facilitator of strength and a challenge to staying strong and well. The main themes were teased apart, using other questions from the yarns and following up with Storytellers to ensure that I had captured their Stories accurately. The questions definitely guided the sub themes, but it was the yarns and the close connection with them and the Storytellers that gave the context to start unravelling the Stories.

The challenges to staying strong and well were also a big part of each of the yarns and, as such, needed to be examined carefully as they can give real insight into the major concerns these young people have and how such concerns impact on their ability to stay strong and well. The questions provided an excellent starting point for the Storyteller to address the broad aims while telling their own very unique and important story.

Storytellers

Before discussing the Stories, it is important to briefly introduce the Storytellers to give them a solid and central presence in the chapters to follow. This section will give a brief cultural, educational and demographic description of the young people involved. As previously mentioned, participants for the research were drawn from educational, TAFE and Tertiary institutions, work places and community contexts.

All of the participants involved have at least one sibling and have a network of aunts, uncles and cousins, often referred to as brothers and sisters in a cultural way, as support. Many of the participants disclosed family and community fracturing, that is, behaviours, such as, addiction, suicide and violence that have impacted on their lives and overall wellbeing either directly or indirectly.

There were seven young women who participated in yarning sessions. The cultural diversity of the group spanned across Western Australia and the experiences of these young women were reflective of many young Aboriginal women. As can be seen from the attached table,⁵ the young women all identified with a place of belonging, in a physical sense as in their 'Country' as well as in a very spiritual and cultural sense as Noongar, Kija, etc. This sense of belonging is paramount to the overall development of young people. In an Aboriginal context, the cultural aspects of these women being able to identify, claim up and find strength in their own cultural identity is a valuable and positive signifier of their overall mental health and wellbeing.

Four of the young women were "living on Country"; that is, they were living on the traditional lands of their cultural group, the Noongar people, while the others came to Perth to further their educational or employment opportunities. Most of the young women involved were enrolled in tertiary education programs, including Medicine, Anthropology, Environmental Science and Bridging and Enabling Programs. All these young women utilised the services of Aboriginal Centres, Schools and resources while studying their degree programs for academic, cultural, emotional and social support, and several regarded the staff and other Aboriginal students as extended family and community. This holistic type of support provided many of the young women with a solid sense of belonging despite being 'out of Country', a long way from home and without the proximity and support of family members.

There were eight men who participated in yarning sessions. Similar to the young women, the young men were all involved in education or employment or, in some cases, both. The family group who took part in the study were part of an Aboriginal Dance group as a full-time source of employment, while others were in pre-tertiary programs and undergraduate programs and one was in a TAFE management course. The cultural groups that they belonged to included Noongar, Jaru, Nikinya and Merowong Gudjurong, offering a snapshot of the cultural diversity in Western Australia.

⁵ Table of demographic and cultural information

The open and honest connections made can be attributed to several things including the groundwork laid during the conceptual phase of the project, where time was spent openly and honestly discussing and debating the concerns of community members around gender. These discussions centred on the appropriateness of a woman researcher talking with young men and the kind of experiences and Stories we were hoping to capture. There was never any intention, either from myself or from the reference group and participants, to discuss gendered, sacred or secret cultural businesses that could potentially be inappropriate for me to hear, record or share. My role in the community as an educator and 'Aunty' also allowed for relationships with male participants that were culturally appropriate, safe and respectful.

A brief introduction to the Storytellers is given below:

Storyteller 1 (S1)

Storyteller 1 is a 24 year old Noongar woman from the Perth area. She was born and raised within the Perth metropolitan area, with cultural ties to the Southwest of WA. Her mother was raised in a small town south of Perth, and her father (deceased) was also from a small town about 200kms south of Perth. Both sides of her family identify as Noongar⁶. Both of her parents and their families and extended families were impacted heavily by past removal policies that resulted in her father, grandmother and several aunts and uncles being forcibly removed from their families and placed into Missions, Reserves or other institutions designed for the forced assimilation of Aboriginal children.

Her educational achievements include an Associate Degree in Community Management and several short management courses as part of her employment. Both she and her male partner are employed fulltime and have two small children. Participant 1 is the youngest in her immediate family and has two sisters.

⁶ Noongar boodja – (country) covers the entire south-western portion of Western Australia. The boundary commences on the west coast at a point north of Jurien Bay, proceeds roughly easterly to a point approximately north of Moora and then roughly south-east to a point on the southern coast between Bremer Bay and Esperance. (<http://www.noongar.org.au/>)

She identifies herself as a strong, proud Noongar woman who has overcome a lot of disadvantage to achieve success. Her current role is in student support services, where she provides information and advice to other young Aboriginal people.

Storyteller 2 (S2)

Storyteller 2 is a 19 year old Noongar man, born and raised in the Perth Metropolitan area. He strongly identifies himself with his Noongar culture and is active in community and cultural events. His family is a well-known Noongar family with members being well-respected Elders and activists. The suburb where he grew up is often depicted in the media as having an 'Aboriginal youth problem' and he has faced Racism almost daily since he can recall. In his early teens, the Racism and bullying he was exposed to at school and socially became overwhelming and he experienced depression and anxiety in his early teens. He spent many months battling this with *Dr Phil*, *Oprah* and meditation getting him through some of his tougher days. But he acquired the strength from his family and culture and the support of teachers, psychologists and others that enabled him to develop what he calls resilience- his shield. He has since completed a pre-tertiary course and is currently enrolled in an Engineering undergraduate program. He also has an internship with a major private Engineering firm that provides him with part-time employment, financial support with his study and a position in the company on completion of his degree.

Storyteller 3 (S3)

Storyteller 3 is a 19 year old Murri⁷ man originally from Queensland with cultural connections to the Pilbrara area of WA. He has lived in Perth for four years and has two older sisters. He moved to Perth with his father to escape family and community violence and addictions and has since completed a year long pre-tertiary course in preparation for enrolling in an Engineering undergraduate program. Storyteller 3 has limited family support in WA; however, he has made many friends in the local Noongar community who have supported and encouraged him.

⁷ Murri people is the broad cultural term for the people of Northern NSW and Queensland

He attended a private high school until year 11 and was employed as a mentor and youth supervisor – a role that he feels is very valuable to staying strong and well and a role where he can offer the same support and encouragement that helped him become the strong and well young man he is today.

Storytellers 4 (S4)

Storytellers 4 were a small family yarning circle with a father and two sons- aged 19 and 25. Their cultural identity is Noongar and Walmatjarri⁸ and as a family they are heavily involved in cultural and community events and activities. The older brother (Brother 1) had spent many years in and out of juvenile detention and later, adult prison. Drug and alcohol problems had impacted heavily on the Brother 1 and at the time of the interview he was working on staying sober and caring for his family. This contrasts with the younger brother (Brother 2) who had completed year ten at a public high school and has had on-going employment as a Noongar Dancer and cultural performer. The father is a cultural advisor and performer and he provided insights into how his own journey with addiction had impacted on his sons. He connects to and with the ‘troubles’ that his older son had experienced. Brother 2 has no children, while Brother 1 is working on building relationships with his ex-partner and their children. Both young men and their father are all in a ‘good place’ and were working on supporting Brother 1 to be the ‘best man he could be’. The father, although not in the age range of this research, shared insights into his own journey as a parent and as an Aboriginal man. His part in this yarn is important for understanding the very different pathways these young men took in their lives and for appreciating the value of family in their survival and strength.

Storyteller 5 (S5)

Storyteller 5 is an 18-year-old Kija⁹ woman from Kununurra, WA, who is currently residing in Perth to complete an undergraduate degree in environmental science. She has been living on and off in Perth (off Country) since she was about 13 at boarding school and then later in university accommodation.

⁸ Walmatjarri country is in the Great Sandy Desert, south of the Fitzroy Valley.

⁹ Kija/Gija East Kimberley area of Western Australia,

She spent her early life in small towns in the Kimberley that have a high population of Aboriginal people and that, as communities, were dealing with problems of sexual abuse, addiction and trauma. The decision to go to boarding school at a young age was based on the circumstances in her community and the impact that it was having. She has struggled with interpersonal, institutional and intracultural Racism and loneliness and often feels that she and others struggle to find a place in either the Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal world. Her mother is non-Aboriginal, and her father is Kija, although he grew up with his non-Aboriginal father and only as an adult connected with his Aboriginal family. This too has had an impact on how this young woman sees herself in the world. She completed year 12 at a high school and a tertiary enabling course prior to her starting her undergraduate program in environmental science and a cadetship with a government department.

Storyteller 6 (S6)

Storyteller 6 is a 22-year-old woman from Mullewa who identifies as a Watjarri¹⁰ through her mother and Maori through her father. She is working fulltime on a government traineeship in Perth. She has experienced a lot of grief associated with the death of younger members of her family and in the past has utilised online counselling services to provide support. She is grounded in both her cultural identities but connects more strongly with Waltjarri identity/ culture as she grew up a 'long way from New Zealand'. Her story tells how her experiences with grief and loss have shaped and defined her and have provided the impetus to stay well and strong. Her insights into youth suicide and the ongoing impacts she experiences have led her taking on a mentor- like role with other young people in her family .

Storyteller 7 (S7)

Storyteller 7 is an 18-year-old Wongi man from Kalgoorlie/Leonora who has been living off Country while attending boarding school and currently while he completes a tertiary enabling course. He is a keen athlete and his involvement in sport is a major factor in his overall mental well-being. As a young teenager, he experienced bullying and Racism at school and spent a lot of time with Indigenous support staff on his school campus.

¹⁰Cultural/language group from upper Murchison river, from around Yallalong Station in the west, to near Meekatharra in the east, from north of Mt Augustus, to south of Talarang Peak, Western Australia. (<http://www.bundiyarra.com.au/wajarriApp/#information-page>)

He credits this and his relationship with one particular male teacher with his finishing high school and pursuing his dream to join the Defence Forces and becoming the first Indigenous Chief of Defence. Family is central to his identity and his strength.

Storytellers 8 (Sis 1 and Sis 2)

This yarn was conducted with two young women from the Eastern Goldfields area in Western Australia. Storyteller Sis 1 is 18 years old and identifies as Wongi and Noongar. She has been living off Country in Perth for several years attending an Aboriginal specific high school and is currently in an undergraduate program with the aim of gaining employment in the resource sector and to be an advocate for Aboriginal women in the mining sector. She has an education and accommodations-based scholarship from a major resource company that will pay for her university and accommodation fees while she is studying. Her ultimate goals include having a job that allows her to travel, buy a home on the coast and provide more for her family.

The previous policies around removal of Aboriginal children have impacted heavily on her family and she is committed to changing some of the problems that she feels her family are coping with. Her connection to Country and the importance that she places on this has shaped her educational choices and is a determining factor in her future pathways.

Sis 2 is an 18-year-old Noongar woman who is also residing in Perth to complete her studies. She is currently enrolled in a Sports Science undergraduate program with the hope of working with elite athletes in the future. Like her co-storyteller, her family and extended family have had some difficulties and she is committed to providing positive and encouraging support and role modelling for her younger family and community members. She sees her own resilience as strength. She has high ambition, determination and a real passion to make a difference in her community.

Storyteller 9 (S9)

Storyteller 9 is a 25-year-old Bardi/Jawal/Nyul Nyul man from Beagle bay/Broome/One Arm Point/Lombadina. He left his family and community when he was 15-years- old to take up study opportunities in Darwin and then later in Perth. His childhood was spent grounded in cultural activities, such as hunting and fishing on Country and had a very strong emphasis on education and sports.

His grandmother helped raising him up while his parents worked and studied, instilling in him a strong sense of personal and cultural responsibility. Storyteller 9 'draws strength and resilience from his Aboriginality' and from the hard work of his parents, grandparents and great grandparents to navigate the intercultural spaces of education and mainstream employment. He works as a mentor to young Indigenous students and has completed an undergraduate in community development and a diploma in teaching.

Storyteller 10 (S10)

Storyteller 10 is a 20-year-old Noongar woman from the Perth/Fremantle areas. She is in her 3rd year of her undergraduate degree with plans to move into Medicine and Surgery. She is also part of a WA government cadetship program. She grew up in a large extended family that had both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members and feels strongly connected to both as well as to Noongar Boodgar (Noongar land). She credits her ability to 'navigate society' confidently because she has grown up in two 'worlds'. Challenging stereotypes of Aboriginality, she sees herself as part of 'something bigger'. Her ambition is to finish her degree in medicine and work as a Doctor in Aboriginal communities or contexts.

Storyteller 11 (S11)

Storyteller 11 is 18 -year- old Noongar women from Manjimup in the South West of WAa. She has worked as an Aboriginal Education Support worker in primary schools and is currently working in the student support field with young adults. She has struggled in the past with family and addiction issues and is the only participant to talk about her own ongoing issues with addiction. Despite all of this, she sees herself as a strong and proud Noongar woman. Her connection to Country, culture

and family are sources of strength that she draws on daily in order to keep staying strong and well. Multiple losses of family and friends through suicide and violence have forced this young woman to face multiple stressors at many times, and she is 'battling every day to stay on top of things and winning'.

Chapter 6

The table below provides a guide to the main themes that are discussed in the following chapters. The facilitators and the barriers to staying strong are discussed through the Stories of the young people. It is through these Stories that we can begin to understand how all of these themes are interconnected and how they are experienced in the lives of Aboriginal young people.

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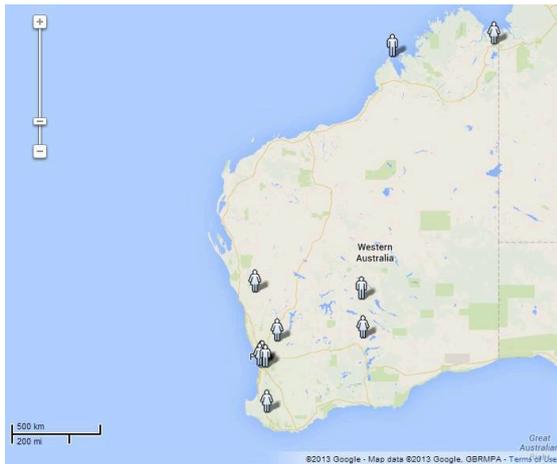
Growing up and staying strong and well - what we need

This broad thematic area has a direct connection to open-ended questions designed to get a 'big picture' of what young people believed they needed to grow up strong and to stay mentally and culturally well. While many of the factors associated with growing up strong discussed within this research project are

applicable across a wider youth demographic, the cultural specificities of being an Indigenous person in Australia need to be prioritised and understood.

What do you need to grow up strong and well? This was one of the first questions asked of the Storytellers once we became comfortable with each other, the physical space and with the technology (digital recorder). The factors that they identified are discussed below.

Connection to Country and Culture - People and Place



For the cohort of Aboriginal young people in this project, Perth city is home, a landscape dotted with buildings and roads that have overlaid many significant cultural sites and spaces, but it is still Wadjuk Boodjar (Noongar Land), and the built landscape has not diminished the profound connection to Country that the Storytellers felt. The centrality of Country or connection to place was clearly identified as an important ingredient to developing strengths and resilience. For some, being on 'Country' is not a choice for them to further their education, employment or training as many of the regional or discrete/ remote towns and communities do not have the capacity or resources or infrastructure needed.

For others, however, opportunities such as scholarships, travel and employment that take them away from Country are the choices they made to pursue their personal and academic goals, dreams and aspirations.

Who you are and where you come from are the basis of our identities, and for young Aboriginal people in this project this connection is contextualised and enacted in an urban, predominantly non-Indigenous context.

Being on Country makes me feel better all ways round. Our culture, our ways our lingo, we been here for thousands of years Unna¹¹? I guess my spiritual health is better when I'm home. Cause we back in the bush and we go back out and do all that stuff like fishing and my I guess wellbeing is better too cause even though it's not much its more than what I do up here. Like we play basketball or grab the footy. We all just get up and go. Being with the family, back home makes me feel better. I guess feel better all ways. I get my culture from my Pop and our Elders. Pop used to take all us kids, all the first cousins, nieces and nephews all used to go out bush- let's go bush for the weekend He would just take us all with only the clothes on our back. We would make mia mias¹², hunt and cook kangaroo, make spears, digging sticks, paints. We just lived off the bush when he took us out. My pop and uncle still live on Country and I go down there and sit and stay there yarning, visiting the oldies in the cemetery. I feel safe and invincible when I'm on Country, when I'm home. I'm a Noongar and this is my Country. This My Country. This is ours we are the first fellas here, ancestor job, you know way back, thousands of years. Being Aboriginal, I don't know how you explain something like that to wadjelas¹³ ? (Storyteller 11)

Storyteller 11 has experienced multiple stressors throughout her life, and it is this connection to Country that she feels, that she has been taught about and that she has experienced provide her with a protective booka¹⁴ (cloak). For this young woman, the impact of intergenerational trauma on her life, family violence and addiction, went hand-in-hand with the protective experiences of Country and culture. Her reality is that she struggles with her own addictions; however, she mitigates and navigates this with a profound sense of connection to her Country.

This is grounded in a very real and tangible sense of belonging to a place that has thousands of years of *herstory* attached to it, the place of her Ancestors and her old people. Her sense of being invincible, of feeling safe and overall strong and well is

¹¹ Unna is Aboriginal slang and is used in conversation when seeking confirmation or agreement. (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/unna>)

¹² Mia mias are temporary huts or shelters (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mia-mia>)

¹³ Wadjela is a Noonagr word for non-Aboriginal person

¹⁴ Booka is a Noongar word for animal skinned cloak (<https://www.derbalnara.org.au/wangkiny-language-glossary>)

the physical, social and emotional manifestation of the protective factors experienced when she is home.

This connection, her anchor to her place, is the foundation of self-identified strength and is an important determinant of her overall health and wellbeing. Understanding the value of relationships to Country in the context of this Story shows how these connections are central to developing resilience. Despite the many differences that were evident across the cohort, this connection to place was expressed, in different ways, by different participants. Storytellers all identified themselves strongly with specific cultural groups and geographical places or Country; everyone expressed cultural connectedness to people and place. These connections have survived the intergenerational dislocation experienced by many Aboriginal families and communities and for this young Noongar woman maintaining those connections and valuing the SEWB protection is a 'no brainer'.

I feel like a lot of that sort of stuff, like, I feel like it hasn't been taught to me necessarily so much, but I still feel like I'm picking up on something because I do feel really connected to these places. I don't know. I guess you could say, spiritual in that stuff, but I guess that comes from my Nan and comes from what I've been taught, but it is the sort of conversations that go on in my house and my cousins' house, my aunties' houses or something like that, you know. Like, just this everyday sort of conversation that is embedded in my brain. We don't necessarily go out on Country so much. Like, we don't really have access to it because there is usually houses and farms and stuff built over it, but, yeah, there is a certain, like, I guess, amount of - - Like, we go to places that used to be traditional women's site and stuff and we like those places better, and that is where we have our picnics and our family barbeques and things like that. So, yeah, they are pretty important, those places. And, like, that country, that notion of country then encompasses all that family and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, so you see it all the time, like it exists. Like, for some people, not for everyone, not for all Aboriginal people, some people don't, but depending on where you are I think it can have, yeah, it can have huge, huge - It is your mental health, your will to live at that place. They know that that plays a huge part in your recovery and your life.

And if all that stuff is being enhanced from being there, like from being on country and having all of that stuff that is associated with that that makes you strong in who you are, then of course you are going to do better. Like, it is almost like a no-brainer. (Storyteller 10)

Country, for this young woman, is about family, identity and a place of healing and strength.

Her spiritual connection is explained through the conversations and implicit teaching of culture that she experienced around her Nan, aunties, cousins and through her family visits to significant sites for gatherings. It is here that she learns and understands how important maintaining those connections were and are to her spiritual, cultural and physical health. She talks about having enhanced health, a sense of purpose and place in the world when she is on Country. This Storyteller grew up in and around Perth so has been able to be on Country while she studies. This access to the familial and spiritual strengths that she sees in Country have enabled her to better navigate the tensions and benefits of being part of a culturally diverse family. She moves between her Aboriginal cultural connections and her non-Aboriginal families with confidence and clarity in her cultural identity. This ability to navigate the two worlds while maintaining the knowledge and connection of and to place is a fundamental part of who she is. In terms of social capital, this young woman's relationships with both people and place are part of her immediate support network and offer protection and capital, both necessary for growing up strong and well. The imposition of dominant cultural values, beliefs and expectations has been shown to have negative impacts on young Aboriginal people; however, the intercultural or bicultural make up of this young woman's identity offers her protection and skills within non-Indigenous spaces as well. This complex composition of her identity and how the various facets play into or support her endeavours in both spaces is highly relevant to understanding the complexity of identity and cultural connectedness within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia.

Well, I've gotten extra training in being able to navigate society, because I'm in a position where I have to be able to make my way through two really different in so many, you know, lots of ways, ...Two really different worlds, and so I feel like I can do that pretty easily. Like, I feel like I have done that my whole life really. And sometimes it is really difficult, especially when you get those two parts of culture that really clash and, you know, you are not really sure. You know how you would deal with it if it was one situation, like if it was on one part of your family, but, you know, like, it just like you can't win so you have just got to try and do your best to get through it.

And it is not like assimilating. It is not that. It is just that you are making a choice to sort of stay strong with who you are, but also get through. There is, I reckon, a way to do it and be happy at the end of it, yeah - It is that idea of integration rather than assimilation.

So, I can integrate into this world and not lose who I am in it, and actually gain all the benefits that are part of the white world or the dominant culture and get the benefits and bonuses of that, and that doesn't make me any less part of that culture. Like, given my understanding of Aboriginality and culture, I think that there is like a certain sort of like stereotype of what Aboriginal culture is, and when I think about culture to me, my culture is, you know, like a Noongar person living in the city, you know, culture changes. Culture is not just like a stagnant thing. And over time, you know, you've got to make adaptations and changes, and when your environment changes, then, you know, some practices that may have been cultural once can't happen anymore.

It's not like going out and practicing things that are traditional, you know. But it also doesn't mean that the culture is any less, like, less alive. Like it is, it is around; it is just we still do things that are just specifically for us, but it is not what everyone else seems to think it is. Like, it is just so weird. (Storyteller 10)

While this young woman experiences tensions, stress and other negative impacts as a result of her intercultural identity, her strong connection with her Country and her Noongar culture and family is a constant source of strength.

This yarn also reveals that the ability to navigate two worlds is a skill that most of our young people can enact with and through solid connections to Country and culture. For this young woman there is a clear and direct understanding of the importance of integrating cultural knowledge with her current reality. She integrates, rather than assimilates. She takes the opportunities that are presented in both spaces. Her Aboriginal/ own cultural connectedness is not compromised or threatened by her engagement in dominant spaces. This connection is profound and is not reliant on a stagnant idea of Country or culture but of a dynamic and evolving connection. Despite the displacement that Storyteller 10 articulated around access to Country, these connections, as a source of strength, are in fact a 'no-brainer'.

This is a very sophisticated understanding of how culture changes and adapts. As a source of strength, cultural practices and identity are embedded in Country.

These relationships to and with Country have been adapting and shifting and importantly managing to survive and thrive in often very oppressive contexts. This points to the resilience of different cultural groups and our young people to survive, who despite the massive disruptions, continue to find strength in that resilience. She also points out how you are perceived as an Aboriginal person, the stereotypes associated with your identity and cultural practices and the lack of understanding from the wider community of what contemporary Aboriginal culture looks like or, more precisely, what Aboriginal people look like. Her identity, intimately connected with her Noongar culture, is also informed by her non-Aboriginal family and the tensions mentioned previously, cultural clashes that occur require high-level skills in cultural code switching. Code switching is a skill that Storyteller 9 is incredibly good at and an acceptance that you 'can't win' sometimes and you just have to try your best to be strong and get through. The ability to walk into two worlds without suffering cultural whiplash is tiring and often painful experience.

In this project cultural identity is intimately tied to growing up strong and well and to staying well - developing resilience. Knowing who you are and where you come from, your family's Stories are important parts of how you are in the world. There are also some interesting and relevant perspectives given on multi/bicultural aspects of identity and how that works in a predominantly Western space - specifically in educational contexts or in an Indigenous space – within the family and the community. The idea of walking in two worlds, of integrating not assimilating, and of finding strength and positivity in your identity are all responses to the research question of how identity impacts on overall wellbeing.

Storyteller 9, a young Bardi/Jawal/Nyul man from Beagle Bay, has been living off Country since he was a young teenager. His parents placed a high level of importance on education and supported and encouraged him to excel in academia, cultural and sporting contexts. He went to Darwin as a teenager to take up a scholarship to complete high school. His formative childhood years were spent immersed in culture, with a strong connection to people and place.

The Threads within this young man's story are numerous and capture a range of concepts and ideas around the importance he places on culture, spirituality and socio-historical and intergenerational stories of resilience.

You know, being well grounded with people who you love and trust, you know, knowing who you are inside and out, and that could be culturally, spiritually, yeah, culturally and spiritually. There was another thing I was thinking of.

Yeah, like, you know, and even on your families and all that sort of stuff, kinship and your extended family is another big thing as well. That was something that was roped in my head from day one, hey, because, you know, us Aboriginal mob up top there, you've got to know five generations back or four generations because, you know, half everybody in Broome is related to each other... My social well-being... I draw strength from being Aboriginal. That's what I do, yeah. So, maybe it does, yeah, just the fact that we are still here anyway, you know. Yeah, yeah, well it is the foundation where you came from in the end, and if that is strong there then, you know, anything at the top there, if that is made strong, then you will be pretty much alright. I think your family is pretty much the core where you came from in the end and it is something that, you know, we all go back to in the end, you know. The people come and go, but family is forever, pretty much, and if you can keep them foundations strong, then, yeah, you know, you can swing any which way that you want. (Storyteller 9)

His yarn starts off with the firm belief in growing up being grounded to place and people, of knowing them and them knowing you inside and outside. Detailed knowledge about your kinship, familial relationships and a spiritual connection to them is central to his understanding of his place in the world.

This young man is explicit in describing how he drew strength from his Aboriginality and that knowing who he is allows him to move more comfortably within the non-Indigenous spaces. His yarn demonstrates the importance he has placed on knowing and participating in his culture, identity and spirituality to define who he is. Growing up immersed in both place and culture, this sense of pride, self-belief and connection were foundational to him growing up strong and well. The impact of not having these in your life brings loneliness and feeling half empty or incomplete:

I'm proud to be a Wongi. I'm, like, half Noongar as well. But I always like claiming that I'm a Wongi. I just live here. I will always go back to Kalgoorlie. Kalgoorlie will always be home to me. So, home is your Country. Home is where you come from. My mum is Wongi and I grew up around my Wongi family, on Country....Yeah, it makes me feel proud....(Storyteller 8 Sis1)

This quote really highlights the importance of place and family to this young woman as central to growing up strong and well. Her father identifies as Noongar and she relates to that part of her cultural identity with both pride and passion, but it is her connection to the Country she was raised in, the Country of her mother, the Country of her family that defines her cultural positionality. The value of Country as central to who you are is fundamental to this young woman growing up strong and well. It is what she needs to be strong in the world and provides protection against many of the issues she has faced in her life.

“My identity comes from I-identity. I meaning I, not you”

Family and Identity

Family and identity play key roles in the healthy development and success of Indigenous young people and when asked about the things that were needed to grow up strong and well, the Storytellers in this project all spoke of the importance of a strong, solid family environment. Storytellers predominantly come from single parent households with grandparents, aunties or cousins taking on the primary care for periods of time.

The idea of family as both a challenge and a protective factor came through the responses of some young Aboriginal adults. Such responses revealed the tensions that exist for this generation in terms of intergenerational trauma, intergenerational poverty and fractured families. The yarns that were shared in this research highlight the high value and importance that young people placed on family and the broader kinship and extended systems that they are connected to and with. The Stories also shed light on the sometimes-conflicting influence of family and of the importance of trust in family to ‘always have your back’.

Understanding that the definition of Aboriginality in Australia has historically been about control and oppression is integral to understanding the yarns that have been shared in this project. The impacts of generations of forced removal of children and the forced disconnection from Country are present in all of the yarns

For Storyteller 7, who is living off Country and away from most of his family as he completes his studies, family is intrinsic to his identity, success, ambition and resilience. His parents have instilled a strong sense of familial obligation and respect that he carries with him and draws on to stay strong and well.

Basically, how I would see it is if you don't have family there to help you out in certain situations or you, like, can't trust them or they can't trust you ... that there is no one really out there that you can rely on. So, family...they might jar you for being stupid, but they will have you back. I've stuck around with all my family and all my cousins. Like, all my cousins are like my brothers and sisters to me anyway, and we all look out for one another regardless of what happens...: I don't know. It's probably different because ours is more like it is culture. Like, it's in our blood to look out for one another, whereas - - Because, like, with us blackfellas....-Whenever I see or meet another blackfella, they will go, 'Oh, what's your name?' and I'll go and the next thing they are either my aunty, uncle, cousin, nephew, niece, so you have a lot of family everywhere.. And so they have looked out for all of us, well, looked out for me and my brother on several occasions. But, yeah, every time when something goes wrong with them I try and offer a hand and help them out. So, most of the time, like, we have our disagreements, but then at the end of the day we go, 'Hey! We're family. We've got to get over it, hey! Accept our differences and move forward.' Yeah, and they will always love you for who you are... I reckon for those who are like with DCP (Department of Children's Services) and all that and they go from family to family, just the constant changing it would get to the point where, like, you don't know where to go or who to trust or where your home is. Yeah, having no one, yeah. (Storyteller7)

The cultural positioning that takes place when he meets another 'blackfella' describes a framework for the complex relationships and behaviours that facilitate the *doing* of family. The idea of not having this framework, of the impact of fractured families on your place in the world, is also made very clear when he talks about the DCP (Department of Children's Services) kids and their inability to trust or feel connected. The layers in this small thread reveal quite a lot about how family works for this young man. For Storyteller 7, family and identity is in 'his blood' and is central to growing up strong and well. Family is culture and culture is family.

Family, even when fractured or under duress, is a source of strength - cultural and emotional.

Emotionally, well, I'm not sure how white people are, but Aboriginal families are very tight, so that's helped me a lot, definitely I think, well, the main thing to grow up strong and well is you have got to have that good family background, so that imprinting, I guess you would call it. And also, like, growing up, the Indigenous people you do have around you have got to be positive. Like, with the Elders and that, people who the Elders approve of, like, who respect their culture and won't do things to sort of make themselves look bad, make their people look bad. Like, if you go away to go to uni they are not going to be like, 'Oh, you are leaving us', do you know what I mean? It should be family first, like, 'You are doing good for your people. You are a good role model. You will be able to help us, like, when you get up in front', so that sort of thing. Like it is number one.Yeah, family that support you, not hold you back, but at the same time, family that do hold you back, distance yourself from them, but you have always got to let them know you are there when bad things do happen, and then you have got to - - It is heartbreaking, but you have got to pick up the pieces... because drugs and alcohol makes people's judgments bad, sort of thing, so they do stupid things and make stupid decisions. It just not safe to be around them, because if you are around them you are probably going to get into that sort of thing, like, you will either abuse that substance or you might be with them and they'll get busted by the cops and you'll go down too. Like, keep your boundaries from them, like, keep your distance, but if they are family, like, you have got to do the right thing and help them out sort of thing.. .So, those who you can see if they don't get support they are going to slip, you help them up so that that is not another person giving Aboriginals a bad name. So that is that cultural pride, too, I guess. Some people need to, not everybody. Like, some people need to hit rock bottom before they can start going up....that is what I mean by not giving up on family. Once they hit rock bottom and they start coming up, you have still got to be there if they do turn to you for support, because if you are not there they are just going to.... Because, you have always got to have, what's the word for it, you can't just give up. You have always got to have, like...hope.

There are several threads in this extract that highlight the intrinsic values and beliefs around family for this young Storyteller.

For him, building a strong base to grow from is about positive and strong family background, respect, loyalty and family support. Respect from and of the Elders is an important part of family and identity as a motivator to success. Success in this context is framed around what you can do with it, rather than what you can get from it - doing family. By respecting yourself and your culture and behaving in ways that will bring respect to your people, you can be a role model, provide positive

examples, giving back to others and hope. This is foundational to building resilience, maintaining it and supporting it in others.

The 'emotional tightness' of Aboriginal families that he yarns about is what he believes is the basis for positive family background. But the tensions that exist within this very connected, interconnected and 'tight' family context can be also difficult to negotiate. For this Storyteller, 'involved' means being there to support family no matter how 'stupid the decisions' were that they or you had made. If they are family, you must do the right thing. He mentioned a couple of times in this thread the importance of not adding negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people - of not being 'another person' giving 'Aboriginals a bad name'. For him, it is about cultural pride; however, within this is the understanding that he is not judged just on his own actions, but rather according to racialized stereotypes. These ideas around stereotypes will be discussed in detail later in this chapter; however it is important to understand that how we are viewed by others can and does impact on how we view ourselves. This is true for individual and families.

Family is where the foundations of the Storytellers identity/is are formed, and it is through family that he learned his place in the world and the roles and responsibilities, obligations and expectations around 'doing' family.

Identity and Intercultural spaces

The demarcation of the components needed to grow up strong and well into neat themes and subthemes imposes a false sense of separateness that does not really reflect how Country, culture, family and identity are interdependent on and with each other. This sense of who you are and where you belong, your cultural identity is a thread that runs through all the yarns.

Identity for some of these young people involved a sense of responsibility and obligation to be the best version of themselves so that they could give back to their family or community and be part of something bigger. Others clearly spoke of the intersectional spaces that these young people occupy. It is not a solid and stable space with fixed rules and ideas but rather a space that they themselves are part of defining and creating.

The yarns also showed that it is not easy to separate Aboriginal cultural understandings of identity from the socially constructed views about Aboriginal peoples that are often negative and stereotypical. These representations impact on how you see yourself and others. The experiences of interpersonal, institutional and intracultural Racism that are a part of their daily lives were a major consequence of their identity and the impact of this is profound. For some, the issue of skin colour played a big part in how they perceived themselves and how others perceived them. 'But you're not like them' comments and overt displays of discomfort and at times fear from non-Indigenous people were experienced by most of these young people almost daily. Racism and stereotyping were issues that had real impact on how these young people grew into young adults. For some of the young Storytellers in this project, challenging these stereotypes and ideas from all facets of community was part of growing up strong and well. Learning how to navigate Racism and to challenge it is a strength that they developed as they grew. For just a moment, imagine the potential of our young people if they did not have to learn to 'deal' with Racism. The very fact that the young people in this project are all engaged in higher education or employment is a testament to their resilience and strength and to the capacity of their families and cultural groups to withstand sustained and systemic Racism and still function.

Storyteller 10 is clear that the intersectional space she occupies is at times problematic but finding a way through within that space was and is paramount to growing up strong and well and achieving her own ambitions and dreams - without compromising her cultural and familial identities. For her, like Storyteller 7, having a cohort of other Indigenous students around her at the university provided support and a shared understanding of some of the issues impacting her around identity.

Obviously I've got white family, too. I used to feel quite torn sometimes. Like, 'Am I supposed to hate them? [non-Aboriginal people] I'm not quite sure what I'm supposed to feel. And it is also like, well, you know, they are part of me too, that I love just as much as my Aboriginal family... Sometimes I feel like I am... [forced to choose].) I've had to hyphen my last name. It always seemed to be like an issue. So, like, when I turned 18, I went to a hyphen with my last name. It was like nice symbolic sort of thing... And it is also like, they are part of me, too. I've had all that influence growing up... I think it is good though, because it means I see it as a positive way. It has prepared me to be able to deal with people at uni. Just like, uni is a

really white institution, it is a sort of colonized European influence. And if you want to do uni you have got to be able to cope with it. They get it. [other Aboriginal students] There is something different maybe. You have got to be able to get through. And that is just something you have to do. And, like, every day we are. We are living in this. To survive, you have got to be able to cope with it. I don't know they just seem to get it Otherwise, people who end up in jails and things like that, like, there is a lot of young boys and things like that, I think that sometimes it can be that maybe for some people it could be that there is a real difficulty in trying to make your way through white society and to like abide by these laws that just aren't your own. Like, constantly you don't really have a choice. You have to keep going through this different weird culture that is just slightly off. I don't know, the act of going rebellious may be like rejecting those laws and saying, 'No, I'm not, you are not my culture', which, you know, is understandable, but you are not going to be happy and, you know, strong. And it has the potential of you ending up in jail. Yeah, I know. It is just like you can't win so you have just got to try and do your best to get through it. And it is not like assimilating. It is not that. It is just that you are making a choice to sort of stay strong with who you are, but also get through. There is, I reckon, a way to do it and be happy at the end of it....It's an identity thing. And as soon as you start to figure that sort of stuff out you start to accept.

This young woman articulates very complex ideas about family, culture and identity. The idea of choosing which of your cultural identities receives primacy is deeply painful, personal and intimately linked with your upbringing and with societal expectations. Feeling 'forced to choose' between her Indigenous and non-Indigenous families was a real struggle for her and it was only as she grew older and hyphenated her name that she felt like she was honouring all of the parts of her identity. For her, this space that many Indigenous people live and function in has been positive and does not compromise her Aboriginality. Rather the skills she has learnt to navigate this space since infancy have enabled her to pragmatically 'cope' with moving in the dominant space, the colonised spaces of the University.

She also sees those who struggle in this space, in this 'slightly off' culture and the difficulties that those young people experience. The reality that as a young Indigenous male you are more likely to go to prison than to university is not an abstract idea or a slogan for a health or media campaign, but a consequence of struggling in this space where you 'can't win'. She talks about making a choice to stay strong with who you are but to also find ways to get through- without compromising her Aboriginality or her other cultural identities. There is a real

sadness in this thread that recognises the struggles that the young people undergo as they try to be strong in their identity, despite feeling like they just 'can't win'. The tragic consequences of this are evidenced across the Social determinants of health and the continued disparities experienced. This young woman, however, has developed a strong sense of self, in both dominant and Aboriginal spaces, and has gained skills and knowledge growing up to facilitate this. For her, the cultural bridges that she spans were built during her childhood and are integral parts of growing up strong and of developing resilience. As a university student, on one hand, she has dealt with both the institutional and personal Racism associated with stereotypes of the capacity of Aboriginal youth but, on the other side, through support and education she has been able to process and deal with this and use it to motivate and strengthen her position within the university, in her family and in her communities.

Storyteller 9 is confident around ideas of his identity and how it has shaped and strengthened him. Both of his parents struggled with many hardships to achieve a tertiary education without compromising their cultural connectedness or obligations. This gave him a very firm foundation while growing up, understanding the importance of being able to participate in both contexts. His cultural identity is not compromised by his education or being off his own Country. He places great importance on knowing the Stories of his family - both pre and post colonisation and it is through these Stories and values embedded in them that his identity has been framed, formed and developed as core strength in growing up strong and well.

Yeah, if you didn't have much knowledge about who you are..., you might be an empty vessel maybe. You feel sort of trapped between two worlds. Like, you don't know if you belong in this or belong in that, and if you sort of have something to draw upon or go back to in the end it sort of makes you complete in the end. It made me complete, if that makes sense. You know, from my father's side..., he was able to reconnect with Country and that there, but his mother, my grandmother she was a part of the Stolen Generation. They took her away from where she stayed and took her ...you know, to Beagle Bay, where she met my lulu' now from my dad's side. And, you know, it is the same with my mother's side ... My grandmother from mum, rest in peace, she was a domestic, a domestic slave in the house, cleaned up, cooked, done everything, you know. Mum grew up on the reservation and that there. Being pregnant at 15 or 16, having to work and to study and look after the kids as well. you know, a family of five

or six kids, they had to juggle that with university.... That shows some resilience there.

Well, that is something (these stories) I go back to in the end, or rehash why I'm doing what I'm doing, if I am on the right path, you know. Because that's pretty much what moulded me to who I am now is all of those set of values that I've learnt when I was a kid, being dutiful, honourable, leading by example, being in touch with your family, understanding oneself right down to the core, hey, and, yeah, being respectful to women, and self-reflection is a big part.. Once you do understand (who you are and where you come from) , then whatever those people can tell you, 'Oh, you know, you coon, you this and that', then you are like proud of it, hey. And that just throws a big spanner in the works to them, because they think they are going to try to get you that way. People... guddia mob when I talk down the shops 'Oh you have got such a strong Australian accent. Are you sure you are Aboriginal?' I'm like, 'I'm pretty sure I'm Aboriginal'. 'Oh can you talk a language?' 'Oh yeah, I can talk language if you want, you know' (says some words in language) 'I can talk if I wanted to'. 'Well, why don't you?' they will say. 'No, first of all, you are trying to construct my identity. My identity comes from I-dentity. I am meaning I, not you.

Both sides of the Storyteller's family were impacted by the policies and practices that resulted in the Stolen Generations. There is ample evidence that supports the negative impact the Stolen Generations continues to have on Indigenous families and identities, but for this young Aboriginal man, the stories of the strength, courage and resilience of his grandparents and parents are the links in the chain that are at the core of his identity. Reflecting on and understanding the strengths gained through their experiences, this thread speaks of a very strong connection to people and place that have moulded his values, behaviours and choices.

His childhood immersed in cultural practices and traditions provided him with a foundation and the determination. The grit of his family sets up a narrative from which he built a strong sense of self and an ability to feel complete. It is the strength and conviction of his identity that is driving his academic studies in Community Development and his role in supporting other young Indigenous people who are struggling. His ability to be strong in the world is drawn from a very firm and unshakeable sense of self, individually and in the wider Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contexts.

Storyteller 6 is a 22-year-old woman who identifies as Watjarri and Maori, although she sees her cultural identity as being formed by living with her Aboriginal family, on

and off Country. It is in this space that her cultural identity was formed and where she has learnt to negotiate her sense of self - individually and as a part of a larger extended family and cultural group. The tensions around the ideas of Aboriginality and living off Country and away from extended family played an important part in how she sees herself and her place in family, community and wider society .

Well, I don't talk about my nationality a lot. If someone asks, well, yeah, I am more than willing to tell them because I think it is interesting when you hear people's different cultures and everything but don't think it's 100 per cent needed if you actually tell your cultural heritage to someone, because I personally think they don't have to know because you want them to see how you work rather than just who you are and to make stereotype images based on what you are, rather than the skills you have. . My parents moved to Perth because they wanted a better education for us. But I received a lot of judgment from my family because I was different to, like, my extended family and everything. Like, (being on Country) it is a great thing. I go there every now and then, but it is just a fact that if you identify yourself as a Watjarri like I do I don't see why people have to down you for that just because you are living in Perth. I got called 'coconut' a lot. I think it doesn't give Indigenous people the right to get education, and I'm like, 'Seriously? What world are you living in?' Like, everyone has the right to an education It's great if you get support from the community. That's great. But if you don't, that is not so bad either as well, because you do have another life that you are making for yourself and for your future. Like, it's still a great thing. You can always have that part of your heart that always remains there, but it doesn't mean that you have to physically be there just to get that feeling of belonging So, you draw strength from your identity and from the history of your identity but it doesn't define everything about you. (Storyteller6)

For this young woman, her identity is firmly tied to her Watjarri culture and Country; however, she is cognisant of how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people understand and interpret it and ultimately make judgements about her. This is an interesting and important point to try and unravel. We are informed by the values and beliefs that we are taught via socialisation and through dominant institutions such as the media, education and health systems. For this young woman, the navigation and negotiation of the often conflicting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contexts that she experiences daily have impacted heavily on her sense of self, on her identity.

In this thread, internalised Racism is expressed through the use of the term "coconut". In an Indigenous context, coconut is used to position the other Aboriginal

person as 'white,' as being 'less than Aboriginal' and of being brown on the outside and white on the inside - it is not a compliment. The pervasiveness of this is expressed beautifully by the Storyteller in relation to the ideas she believes her extended family have about education and whiteness and living off Country.

She understands this to mean that her extended family have very low expectations of what you can achieve as an Aboriginal person and the idea that if you step out of these, you lose your authenticity as an Aboriginal person. The notion of *less authentic* is also carried through living off the Country. Developing a strong cultural identity was identified as important in the very early stages of the development of this project; however, the very real complexities of this have really only been shown through threads in stories like this one. Our young people are growing up in multiple contexts with many differing ideas about how to be Aboriginal Australians. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, this Storyteller has weaved and threaded her complex, multifaceted expressions and understandings of multiple identities into and around all aspects her life.

The intersectionality of her identities is a complex and dynamic space that she has grown up in, functions and thrives in. She is confident in her identities-but realises the imposed limitations that frame it, personally and culturally. Her strength is her Watjarri identity, but it does not totally define her - this is a very interesting and quite complex statement that challenges some of the ideas that we have around the centrality of identity.

There is no doubt that this thread reveals that the Storyteller is a proud Watjarri woman but for her, her identity is much broader than that. Her connections with family and culture were challenged when she was young, and she grew up in a predominantly Western space but does not believe that this limits or delegitimises her Aboriginality. For her, growing up knowing who you are and where you come from are important components of your overall self; however, so were ideas around limitations and capacity. She is very aware of how negative stereotypes are often the base from which non-Aboriginal people judge her. Developing a strong cultural identity within this space where the tensions are manifested in strained relationships, Racism, stereotypes, self-doubt requires both courage and resilience. For this woman, Racism and the limitations placed on her by dominant ideas of

Aboriginality can be evidenced in her reluctance to always identify her cultural heritage. By wanting to prove herself before identifying she is hoping to be judged on her skills rather than on her cultural identity. She is trying to say that she is more than a stereotype. The closing sentence of this thread articulates the importance of developing, maintaining and nurturing a strong cultural identity and of the intersectional space in which her identified was developed, nurtured and maintained. The complexities of this young woman's identity do not neatly fit into positive and negative, success or deficit thematic areas but rather move between them and are informed and enacted through all of these lenses. The importance of cultural identity is evident; however, understanding the ways in which our Indigeneity can be strengthened and not consumed within this non-binary understanding is of real relevance in the overall approach to supporting young people to remain strong in the contexts they live in. The intersectional spaces that many of our young people move in and out are complex and shifting. Intersectionality has been a part of many Indigenous cultures and peoples and can "complement growing discussions about the complexity and multiplicities involved in being Indigenous" (de Leeuw & Greenwood, 2011, p. 54). In a health and youth context intersectionality is often viewed and understood from a deficit position, from

...multiple axes of inequity—such as race, indigeneity, poverty, gender, disability, and sexuality—and to address power and privilege that shape and produce sociocultural and historical inequalities (Njeze, 2020, p.3).

A strengths based understanding of intersectional spaces that young Indigenous people move in can enable a more nuanced perspectives and insights into their life experiences and gain greater understanding into the cultural, individual and broader social processes that support strength and wellness.

Storyteller 5 is an 18-year-old Kija woman who has been boarding in Perth. Her early childhood was spent in small towns with a significant and visible Aboriginal population and she has felt like she didn't quite belong anywhere. This idea of being in between two cultures is carried through in her yarn, as is the associated consequences on identity. The growing number of young people that function in this space reflects a lot of social and cultural change and adaptation - forced and chosen. The ability to make choices under constant duress is a testament to the

resilience and strength of Aboriginal families and the capacity they build and nurture in our young people.

I reckon, like, because I'm not very dark - - So, like, when I was in my home town people used to say that I'm white, but then when I come down here (to Perth) you are like a half too black for people. And so, you know, that was really confusing, especially when I first came down, because I was so used to being, like, the white kid, and then coming here and you are like, 'Oh, she is that black girl'....' What are you talking about?' So, yeah, that was like really hard. When I was a kid, like, even though everyone is your family, they were like, 'Oh, you are so white, like this here' and you sit there and you are forever like fighting people, well, not fighting them but, like, you know, I look at them and go, like, 'You know who my family is. How can you sit there and say that?' : Yeah, if that's what you've got to think about me, then I'll just, you know, - Like, maybe that will surprise people about me. Like, I was thinking the other day when people say, 'Oh, you don't talk, like, you don't talk like a blackfella' or something like that, it's like I talk like all of my family and they are all black, you know. Like, before I think that would have really upset me and it would have really hurt me and I would have taken that on board and started to believe it. But now I can just roll my eyes and go, 'Yeah, I feel sorry for you. Like, you don't know. Like, you are the uneducated person that doesn't understand that there is like multi levels of Aboriginal identity.' But I also understand how hard it can be, because I know what it feels like from the other side as well. Like, I know how hard the struggle can be to try and figure out who you are, you know, in this sort of environment, because it can be very isolating if you don't have that sort of support.

In this thread, the duress and impact associated with the stereotyping of Aboriginal youth and the consequences of intracultural Racism are evident. Being too black or too white in differing contexts has forced this young woman to be confident and clear about who she is and where she comes from.

For her, finding a place where her cultural identities 'fit' has been problematic. She has faced the very real and tangible implications of her bicultural identity and through it, she has developed a strong sense of who she is - and who she is not. Intracultural Racism in her family space, where support and positive identity is formed, has challenged her identity and she was forced to push back on the family's narrow understanding of Aboriginality. This can simplistically be seen as is internalised oppression and internalised Racism, but it is not as simple as that. The reality is that shades of colour can and do dictate experiences, choices and outcomes. Discussing skin colour, even in this space, is challenging and problematic. As a fair skinned blackfella, I am all too aware of the difference in the way people, society and family treat you – like this young woman. Her family, as

she rightly claims, knows who she is, knows that they are family, and yet they still question her and her 'whiteness'.

This young woman really gets to the core of many of the threads shared around identity and the multifaceted ways in which it is formed and enacted - ways of doing and being Aboriginal. Understanding how these tensions coexist is an important part of developing programs and policies to support this increasing demographic group. The importance of having a strong sense of who you are, of belonging with and to family, and the ability to be able to walk between the two worlds, were core to the threads shared around the importance of identity to growing up strong and well. The tensions around Indigenous identity are a part of life for all Indigenous Australians. For these young people, the value of understanding how to be comfortable and safe in dominant spaces has been part of developing into strong adults. Despite often traumatic and constant interpersonal, intracultural and systemic Racism, their cultural identity has flourished within the very urban settings and is a protective factor that they relate to and with. The importance of having other Indigenous people around in education and family contexts is also a thread that is picked up in the yarns. For these young people, this support enables connections with others outside of the extended family that can 'do' family', maintain and nurture cultural connectedness and continue to develop as strong and well young people.

Education and Moorditj¹⁵ people

During the yarning session with two young women from the Eastern Goldfields in WA, the importance of having someone to connect with who would be safe and trustworthy was clear. Both young women have lived on and off Country since their early teenage years and have been reliant on the support and care of people outside their families in many situations. One of the Storytellers disclosed abuse in her family as being the main reason for coming to Peth to finish school.

They were both clear that the criteria for being a moorditj person or mentor is centred on trust and lack of judgement. Gender was not a specific issue for mentors, and both young women had worked with both female and male mentors. It is interesting to note that neither of those two young women wanted to confide in a

¹⁵ Moorditj means solid, dependable, good, in Noongar

member of the cultural group. Anecdotally, this is a generalised feeling in many parts of Aboriginal communities I have lived and worked in and could be helpful insight into setting up support structures for young people.

Storyteller Sis 2: Yeah, like, people to help you along the way.

Interviewer: Is that family or can that be anyone?

Storyteller Sis 2: Yeah, anyone, teachers.

Storyteller Sis .1: Someone to talk to. Like, I always talked to the mentors back at school about my problems and everything really.

Storyteller Sis2: Yeah. And, like, they never judged you or told anyone else. They were just like - -

StorytellerSis1: Yeah, really understanding.

Storyteller Sis2: And, like, yeah, just talked about it and they gave advice and stuff.

Storyteller Sis2: They were girls, both girls, one was American and one was from Melbourne.

Interviewer: Okay....was the Melbourne girl Koori or was she wadgula?

Storyteller Sis 2: No, she was wadgula...

Interviewer: Did it make a difference, do you think?

Storyteller Sis 2: Not really.

Storyteller Sis 1: I don't think I would like to talk to someone like a Wongi person because, like, yeah, I don't know, I would just feel weird. Like, it is not like they would go back and tell all these other - - Yeah, I would feel like that the whole time.

Storyteller Sis2: Yeah, kind of. Yeah, so sometimes having someone completely removed from your community is a good

Like many of the other threads shared, this thread also highlights how important it is to have moorditj people in your life for both growing up and staying strong and well.

The threads shared around family, Country, culture and identity are all parts of the interwoven and complex stories of the cultural connectedness, cultural revival and cultural maintenance for the Storytellers. All these threads do not tie easily off the themes- the edges are frayed. The successes, challenges and often-contradictory experiences shared cannot be separated - they need to be understood as part of the overall fabric of life for contemporary Aboriginal youth. Coming through the threads shared are very strong links to education and the importance of it.

What is also very clear is that the support of having other Aboriginal people - peers and staff - in this space in terms of solidifying identity and connection, providing a sense of family and an overarching sense of safety and comfort in having people who have similar experiences around you are also very critical. Early yarns in this research highlighted the importance of education - from early childhood through to

tertiary - as a pathway that has the potential to make sustainable individual, family and community change. Initial yarns identified the values in hearing the stories of young people who were involved in education and who were succeeding – academically, culturally and personally.

As an educator, the retention and completion rates of our young people is an ongoing issue and the improvements across a range of educational indicators is a reason for celebration. However, the dropout rates and levels of engagement in education of Indigenous young people are still well below what is needed to address the current disparities. Having an education provided me the opportunity to move out of poverty, ending intergenerational dependence on welfare and perhaps, more importantly, opening new ways to be in the world for my family. Many of the Storytellers are like me, first in family attending university, and as such are making pathways that were not clearly visible, let alone open for others before them to walk along.

For Storyteller 9, the value of education was ingrained in him from a young age. Both of his parents have a university education and his literacy levels set him apart from most of the other Aboriginal kids at his school. He spent most of his high school education in boarding schools and travelled to Darwin and Perth to complete tertiary studies.

Throughout this time, he was often questioned or doubted (questioned in terms of his ability to be Aboriginal and literate and doubted that his achievements were his own) using his 'black card' to get into and through university. The persistence of these kind of ideas in dominant society are grounded in a belief that as an Aboriginal person you could not possibly get there on your own.

Understanding just how much energy it takes to just **be** an Indigenous young person in higher education is fundamental to developing the appropriate supports and networks. While the Stories of these young people are of strength and resilience, the emotional, cultural and personal cost of wading through the tide of attitudinal and institutional bias and being viewed as an aberration because of your achievements is as immeasurable as it is insidious. For this young man, the very solid cultural and academic foundations laid in his early childhood gave him the

tenacity to move through these experiences strong and confident but not unscathed.

Well, mum and dad, they had been to uni you know and back in primary school they would read with us. We would get a book and you would go back home... read it to your parents and they would tick it off. They would write a comment and then you would go to school the next day and the teacher sees what you've read and all that. But a few of my mates were in a group called star, star is like if your learning is a bit behind and that. They had to go in separate classes.... there was only me and another blackfella.... we were the only two Aboriginal mob in the class, hey. I understood that they were in there because of that but I wasn't going to judge them or that, and if I did do that half of them were my cousins anyway, so I would be copping flak from mum and dad. (Storyteller 9)

His academic achievements positioned him differently to most of his Aboriginal peers and he realised when he was quite young that many of his family and extended family members really struggled in the system. His solid cultural and academic foundations were the cornerstones in developing his leadership skills early and in developing a strong sense of community obligation and responsibility.

People have preconceived notions of what a person is or what he does and what have you, and some people get caught up, you know., 'Oh, he's from a community and that. He might not know much at all.' And, you know, I've lived it. I went to Darwin and some of the city kids down there thought I was just some bloke from who was just getting by just being black, but I told them, 'No, you know, I can do English? I'm good at maths, geography, geometry, trigonometry... I told them, you know, 'nobody has spoon-fed me'

You know, they were reading out statistics in one of them Aboriginal units I had to do for teaching. They were reading out statistics, and they all turned back at me because they knew I was Aboriginal, 'How come you are not that bad?' I was like, 'Hey, there are a lot of my people at uni here. Don't let these statistics sway you. And their perception changes It comes into them and then they have changed themselves in the end, and instead of being all stuck up and snooty and all that to other Aboriginal people, you know, they carry it as well, 'Oh, you know, he was a good bloke ... we shouldn't be too hard on his mob.' (Storyteller 9)

The impact of education is not limited to his own individual goals, dreams and aspirations but extends to his role as educator. Like many young people in his position, this young man is constantly re-educating and reconfiguring dominant ideas about Aboriginality. Education is a highly racialized and political space, and this is clear in the yarns shared. All the Storytellers believe that education is the key

to making changes and to growing up strong and well; however, education is also a place where they experience Racism and stereotyping.

Being the one who is not like the others or who is white enough to pass but too black to be there on merit is a constant tension. Writing up these yarns, it did not surprise me. The levels of Racism and stereotyping these young people deal with is not surprising; however, their capacity to manage it and use it to facilitate change is a narrative that is not widely heard. Young people like these Storytellers are the future leaders in our communities (by **our**, I am referring to the wider Australian and Aboriginal community). These young people have learnt to operationalise the core strengths of family, culture and identity within spaces such as universities and effect real changes - with and without institutional support.

Storyteller 9 speaks quietly in this next part of the yarn- he was answering a question about where he sees his life after finishing his course and it was remarkable to see that he has clearly thought about the values and beliefs that he was raised with and uses them as a base to revalue and reflect on future pathways and opportunities.

Well, that is something I go back to in the end or rehash why I'm doing what I'm doing, if I am on the right path, you know...and that is the thing in the end is that self-reflection is a big part. I will probably be working out in the community, the community meaning anything really. You know, it might be the Indigenous community, sporting community. I'm not really into that whole monetary type gaining.

Like, for me, success is doing something that you love and just doing it, and if you get paid good for it, then good on you, you know. And that's it. I'm not chasing financial success or something like that for me, myself, it all ties in with my spirituality ... Like, you know, money comes and goes but family is family in the end. And that's how I view it. If I can work in an industry that supports who I am, then yeah, I'll go for it ...maybe education, maybe mental health. But, yeah, you know, I've got some sort of direction. (Storyteller 9)

For this young man, his education is a means to an end- the end being that he has the capacity and skills to give back to his community or to the wider community and not just as a means to financial or professional success. These kinds of collectivist values are expressed in several of the yarns shared- a sense of being part of the social and political change needed. This level of political and social awareness and responsibility was evident in this cohort. The booka or cloak of responsibility they wear in terms of making the situation better for those who come after them is both a

testament to their strength and cultural connectedness as well as an enactment of the values, beliefs and cultural knowledge that they were raised with.

Storyteller 10 also provides some very rich and layered answers to the questions and yarning points, particularly around education, identity and family. Her ambition is clear- she is going to be a medical Doctor. Her compassion, empathy, and sense of responsibility are also clear. This next thread weaves through ideas of stereotypes, obligations, responsibility and personal and cultural beliefs. She was excited for the future, prepared to work hard and believes that she is part of something much bigger than herself. This thread crystalizes the impact that education can and does have while also paying respect to those who came before- who were not given opportunities. It ties in with the ideas of Songlines and making new pathways for others to follow- these pathways are culturally designed and constructed- that is they reflect our way of learning, being and doing in the often-hostile environment of education. These pathways are not clear of the debris of colonisation, and the experiences of all these young people highlight how implicit, explicit and institutionalised Racism is part of the daily lives of most of them. The Songlines or pathways are still quite new and fragile. The more of us who travel along these pathways, the more entrenched the pathway becomes. The experiences and resilience of each individual and group who goes before us support the growth of those to come. This is, in a very contemporary sense, the transmission of cultural values and practices in an educational context.

My family, my friends, being successful is like, happiness and being good with yourself and liking yourself and being strong and then letting that influence everything that you do, your work or uni and like being able to achieve and stuff. But more specifically, apart from my family and friends, university is a big part of my life. Like, that is really important to me at the moment. Everything that it represents and everything that comes with it like (Indigenous space on campus) and everything, that is really, important to me. What is important to me in terms of my interests and world issues, health and Aboriginal health. That is something that I want to dedicate my life to. Like, I want to go into medicine, but I also see it as not just being like a doctor. It is like helping people and giving back to our community. We need more Indigenous doctors, I could talk for hours about why we need that. I do a lot of work working with young Indigenous people on mentoring camps. I think it is getting young kids who maybe haven't had the same sort of life that I've had. You know, I've definitely had it tough, but I've also been pretty lucky, I think, as well in terms of the support that I've always had in my life. And so, yeah,

I think it is really important to get other people into uni or being strong in themselves and getting places and things like that.

It is the environment that I'm in now at uni. Like, it is the people that I'm meeting. Really all of it comes from being at uni and it comes from being at (Indigenous support space) and finding this group of people that are on exactly the same journey that I'm on. And, you know, they are all, like, Aboriginal people, young Aboriginal students who are at university. So we are already outnumbered and for most of us who spent most of our life growing up in this environment that is really like you have always been the odd one out, like, the only Aboriginal kid in the class or there's been like five in the whole school. You know what I mean? At high school, my best friend was the other Aboriginal in the school. I guess it is that sense of belonging here that you get.

I know there is an expectation that I'll be working (as a Doctor) with Aboriginal communities, which is actually an accurate one, but, there are also expectations that I'm going to need a lot more help as well, that there is going to be a lot more to get me through, which I don't know if there is or not. But, you know, I'm not saying that it is wrong either. Maybe there will be. Like, maybe it will be easier for wadgula people who are coming through and who are doing medicine but then there are reasons for that as well. There is a whole history behind me that has influenced who I am right now, and a lot of it comes from previous, like, just massive differences in, like education. It comes from things like that and, you know, like, Racism and discrimination and no opportunities for like my whole family. I'm the first one at uni...

I feel like it is not just about me. I feel like it is bigger than me. I feel like I'm a part of this new generation and this new sort of way of seeing Aboriginal people coming through and being doctors and stuff like that. And I have a strong belief in the importance of it. I really feel like I can make a difference. I feel like if I can get through this, then, you know, I can change things, even if it is just by position.

Like, I know that I want to do more stuff with helping other people, I guess. And so I feel that it is just a really big thing. I also feel like I'm on the right path, like, this is where I'm supposed to be, you know, and so I need to keep going down that way. Also, you know, I want to do well for my family. - They are all pretty proud of me. What I'm doing is actually what I want to do, but I really like that I'm doing what they want me to do as well. I have this vision in the future that all of the sort of stuff that is going on, all of the negative sort of stuff, I feel like at the moment it gets perpetuated because everyone seems to be stuck in cycles of stuff that seem to go over, like, in families and things like that. And for me it is about breaking those cycles and then changing them and making them into really positive stuff.

So just like having Aboriginal people going to university is just like, you know, an option, like it always would be and if it wasn't it wouldn't be because of the colour of their skin (Storyteller 10)

This thread is extremely powerful and articulates the changes that have occurred in how we think and do education and our rights to it- at all levels. This young woman sees herself as part of a new generation of Aboriginal people, a generation of Indigenous people who are aware of their rights and who are part of a small but growing number who are becoming doctors, teachers, lawyers and who, by their very existence and participation, are forcing the rest of the society to acknowledge our capacity and our intelligence. This part of her yarn was really animated and excited. She was and is excited to be part of the change, and like the previous storyteller, she sees herself very clearly on a pathway that is right not only for her but for her family and her mob in general. She is clearly aware and reflective of the impact of past policies and practices on her family and Aboriginal people in general with access to education: thus, her commitment to ensuring that she provides a space for others to come after her. She has been enacted through her role as a mentor for others. This is again reflective of a more collectivist approach to education and to providing support for Indigenous students.

The level of scrutiny some Aboriginal students undergo is also echoed in this thread. As with our previous Storyteller, there are expectations placed on her by other students and teaching staff. She has been scrutinised about her capacity and she has handled that with humour and understanding. This kind of confidence and understanding comes from a place of enormous strength and capacity that is grounded in her family, culture and her access to and participation in education.

She is extremely clear regarding the cycles of 'negative stuff', the intergenerational trauma that is very much a part of her own family and her role in this. She is to be one of those who break the cycle- and her education is the key to achieving this.

The importance of belonging and connection or relationships in education context is clear - having others around you who are on the same path or who are, like yourself, are trying to find a place in your Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds is a key source of support and strength. Her experiences at university are supported and encouraged by a specific Indigenous centre, located on her university campus. She gains strength from the space and, importantly, from the people.

The cultural connectedness, irrespective of geographical location or cultural groups, is supported and maintained through shared experiences, goals and aspirations.

For her, this creates a sense of belonging, resilience and strength the foundations of which were laid in her childhood around family and culture. Spaces that can facilitate this kind of connection with students are the sites for the transformative social, cultural and political change evidenced in the threads from this young woman's story.

Education is key to providing her with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate and thrive in very different cultural spaces. The benefits of educational spaces, processes and programs that effectively engage with and support young Aboriginal people is a continued thread in Storyteller 7's Story. Throughout high school, he was constantly bullied for "just being Aboriginal" and was constantly challenged to have physical fights. The common perception at his school was that Aboriginal boys fight, and this was the basis for his relationships with his peers and in many cases with the staff. This perception of violence is a heavy burden for our young men to carry and contributes to the enormous physical, emotional, mental and cultural distress that they experience. This is a thread that will be explored in challenges to saying well. This young man felt that he had been judged and found guilty the moment he walked in to high school and it culminated in him moving into a boarding program at a private school, in Perth, to avoid dropping out of school completely. The support of the Indigenous liaison worker at high school was the main reason why he managed to stay in school as long as he could.

Well, it all started when I went to high school. A couple of boys used to bully me just for being Aboriginal, and at that point, like, they always wanted to fight me, but I made a decision then that I wouldn't fight unless it was absolutely necessary. Everyone thinks that an Aboriginal kid goes around fighting when in reality it is not the case. Not all of us are the same. I copped a lot of Racism on a day-to-day basis. The Indigenous liaison there was helpful. Like, they (the bullies) would just be on my back all lunch time, so I would just go to her office and I would just sit in there and I would yarn away with her. For the three years I was sitting there and taking it, it got to the point where I didn't want to go to school no more. And mum saw the big behaviour change as well so that's why she looked into scholarships for other schools. I made the move to, they have a lot of scholarships for other Indigenous kids and we got on really, really well with one another...

...when I was in year 12 I used to go help out the year 8s, and then in turn the year 8s would help me out with something. So, it was like one big happy family, we all had each other's back, regardless. Because in the boarding house you live with all these people. Like,

you get along with them. And the first three days, homesick a lot; after that it was, yeah, so much fun, and I'm so happy that I actually went to boarding school. Yeah, I have thought about other possible scenarios I would have dropped out. Storyteller 7

The obligations to each other that were shared earlier in his family and that were a core part of his growing up were extended into the relationships with other Aboriginal boys at school. His previous school had only three or four Aboriginal students and the lack of cultural and family support resulted in him feeling isolated and being subjected to bullying and Racism. The small cohort of students at the boarding school provided him with protection, a sense of belonging, and a way to do family when living away from familial support systems. The support provided by being part of a family or group of other Aboriginal boys at school offered a framework for culturally safe and affirming relationships. This thread also reiterates ideas around mentoring and supporting others. Part of receiving the support is the responsibility to provide that support for others.

The Indigenous liaison worker at this high school and the Indigenous program at his boarding school facilitated the personal, cultural and academic growth of a young man who had felt physically and emotionally battered by the education system.

When a program and/or organisation implements a culturally informed and safe framework that centres around relationships and provides opportunities to develop and nurture cultural ways of being, young people, like this Storyteller, can flourish and reach their potential.

For many young people, educational contexts are where they experience daily Racism and stereotyping; however, through the support of Moorditj people, it is also where they find support and strength. Their stories and experiences are key to supporting this. Developing programs that acknowledge the strength of our young people and the importance of relationships with Moorditj people are essential to the changes needed. When we only see key spaces like education from a deficit position, we are viewing a whole population with blinkers on.

Lifting these blinkers, widening the lens, can capture the stories and strengths of young people like these Storytellers. The value and importance of having Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander academics and support staff has been fundamental to the Storytellers success- personal and academic.

Staying Strong and well: Ideas of Success

Finding out what young people in this project thought about success was identified as an important piece of the overall story of resilience and good mental health. The Storytellers were asked explicitly about what success meant to them.

Success is making it in a job, got family you know good ways¹⁶ family so that they are looked after and loved. Having a job is important you need it unna? For money. Getting an education is real important and I wish I had finished high school. Successful is like I would say is when someone has set a goal or a dream that they have succeed or reached their dreams. (Storyteller 11)

Because, well, like, if I get through uni, especially like environmental science, it will give me a good job after uni, and then I'll have that sort of money, comfortable, a comfortable amount of money for like and then yeah, I will like help look after mum and dad when they need it and stuff like that. (Storyteller 5)

No, I'm not really into that whole monetary type gaining. Like, for me, success is doing something that you love and just doing it, and if you get paid good for it, then good on you, you know. And that's it. I'm not chasing financial success or something like that, you know. (Storyteller 9)

I would have to say success is knowing that I can make a difference. I reckon that if other Indigenous kids can see that I can go through high school and get a university degree, join the military which is probably the most hard core racist thing you can possibly go and join ...Because, becoming a pilot is one of my long-term goals. Probably being the first Indigenous chief of defence force as well - -If white people can do it, why can't I? That's how I see it, right? And if I do get chief of defence, I'll go and see other Indigenous kids and it will be like, 'Hey! I did it. I went through just the same as you, all the hard times and I persevered, bounced back' (Storyteller 7)

Going to mainstream into physiotherapy or sports science and finishing that, being able to, like, provide for your family as well. Being independent and ...Storyteller8.1...Yeah, your own person, having a house or your own house, your own car. Yeah like, doing something you love. (Storyteller 2)

¹⁶ Good ways-a functional, healthy family

These yarns and ideas of success are centred around family, education and following your dreams and passions. Success is not seen as an individual endeavour; it is more nuanced than that.

For these young people, successes involve opportunities, economic stability and fulfilling obligations to family and to themselves. Being able to support your family and give back to community is a core value for these young people and is a measure of how successful you are or can be. The idea of cultural obligations is present across all the thematic areas and it is in these ideas of success that these obligations are starting to be met.

Success is about your capacity to make opportunities in education and to have and hold on to long-term aspirations. Success is linked to wealth in terms of providing for others and/or securing an economic base from which to make better choices for yourself and others. Knowing what success might mean is essential to understanding how to support young Indigenous people to achieve their goals and aspirations. While these ideas may not be radically different to those of other young Australians, it is important to understand that opportunities around education are very new to Aboriginal families and communities. Success and pressures to succeed may be experienced very differently.

The opportunities provided by gaining access to education have an immediate and long-term impact on intergenerational poverty and, perhaps more importantly, generate intergenerational hope.

Maintaining your shield (Maintaining strength and Resilience)

As mentioned previously, there is not a lot known about how resilience is developed and maintained in a state of almost constant crisis. Finding ways to support young people to replenish, heal and rejuvenate within this is important and was a key question in the yarning sessions. Storytellers were asked to share what they did to stay well - mentally, physically, culturally and spiritually. In the threads shared, the health of your spirit and your connections and relationships to and with culture, land and people are clearly identified as foundational to growing up and staying strong. For the Storytellers in this project, a diverse range of activities and tools were utilised to maintain good overall health.

These included surrounding themselves with people who they trust, accessing mental health services, physical activity, meditation, yarning with people and connecting Country and/or place.

For some of the Storytellers who are living off Country, finding these connections and maintaining them are central to their capacity to succeed and be resilient away from their families and communities.

Resilience was not a word that this young group of Storytellers really identified with; however, as a concept there is a very clear understanding of what it is, how to get it and how to keep it. The Stories in this project provide a real snapshot of cultural meanings of resilience both as a process and outcome. From the yarns, it is evident that young Aboriginal people continue to be exposed to multiple familial fracturing - Racism, grief, suicide, poor health and education outcomes. What is also evident is the power and capacity of family, identity and culture to mitigate against them. It is evident that they are the core factors in building strengths to cope with the reality of being Indigenous and young in Australia. Supporting the healing of families and communities is core to addressing many of the issues that the Storytellers have identified. Focusing on a more holistic approach to SEWB that includes identifying and building on the existing capacity and strength of families and communities to facilitate resilience in our young people is not a new idea, it is what communities have been calling for, for many decades.

Someone that comes out of really fucked up stuff you know they are the Bossest fellas I know. I'll give them that. If you have had a rough life and you can get over it, you just Boss. Sometimes we do things that aren't the best to get through, but you know we get through. I might be a bit what that word you used resilient is. Not in a totally good way but I still here, trying to get on with it. You know sis getting there slowly but surely. There is a lot more I can do, I know it. Sometimes you feel like there is nothing out there for us you know. But you gotta try to be grateful for what we got- how much more is out there for us. Family is number one not you. (Storyteller 11)

Yeah, yeah, I would call it (resilience) a shield. Yeah, I guess in some things I am; in others, not really. I guess I never used to be very resilient but now I just wipe it off kind of thing. Racism, I mean you get over it because it has happened every day pretty much. You get looks, people who cross the street, which a lot of people don't think happens, but it does still.

*Also like me and...-, were talking and we were saying, there was that sign up near the front desk, about life expectancy 'My life expectancy isn't as long as my retirement age' So the stats are that I will probably die before my retirement age.
(Storyteller 2)*

Both threads speak about different ways of staying strong or developing resilience. For Storyteller 11, coming through trauma, grief and other negative experiences requires a lot of personal and cultural strength. Her naming up those who do come through these circumstances as the Boss is a very apt way of describing young Indigenous people who can and do succeed and who daily exhibit enormous capacity to be resilient and hopeful.

She acknowledges that her ways of coping, her resilience is not always manifested in the 'best way'. Some of her responses to stress are undoubtedly unhealthy, but for this moment in time they are working - in a very fragile way. She understands the importance of changing her behaviours and patterns and it is through focusing her goals, aspirations and ambitions that she believes change can and will happen - slowly but surely. This young woman has lost several friends and relatives to suicide and violent death, has dealt with fractured and violent families, and has been using drugs since she was very young, but she is not lost or filled with hopelessness.

The capacity this young woman exhibits in terms of functioning within the mainstream society every day and maintaining a sense of cultural identity and strength is an excellent example of the tenacity and fortitude of many of our young people. Her ability to continue to strive for the better, to work on getting stronger and to build resilience despite her long-term exposure to high-risk situations is grounded in her relationships to family and Country. She spoke about the historical hurt and trauma of her family and of the wider Aboriginal community with great empathy and compassion, although frustration around the internal fighting comes through. Using this thread to explore cultural understandings of resilience is a very deliberate attempt to try and understand the uphill struggle that many of our young people experience when trying to succeed on their own. Understanding the impacts of history, Racism and oppression is central to supporting Indigenous youth to stay strong and well. So is the understanding that despite these legacies, many of our young people are functioning and succeeding.

Seeing through the trauma and looking into the strengths behind the thread from Storyteller 11 is an equally important part of herstory. Within the thread is the core belief that her community and family can and should come together and support young people. The fractures in her family and community are understood and cause real pain and distress but within this is also a sense of hope for the future and importantly, possibilities.

Storyteller 2 provides us with a great visual for understanding resilience - he sees it as a shield that offers protection. This shield is an important part of his functioning in daily life and enables him to navigate a society that is often harsh and unaccommodating. He has experienced many incidences of Racism and has learnt to deal with this using his own shield. He mentions a poster that is displayed at the university he attends. This is a public health poster that shows the average life expectancy of Indigenous men as being much shorter than that of the non-Indigenous counterparts. He reflects on what that means for him and his male family members and peers. Developing resilience in this reality has required him to learn to “live with Racism” and to accept the limitations of bad health outcomes as factors that cannot be avoided. Acknowledging these traumatic realities is to understand the cultural specificities, circumstances and realities in which young Indigenous people are expected to develop strengths and resilience.

This next thread from Storyteller 10 speaks clearly of her ideas around resilience. She shares the importance of facing the challenges that she experiences and learning from them in order to grow and develop. The risk factors that young Indigenous people face are expressed very simply and clearly. They legitimise their experiences and acknowledge their continual challenges. Their experiences are legitimised, and the continual challenges acknowledged. For her, positive attitude, happiness, courage and her connection to family are the core strengths she draws in to build and maintain her resilience.

I have good relationships with people. I think that is my number one thing with how I function. We depend on our relationships with our family, and that is what is important to me. And so, maintaining them, and ... surrounding yourself (with) people that treat you well and who are good to you ... who make you feel good about yourself. Like, that is so important....

The happier you are, the more positive things sort of happen to you, but then I think it has also got to do with you, like, your attitude and your mind frame. Like, if you are in a really good space, bad things can happen to you and you can react to that in a totally different way. And you see it differently, you can see something bad happens to you and you can go, 'Well, I can use this as an opportunity to maybe gain a skill in myself'. I am going to build this strength, because I'm going to have to deal with these situations in the future, so if I can learn to deal with it now, then I can use this as an opportunity to grow'.

I think that there can be good things in learning to overcome problems and stuff that you can face. I think that you can get a lot of lessons out of that, and you can get a lot of life experience which can be really like invaluable in any situation really. So, again, I think it is all how you look at it. Like, you could take it on as, you know, 'Poor me! Look at all the things that have happened to me.' And, you know, that is legitimate. Shit just keeps getting thrown at you no matter what you do, but I also think that even if you just conquer sort of like one little life thing you can gain something from that. You can also feel good about yourself. That is something that I've found. Yeah, if you can get over, like, one thing and you can surprise yourself by how well you've dealt with it, then you start to feel really good about yourself and you want to see what else you can do, like, what else you can deal with. ...If something bad happens, I'll cope with it...and believe it as well. It is not just about saying it. Yeah, you don't just wake up with it. You have to work for it. You have to want to get there and achieve it and stuff like that as well. But, yeah, it is about being able to get back up as well and keep going ... The environment that I'm in now at uni, it is the people that I'm meeting...this group of people that are on exactly the same journey that I'm on.

And, you know, they are all, young Aboriginal students who are at university....if you have the support from other people that are going through the same thing that is when you start to really, come together in yourself and you are in a supportive environment for you to go off and then work out all this stuff for yourself. And then, you know, all these other things follow on. Like, I've learnt to become really open with people and all that sort of stuff. I guess, yeah, it all comes down from growing and learning within yourself and knowing who you are and being really strong with that, and not letting anybody else tell you...: I know it is what has kept me here. I know I would have left in first year. I would have left first semester if I hadn't have had people sitting here going, 'No, it's alright. Like, people have done it.' (Storyteller 10)

The constant thread of strong relationships is fundamental to the building of her resilience.

These connections, for Storyteller 10, were formed and nurtured during her childhood and are the basis of her capacity to stay positive and strong or resilient. This has been further developed and nurtured by her relationships at the university and by the supportive and safe spaces and people she has connections with. The connections have given her the strength to develop, grow and build the resilience she needs to continue her studies. The personal, cultural and academic growth she experiences is enabled by these relationships and this highlights the importance of connections to people and place. Connection is core to building capacity and resilience in and for young Indigenous people. The centrality of these components as protective factors, as sources of strength in the overall SEWB of Indigenous young people, is clear in stories shared.

This thread also speaks about the importance of being in a good place mentally and emotionally and how this facilitates self-belief and efficacy. This young woman's belief in herself and in her capacity to learn and grow from conflict and challenges demonstrates how resilience, as a process, is about managing and mitigating risk, reflecting on it and developing strategies to deal with it better next time. Happiness, positive mental health and self-belief facilitate this as well. Moreover, there is a very strong commitment from the Storyteller to work hard, do better and succeed - all of which are strengthened by her feelings of safety, security and connection.

Self-belief, aspirations and hope along with connections or relationships with people and place are central to being resilient for these Storytellers.

Developing more culturally contextualised understandings of resilience and supporting capacity- building programs and processes that are based on these strengths offer alternative perspectives to the predominantly deficit-based narratives around Indigenous youth. For the Storytellers, having hope and aspirations for the future, plans and dreams run through many of the threads.

Well, my tutor showed me one (an international scholarship) last year. It is a chemistry one. If you get high enough, they take you to England for—what's it called? —Cambridge or something like that.... Yeah, apparently it is like the best university for science in the world. So, I thought, yeah, definitely, that would be awesome.
(Storyteller 2)

In an earlier thread this young man described resilience as a shield, as something that he can use to protect himself against Racism and other challenges. His aspirations, or even just the thought of attending Cambridge, reveals a lot about his resilience, his shield. For young people to overcome challenges, navigate risk and to achieve success - roselike - there must be a sense of hope, a belief in a positive future. For this young man, the possibility, no matter how remote the location is, of attending Cambridge is that target he is journeying towards.

Like, the future can be a good thing. I'm not saying if you think positive, but you think, 'This could happen in the future', like, good things like that, and it makes you feel a lot better when you actually just think good within yourself no matter what the situation is. (Storyteller 6)

For Storyteller 6, believing that the future has the potential to be “a good thing” infers an underlying thread of anxiety or unease. It shows a deep understanding of the importance of believing the possibilities. She is clear that believing in the potential of the future provides opportunities to feel good within yourself and the capacity for dealing with many challenging situations. It also enacts resilience.

Storyteller 3 acknowledges the internal struggles that he has around his legitimacy as a university student. The internal narratives that he hears, the little voices that cause him to doubt himself, are challenged and quietened by his strong sense of self and his place in the world.

I suppose with university it is academic, too, you have got to worry about, ...that little voice in the back of your head- a little voice, saying, 'No, you can't do it, you can't do it', so you have got to look at that ... You have just got to take a third person look at yourself sort of thing. Like, ...Well, if I was somebody else looking at myself knowing the things I've done before... Like, if it was one of my friends with my abilities who thought that they couldn't do it, you would just look at them and be like, 'No, you are a nut case. You'll nail it!' Yeah, self-belief basically. That is the most important thing. (Storyteller 3)

It has been well established that many young Indigenous people experience a disproportionate amount of risk factors and stressors that continue to impact on them throughout their lives. While not discounting these realities, shifting the gaze or adjusting our lenses to focus on the strengths that mitigate these risks as the focus can dramatically affect how we, as researchers and members of society, can support Indigenous families and communities.

The ideas of resilience shared by the Storytellers help to imagine resilience as shield, with the core strengths of culture, identity, relationships, connections, hopes and aspirations as the wood that the shield is carved out of. Resiliency, for these young people, is about being strong in yourself, your culture and in your relationships to people and place. It is about developing capacity through these relationships and using that social and cultural capital to protect or shield yourself when faced with risk or stress. Resiliency is about courage. It is about experiences that transform and cause reflection; it is about having hope and a belief in a positive future.

Continuing with the yarn from Storyteller 3, in this thread he shares how he maintains his overall health and how he deals with conflict or 'bad' situations at home. He also shares just how important relationships to people, community and cultures are and how, for him, finding these connections provided him with not only support but with a level of cultural acceptance that is very important to him.

Yeah, time alone. So, like, if something bad happens at home I like getting back to nature and that, so go to the beach and that sort of thing, be the weird one who just sits up on the dunes looking over the ocean....Sort of reflect and that, or sometimes Kings Park, I will go there and go for a walk around. Like, when I was back home, I would do the same, walk around everywhere.... It keeps you physically healthy which keeps you mentally healthy. So, when you move away from home, some of the important things are finding not a replacement but finding something down here that gives you the kind of support you get at home, so family or a sporting team or elders around that can encourage you. Like, that's what I mean about the cultural thing. Yeah, yeah, so that is about cultural acceptance as well. (Storyteller 3)

Finding a place outside, sitting on Boodjar, is something that Storyteller 9 also found important to maintain his strength and health. Like Storyteller 3, he is living outside his own Country and utilises the beautiful Kings Park in Perth to touch base with the land and to mediate as a way to deal with the stress he experiences. Social and physical activity are also important parts of keeping overall good health although for this young university student however, meditating is cheaper!

I go down to Kings Park and do some meditating. I actually do that sometimes. Yeah, that is a passive way that I can deal with it. There is the other extreme that I do which is probably, you know, go out and have a wild night in town.

You know, there is that. And then there is gym, especially in gym, boxing, hey, I really do just unleash it inside there, hey, or playing video games...bit it's cheaper to meditate. (Storyteller 9)

I do a lot of sports so that helps to take my mind off things. I take into account also the saying 'a healthy body is a healthy mind' or something like that. So, I try to keep myself occupied with sport...Yeah it was good, like, just the whole routine and, like, getting into sports. When you are doing sports as well, like... it was the social aspect as well. (Storyteller 7)

I like to be outside. Like I have to go outside for a little bit every day, otherwise I get really irritable and stuff. And, yeah, you know, just like go and do a little bit of exercise, like, play netball or whatever. Even, like, if it is not competitive, even if it is just, you know, like, amongst your mates, just something like that...Yeah, just being social and sitting down and having a yarn and everyone, like, sitting down and laughing together, you know, and stuff like that. (Storyteller 5)

Playing sport and being part of a team or group provides a physical outlet as well as developing relationships that nurture other aspects of overall health. The social aspect of sharing this with other Indigenous young people provides a safe space - cultural and physical space to yarn, laugh and share your troubles and struggles and, for some, a place to reaffirm cultural identity and connections.

The benefits of belonging are well documented and are applicable in all cultural contexts; however, for these young people these groups and access to culturally safe spaces and support also take on a familial component and, in many cases, provide the core functions of family that have been identified for growing and staying strong.

Having some to yarn to and sporting activities, getting blackfellas on teams. If they picked us up in a bus and that and that getting into some sports...we need to be motivated a bit, you know support and mentoring. Something that helps them to yarn...You know someone to yarn to, like a counsellor or that there. Someone who can get down to the nitty gritty as to why fellas are doing what they are doing and that there. How can there be ways to get off it. I feel more comfortable talking blackfella councillor but some fellas you can't trust anyway cause anyway we all related, you know like family and you can't tell know one nothing. They get annoyed at you and then you know, support and activities for young people, like boxing and that there. I would go all the time. (Storyteller 11)

Chapter 7

Challenges to growing up strong and well

Well, me and J..., because there was that sign up near the front desk, the life expectancy, me and him were talking and we were saying, 'My life expectancy isn't as long as my retirement age'. So the stats are that I will probably die before my retirement age. (Storyteller 2)

This theme had direct connection to the aims of the research and to the open-ended questions around the barriers or challenges to growing up strong and well. The capacity and resilience of the Storytellers were revealed in dealing with the challenges that they face as they try to find their way in the world, or in two worlds. For all of the Storytellers, Racism was the main obstacle or challenge to reaching to their full potential. The Stories shared revealed the devastating and pervasive impact of Racism on self-esteem, self-worth. Racism is a major psychological stressor that impacts on physical, psychological and spiritual health. The above opening quote from Storyteller 2 provides a very profound insight. At only 19 years of age, this young man is acutely aware of the reality of diminished life expectancy. For him, being male and Indigenous is a very real threat to his overall life experience and health. He has watched and experienced how that plays out. For many, it means that reaching 65 is a major milestone and many of us grow up without parents, grandparents, uncles and aunties. It means that we have become accustomed to the disproportionate amount of grief and loss experienced by our families as a result of treatable diseases, suicides and accidents. It means that our children and grandchildren have a set of funeral clothes to wear to the many funerals that the families attend. The disadvantages and challenges have been clearly identified throughout the thesis; however, it is important to understand that behind the statistics there are real and resilient people, families and communities. In terms of young Indigenous peoples, the disadvantage they experience is spread across all the Social determinants of health (SDoH) and profoundly impact on their choices, experiences and potential. Understanding how they experience and negotiate the barriers they face, while staying well, can support a more complex understanding of the very real challenges that young people face.

Challenges were understood to be the barriers at a physical, ideological, cultural level that they felt impacted on their capacity and choices. The challenges and risks to staying strong that the young people in this project experienced were: Racism, grief and loss and fractured families.

Racism

All participants referred their Aboriginality as a source of strength and pride. Their cultural and family connections are the core strengths and the connections to people and place inform own values, beliefs and aspirations. The flipside to this is that every Storyteller consistently identified Racism as the number one challenge in lives. The daily realities of people crossing the road to avoid passing you in the street, people fearing you or your son or daughter, hyper-surveillance, poorer education options, stereotyping, judgement of you and your whole family and culture without having ever spoken a word to you, limiting your potential and experience by low expectations and many internalised feelings of shame and hurt – this list is long and if you are out of breath reading the sentence - imagine, for a moment, living it. If we can imagine this then we can start to appreciate and understand the realities of these young people.

Racism is a 'reality they just had to learn to live with' and started very early in their lives – most remember experiencing it when they began formal education. Dealing with the daily micro-Racism as well as blatant and overt personal and institutional Racism contributed adversely to their sense of wellbeing, ability to function at school or work, and to their overall sense of place in the wider community.

Racism at school

For Storyteller 2, ongoing Racism led him to leave high school early, and to feel powerless and constantly aware of the negative way dominant society sees and relates to you, irrespective of how successful you are.

Racism, Yeah, it does, (hurt my heart) but I mean you get over it because it has happened every day pretty much. You get looks, people who cross the street, which a lot of people don't think happens, but it does still. Yeah. I went to a chemist one day to buy Panadol. An old lady walks out with her grandkid and quickly ran off to the other side of the street and then ran back behind me and jumped on the pathway again.

So I thought.... 'Oh okay, cool!' Yeah. I was thinking maybe I should just turn around and keep following them.... You can see why some kids, though, are just, 'Oh yeah, okay', but you can see why some people get very angry about it. ... Yeah, well if they want to be like that then they can, yeah.... And sometimes the best way to shut (racist) people up is just to keep living the good life ... Yeah, not encourage them.... Yeah, and just keep being a good bloke (Storyteller 2)

There are so many layers within this thread that show a range of emotional and physical reactions to Racism. During the yarning session we started to unpack his Noongar identity and how it impacts on his life.

He talked about how Racism 'hurts his heart' and, as he said this, he briefly touched his chest to emphasise the intense reactions he experiences. He was passionate and visibly emotional as we yarned about how Racism has been disruptive and brought painful consequences for him. This was evident when he shared the Stories about the fear, distrust and discomfort that his very existence can evoke. He sees people crossing the street, visibly changing direction, to avoid him. He knows when and why people clutch their bags as he walks by - he just keeps working at getting over it-because it happens every day. These are serious challenges to try to work through and with.

He understands the angry responses of some young Aboriginal people to this and admits having similar urges to use fear to intimidate, fight back, confront, but he does not. He questions whether society in general believes that Racism is real, or that his experiences are real. His overall positive wellbeing, his family and cultural supports and his own shield, are the strengths he draws on to work through this; however, the challenges of Racism, even from a place of strength and wellness, are profound. He has no control over these perceptions other than his own responses to it. And, for the most part, his response to it is to just try and be a good bloke and keep living a good life.

There is a real sense of vulnerability in this thread. The challenges that Racism throws at him every day are largely unseen or acknowledged by the wider society. The fear and mistrust of Aboriginal young men is not based on him personally but on a dominant stereotype - he does not know the old lady at the chemist or the people who stare at him, who fear him, and yet they impact on a whole range of choices and opportunities in his life.

Yeah, I just didn't even show up (to school) sometimes, just stayed home or I would just leave. Yeah... there is a lot of Racism through there, not directed at me but just being next to it and constantly getting that, 'Oh, but not you!' Yeah, 'You are the good one. Not like you. No, I didn't mean you. I meant that other one.' It is like, 'But, yeah, they are my uncles and aunties and cousins'. I also know in high school there was a guidance counsellor. He didn't want me to go to uni for some reason, to keep the high school score up or something. So, like, the principal put the word to him that they don't want who they don't think can pass the TEE, you know. Yeah, they tried to steer you away from it... (Storyteller 2)

The inherent Racism experienced in this scenario is played out across the yarns and speaks to the prevalence of deficit narratives around Aboriginality. The subtext is that Aboriginal young men like the Storyteller are somehow not the 'real ones'. The 'real' ones are the very stereotypes that inspired the fear and mistrust he experiences. The deficit narratives around Aboriginal young men describe anger, dysfunction and criminality. There is little critical thought given to the subtext or to the implicit understanding of it. There is little or no thought given to what is being said and, more importantly, heard. What Storyteller 2 heard was that he was a good Aboriginal, meaning that he was different to how others perceived Aboriginal people to be. He was judged against very negative stereotypes. He points out those 'others', the bad ones, the stereotypes, are his mob, his family. From my own experiences and those shared by the Storytellers, being told that you don't look, sound or act Aboriginal is meant as a compliment, and there is almost always a level of disbelief when you explain that it is actually quite offensive. The continued Racism, and disparaging remarks about 'other' Aboriginal people, had very tangible consequences for this young man. He stopped going to school.

A thread of institutionalised Racism runs through many of the yarns. For Storyteller 2, high school was the source of pain and frustration that failed to provide options and pathways for him- because he is Noongar. A discourse of negativity and low expectations was backed up and legitimised by the behaviour of the principal. If this very strong and capable young man, who has a strong shield, a strong family and extended family and a strong Noongar identity, struggled to feel safe in high school, then the ramifications for our young people who are fractured or without the support of family and culture are profound.

The community members and young people involved in this research all agreed on the fundamental importance of education in achieving success, good mental health and resilience; however, it is in educational contexts that these young people are exposed to layered, pervasive and ongoing Racism. The Racism this young man endured as an everyday part of his education was not something that he had any control over. Because he was prevented from taking the required subjects at high school, **due to low expectations** of him and the stress of Racism, he did not complete his high school education and went through almost a year of feeling lost and disengaged. Immediate and extended family rallied around and offered support and importantly, offered culturally safe options. They were 'doing' family:

Mentally healthy? Just not getting too down, depressed and stuff. Like, I just sat home and just watched TV shows after TV shows, yeah, you know soaps and stuff How I got over it? I'm not really sure how it even happened actually. I think it was just gradual.

Interviewer: So family came to see you and helped you to get out of your funk?

Yeah. So not only am I talking about brothers and family, you know, mum and dad, I am actually talking about an extended family which is part of the broader Noongar community...Just watching out so it doesn't get that far, you know. Yeah, my uncle gave me a job with him cleaning out the diggers, so degreasing them and stuff. Yeah, hard and hot...So yeah, I tried like labouring kind of work, and I'm just not into it... so I kind of got over it pretty quick when I realised I definitely don't want to do that. I think it was just that having to choose one or the other, (work or study) ...So I went to TAFE for a little while for a Cert II in Business. That was just boring so I stopped that. And then Nan was telling me about the bridging course to get into that and go into university. I just thought, 'Yeah, sweet! That will be pretty cool.' Especially since I kept asking everyone, 'Oh is it anything like high school?' and they said, 'No, it is completely different' (Storyteller 3)

The very real impact that Racism has on self-esteem, self-worth and overall mental health is evident in this thread, and understanding and challenging Racist and stereotypical discourses should be seen and understood as a national health priority. As a determinant of health, Racism is an overarching contributor to serious intergenerational disadvantage. For this young man, the Racism at school oppressed, discriminated and controlled all levels of his engagement, from face-to-face through to formal decision-making processes and outcomes. For him, the impact of institutionalised Racism is clear. It is not at all complex to him or others who experience it, nor is it a post/anticolonial theoretical discussion point. For this young man, Racism determines many of the life choices that he made *for* him.

Racism has had measurable impacts on this young man's life. However, his strong family and cultural connections have given him some capacity and resilience to navigate and defend himself and his family from Racist behaviours and ideologies. Imagine if all his energy that he is spending on being constantly alert and ready to defend himself could have been channelled into realising his potential and dreams. Imagine if this energy was directed at getting into, "what's it calledCambridge University" (Storyteller 2).

His enrolment into an Indigenous pre-tertiary course provided him with a culturally safe educational space. It has also provided a pathway back into education - a very clearly identified factor in changing social and economic realities in his family. With a head full of dreams that have been nurtured through the culturally appropriate support he received within the educational institution, he has big plans that do not include laying on the couch in front of the TV but include aspirations of attending Cambridge University.

Education is a key factor in cultural, political and economic change and it was clearly articulated as part of the narrative of success that this project is built around. For Storyteller 5, education was clearly identified as a way to make positive changes in her life and to open up opportunities that are not readily available in remote and regional communities.

I suppose moving away from home when I was little and going to boarding school I've kind of had to become strong over that time....I was quite scared, but then, I don't know, I had, like, my aunties and stuff down here, so, yeah it was probably halfway through year 9, so it would be, like, a year and a half (before she stopped getting homesick). I took my time, but, you know, it is okay. It is so different because ... you've got, like, all your family around you and just everyone like can be comfortable all the time, and just being mad or whatever, and then you come to boarding school and everyone is like quiet. And, like, when I was little I was in (...) there was like blackfellas everywhere, but at boarding school there was only six of us. Yeah, they were alright. But, yeah, when I first went down, shame....

Yeah, I don't know, I think, like, because I was a prefect at my school I think that took my school by shock. Like, they didn't expect that to happen. And it was like all the questions in my interview for my prefecture they pretty much asked me how being black affected me being a prefect. And I was like, 'How should it?' And I got like really upset by that ...

It is like they are saying I'm like the token black kid on the prefect team and then like they thought that - - I don't know, my school just don't understand black kids, which is probably why they only have six black kids. Yeah, yeah. I don't know; I just feel that because I'm black it doesn't have to be everything about me, yeah. Like, there is like so much more to me than just being 'that black girl'. You know, because there is a stereotype for Aboriginal kids at university and it is that you are less Aboriginal if you study, you know the whole flash black thing. ...And, you know, that messes with your head as well. I've learnt to become really open with people and all that sort of stuff. I guess, yeah, it all comes down from growing and learning within yourself and knowing who you are and being really strong with that, and not letting anybody else tell you. (Storyteller 5)

As a young teenager moving away from her community/family was a major life changing experience for her. She grew up in a small town with a considerable and *visible* Indigenous population and the move to a prestigious boarding school with only six other Indigenous students resulted in radical changes to the way she was seen, judged and treated. Boarding school was mostly positive, and it provided her with opportunities and choices; however, the isolation and Racism that she experienced really 'messed with her head'.

In previous threads from this young woman's Story, the issues she faced as a result of 'not being very dark' impacted on her overall sense of self and her relationships with family and community. However, in a predominantly 'white' school, she was seen as the 'black' girl. In both scenarios, simplistic, reductive and subjective understandings of the complexities of Aboriginality and identity are revealed. As with the previous Storyteller, being 'black' comes with stereotypes and expectations that are driven by others and are situationally and contextually defined for you, not by you.

For this young woman, school was a place that had seen and understood her Aboriginality negatively. In her interview to be prefect, it was implied that her cultural identity could impact on her capacity to function as a leader. This sent a clear message to her around how she was seen and understood. The questions she was asked in her interview for prefecture revolved around her Aboriginality and how it might limit her capacity to perform as prefect, *not* her capacity as a prefect. The ideological position from which these exchanges derive are at the very heart of Racism and erode the fragile connections that our young people are making in educational contexts.

The simplicity around the statement of *'they don't understand black kids, which is probably why they only have six black kids'* once again highlights the importance of Indigenous cohorts as a primary means of support in culturally safe education space.

The other deficit narrative that runs alongside this is the stereotyping of Indigenous people who study at university as somehow *less* Aboriginal. This is a stereotype that is perpetuated from within as well as being imposed. The 'flash black thing' that is referred to is a put down for many Indigenous people. Being a flash black can mean that you have money, education and a job. It implies that you are less Indigenous if you have these things - you are somehow more like a wadjula- white person. This internalised oppression or Racism equates Indigeneity with limited education, poverty and a lowered social and cultural status.

What is also implicit this thread is the idea of skin colour and the privileges or disadvantages that you are afforded or granted as a result. The complexities of these beliefs are wrapped up in historical and colonial constructions of Aboriginality and are perpetuated daily in educational contexts and through the internalised Racism she experiences. The impact of negative stereotyping on her life is made explicit in this thread- what is also clear is that she refuses to let it define her or limit her own identity- but at a cost.

Internalised and intracultural Racism

At all levels of education, the Storytellers in this project face casual and institutional Racism in environments that can be overtly hostile and damaging. This has resulted in limited choices, low expectations and emotional and mental pain and trauma. For Storyteller 3, Racism is a challenge that has limited the potential of his family and caused him to doubt his skills and intelligence. However, despite it being a challenge, he also draws strength from his experiences and believes that he has a role to play in dispelling and challenging stereotypes.

At high school my sister was getting straight A's and that and she went to see the counsellor because she was Indigenous to see what she was doing after high school and she said she was going to do early childhood teacher and he was like, 'What else are you going to do?' She was like, 'I'm going to do early childhood teacher'. And he goes, 'What about hairdressing or something like that?' Like, he didn't even look at her marks. Yeah, he just made assumptions.

So, I guess to prove them people wrong and that is where it is important to be proud about yourself too. You have got to identify. Yeah, so that's what drives me.

Like I said before, you have got to prove people wrong, but at the same time you will have people trying to pull you down because they don't want to see you get ahead. Like, even sometimes it's your own mob. I suppose with university it is academic, too, you have got to worry about, so you have always got that little voice in the back of your head—a little voice, saying, 'No, you can't do it, you can't do it', so you have got to look at that and take a third person look at yourself sort of thing.

... public image is like the worst thing. It's like you never see stories on the news about a blackfella doing good. It is always, 'He stole the car. He killed somebody.' Like, drug overdose or like child abuse and all that stuff and it is like, yeah, it does happen, but, like, we do good for our mob too. (Storyteller 3)

Like others, this yarn speaks of being denied opportunities and to the shared experiences of Racism for Storytellers in this project. It is hard to ignore the persistence of Racism in education and the long lasting and intergenerational impacts it has. This thread speaks to the internalisation of persistent negative narratives and deficit discourses. But it also shows how pride in his identity and culture provide the impetus to constantly challenge how others perceive him, to complete his university course and to defeat or silence the voices of others and in his head. It is important to understand that this young man is not a passive victim. He is articulate, aware and actively challenging stereotypes and assumptions; his strengths are evident, and so too are his vulnerabilities. Acknowledging the broader social attitudes, particularly those presented in the media, adds another layer to the internalisation and normalisation of the negative representations.

The internalisation of Racism and its consequences lay just beneath the surface of many of the thoughts shared in this thread. He is determined to prove *them* wrong. Many of our young people have had their self-esteem, self-worth and self-belief challenged and operate from this defensive position. Internalised Racism intracultural Racism, lateral violence, and ideas of helplessness, hopelessness and lack of agency and capacity, issues of authenticity, judgements on degrees of Aboriginality, and slurs such as 'coconut,' 'flash black' and 'text book black' divide, fracture and apportion privilege and value in our families and communities.

The yarns also showed that it is not easy to separate cultural understandings of identity from the socially constructed, often negative ideas and stereotypes, and that these representations impact on how you see yourself and others. For some, the issue of skin colour played a big part in how they perceived themselves and how they were perceived. For others 'but-you're-not-like-them' comments and overt displays of discomfort and, fear was experienced almost daily. These were issues that had real impact on how these young people were in the world as they grew into young adults. For some of the Storytellers in this project, challenging these stereotypes and ideas from all facets of community was part of growing up strong and well. Learning how to navigate Racism and to challenge it is a strength that they developed as they grew.

For the following two Storytellers, judgements made about them by other Aboriginal people, family member and strangers hints at just how pervasive the internalisation of deficit discourses are. These young people have grown up in families that have provided a strong sense of self, of culture and of family. For Storyteller 5, her Aboriginality is called into question because of her education. By accessing education, she is seen as being less authentic, a coconut – the tension beneath this statement is around ideas and beliefs of intelligence and rights to education. It also alludes to a shared familial understanding and belief around her cultural authenticity in her family. If going to university makes you a coconut, then being authentic could be read as remaining un- or undereducated. Education is seen as a privileged space, a wadjela space.

*And sometimes I feel like I even receive Racism from both sides, because from the Caucasians it is just like sometimes I'm not white enough to be them, but I'm not black enough to be with my extended family. And, like, I got called 'coconut' a lot (because of going to university) I think it doesn't give Indigenous people the right to get education, and I'm like, 'Seriously? What world are you living in?' Like, everyone has the right to an education.
(Storyteller 5)*

...you know challenging, probably Racism would be one of the big things.. people have preconceived notions of, you know, what a person from (remote community) is or what he does . Aboriginal people do it, too. They meet somebody and they might think, 'Oh, he's from a community and that. He might not know much at all.' And, you know, I've lived it. I went to (major city) and some of the city kids down there, Aboriginal, thought I was just some bloke from a remote community.. who was just getting by just being black, hey, '... but, you know, I told them, 'No, you know, I can do

English. I'm good at maths, geography, geometry, trigonometry. I told them, you know, 'nobody has spoon-fed me'. (Storyteller 9)

For Storyteller 9, the implication behind the kinds of intracultural Racism that he experiences was that Aboriginal people from communities or remote areas are less intelligent and are given a free pass in education in attempts to boost Indigenous enrolments. Both of these threads speak to how levels of education are understood alongside ideas of authenticity, intelligence and Aboriginality. They expose persistent and pervasive internalised, negative stereotypes and reinforce dominant ideas around Racism and disadvantage that have become embedded in the national 'story' of Australia. These ideas or perceptions of authenticity are part of the lateral violence experienced across families and communities. Lateral violence describes a range of damaging behaviours expressed by those of a minority, oppressed group towards others of that group rather than towards the system of oppression. Although the behaviours result from experience of oppression, they are expressed sideways (laterally) towards peers and, in particular, use accusations of inauthenticity as a mechanism of social exclusion.

This puts these young people at a greater risk of self-harm and suicide, anxiety, depression and overall poor mental health. The ripple effect of this across families, communities and generations is profound.

Deficit Discourses

Several of the open-ended questions asked the Storytellers to yarn about what their identity, their Aboriginality, meant to them and to identify things that Indigenous youth might experience and that non-Indigenous youth do not. Within the yarns, there were anecdotes shared that spoke to dominant media and social stereotypes of 'Aboriginality' and how they can erode your sense of strength and wellness. Challenging the narrative in their own lives has given some of the Storytellers a very insightful and critical understanding of the power of stereotypes- but at a cost.

Storyteller 10 articulates the challenges she has faced in trying to 'deal with' Racism in her own life and at a broader societal level.

Her experiences at the university have provided her with confidence, skills and a very real sense of validity and this thread speaks of the importance and value of Indigenous-specific spaces and support. Throughout the thread, the passion and

reflectiveness of this young woman is evident, as is the hopefulness, resilience and strength of character that is part of the change she yarns about.

Yeah, sometimes I think people unfortunately don't think they are worth it, don't think they are worth looking after. It is sort of like a form of self-harming and things like that, because you can get really low like that. I have seen that happen, yeah. I guess it is going with the negative stuff.

..., you know, like all the things that you hear about in the media, you know, like the drug and alcohol, the negative stuff, the prisons, the stuff that they love to talk about. I used to think, okay, I used to think I was inherently stupid. Like, being Aboriginal made me less smart, just like because, you know, a genetic mutant. Bullshit! I do science now. I can back that up.

I don't know of any big scale kind of massive one thing that we can do to change that, but I think a lot of it, like changing us, like, changing our perceptions of ourselves is pretty powerful, and it is a good place to start.

I have this vision in the future that, you know, like, all of the sort of stuff that is going on, all of the negative sort of stuff, I feel like at the moment it gets perpetuated because everyone seems to be stuck in cycles of stuff that seem to go over, like, in families and things like that. And for me it is about breaking those cycles and then changing them and making them into really positive stuff.

So, I don't know, just like every Aboriginal person going to university is just like, you know, an option, like it always would be and if it wasn't it wouldn't be because of the colour of their skin.

That is part of it. I don't think it just us. I think it is society in general. If that feeds back in, it is part of the cycle. It is like perpetuating those negative images and then you take that on and like as an Aboriginal person you hear all these things about your people and who you are and, you know, you internalise that. It is like Racism, internalised Racism. You start to believe that about yourself and so that is the cycle within where you just sort of subconsciously think you are going to go because, you know, everyone is telling you that because you are a blackfella.... And I think if we can change that, if there is this massive big attitude shift and all of a sudden there is this really big positive sort of like - - Which is like what we are doing... like research can position society to see a group of people in a certain way. If you are constantly doing this negative research they are going to think, 'Oh they are all useless, they all end up in prison. There must be something inherently wrong with them' you know.

But if you focus on all the people that aren't doing that ... (Indigenous Support Centre) ...like, we are always getting young Aboriginal kids coming through, like, school age people that should start thinking about uni because that is the age they sort of are. We get them in and we just sit down and talk to them and say, 'Just share a little bit about yourself and a little bit about your journey' and I always say, you know, like, 'there is no way in a million years that I

ever thought that I would be doing medicine. Like, I didn't even do science in high school and look at what I'm going to do now. If I can do it, you can do it. You know, don't listen to all of that general, you know, "only the smart top kid of the class is going to be the doctor". You can do it too.'

And then all of a sudden they start asking you questions and they want to know and you can see it changing. Like, their whole world is going to open up in a different direction from that...encouraging them to do this and like changing that, you know, what they are hearing or what they are absorbing from society in the media and everything. Because I know that viewpoint, because I used to think that about myself as well (Storyteller 10)

The power of deficit discourses, of consistent negativity, is made clear in this thread. "Inherently stupid" - this is what this young woman believed of not only herself but of Aboriginal people in general. She believed she was a genetic mutant, unintelligent and destined for failure. These are the stories that she heard, internalised and these are the stories that society in general hears, internalises and believes. Her ability to be reflective, open and honest about this, to call 'Bullshit' on the Racism - "cause she does science now" - is about **her** resilience, and strengths. Here too is the potential of education to give you the tools/knowledge to dismantle the lies. It is also fundamentally tied to the cultural safety and security of place - the Indigenous support unit at her university. The impacts of Racism on her - mentally, spiritually, physically, academically and culturally - are experienced from a place of strength, success and overall good mental health. The implications for those who are struggling, for those who did not get what they needed to grow up strong and well and for those who are "**stuck in cycles of stuff**" are clear and are both profoundly and devastatingly sad.

The capacity to erode self-worth of these negative discourses on Indigenous young people is powerful. The connections drawn around internalising these representations as a form of self-harm exposes the intensity and damaging consequences of internalised Racism on overall mental health. What is articulated here are the direct consequences of Racism.

What is also threaded through this yarn is the social responsibility to address Racism at all levels. This is not just about 'positive' representations in the media or more Indigenous young people at university, it is about fundamentally challenging the why and way that these narratives are perpetuated. It is about all of us,

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, disengaging from deficit discourses despite their pervasiveness and ubiquity (Fforde, 2013). For this young woman, challenging self and societal perceptions are the foundation for change and this is what drives and motivates her.

Challenging the dominant constructions of Aboriginality is a very powerful and important part of being strong. Understanding the complexities of internalised Racism and actively working on changing how she sees herself is how this young woman is speaking back to the most challenging aspect of her life - Racism. Her bi-cultural identity, and being raised up with a very real connection to people and place, has supported her capacity to stay strong and to be part of the change that is needed. Her capacity to navigate two different cultural worlds is also an important component of her overall resilience and mental health. Intra-personal and institutional Racism have been a constant threat and thread, but connections to her Aboriginal identity, to people and place that provided cultural stability and support. Positive cultural identity, knowing and importantly liking who you are is fundamental to this young woman's success. The work that she does with the Indigenous Support Centre to provide opportunities to other young Indigenous people is central to opening up opportunities and possibilities for others. It opens up avenues of support and encouragement that is central to changing the narrative.

What is perhaps not captured in this thread is the passion, emotion and pain that this young woman shared during our time together. Her triumphs and successes were not seen as an individual achievement, but rather an expression of what is possible with support, positive self-belief and a strong sense of cultural identity.

Grief and Loss

Grief and loss, like Racism, really challenge the strength and wellness of the Storytellers. Threads shared around Racism have already revealed feelings of loss, of grief and of the consistency in which these young people experience both.

Like all of the threads in the thesis, Racism, grief and loss cannot be neatly divided into separate thematic areas.

The interconnection of these challenges and experiences are evident. Racism is a very real factor in the loss and grief these young people experience.

Young Storytellers are very clear about how the media and dominant deficit discourses around Indigeneity continually position them. Unravelling the impact of Racism, grief and loss is an important part of really appreciating the severe compromises that Aboriginal young people, their overall health and life experiences, suffer. Sadness and loss are part of life of many Indigenous children and young peoples. Like Racism, grief and loss have had a profound impact on the lives of the young people in this project and, like Racism, grief and loss have become normalised both inside out communities and by the wider society.

As an Indigenous woman I have felt the pain of our families and communities disproportionate loss and grief. For many of our young people, funerals are the most attended cultural activity. The loss of family, extended family and friends as a result of suicide, accident, incarceration or other forms of removal from people and place has had profound and long-lasting impact on the participants. The impact of this loss is not just felt by the individual families and extended families, it reverberates across communities and their geographical and cultural spaces. Like Racism, high levels of grief and loss are part of life for Indigenous people, and the feeling of being constantly in a state of grief, with little time to catch your breath, is shared in the threads below and provides insight into the levels of stress and sadness. The normalisation and acceptance of disproportionate loss of our young people is also evident in the threads shared below and highlights the very real trauma that has been denied, minimised and accepted as part of life for Indigenous young people.

For some, the loss and grief are motivators - a reason to keep going - to develop resilience to try and make it better; for others they are an ongoing and painful reality that they have no choice but to learn to cope with.

Suicide and hopelessness

The difficulties in like just family stuff, like, just that we have a lot of issues, you know, like in a lot of I guess even typical stuff, it all affects you, like, you know, drugs and all that, suicides and mental health and that sort of stuff, death. I mean, I try not to let it affect me too much, but as a teenager or as a 14 or 15 sort of that age I had a lot of difficulties and a bit of a really hard time then, but, yeah, there was some stuff going on then.

You can't go around feeling all that stuff all the time. Like, you can't carry it around with you. You will drown. (Storyteller 10)

The downside to really big families and terrible health outcomes... Yeah, it was like quite often. And also, like, yeah, like, young people passing away that is really hard as well. I think that is the hardest one, ..., I have seen a lot of youth suicides. Especially, like, recently, too, in these past couple of months, yeah. Like, mum got really, like, worried because, like, I was just coming into my exams and a lot of people were, like, you know, getting into that. And mum was like, 'Just don't think about it. Just keep doing your studies, and then, like, when you come home you can start, like, grieving then.' (Storyteller 5)

I've had a few. Just recently, probably in the last three or four years, we've probably had a lot of deaths to do with suicide and that there. Dealing with somebody that is close to you that has a suicide, that is something, you know. It's something I will have to live with is just doing something purposeful, do you know what I mean, for the greater good or something. (Storyteller9)

Yeah, because I know after I finished the bridging course I did go through a lot of times. Like, my cousin got killed in a car accident and then about a year after that another cousin committed suicide, so I was just like, , 'Seriously, how much more do we have to go through before we can really completely go nuts?' Shit! Because, like, even when I lost and, like, when I was about 16, like two of my uncles and three of my cousins got killed in a car, and it was like, 'What the hell!' That screwed me up. Because you try and get on with it but you are so stomped because, like, 'What do you do now?'

And also another problem that I often see people have, like when someone else from the Aboriginal community, like, if they take their own life, it is like, 'Oh, shouldn't you be used to it, mate?' 'What, so that gives us the right to have to go through this all the time?' It is like when they have that thought, 'Mate, where do you get these things from?'

Well, obviously the sad time with the death in the family, because I know, like it happens, it is reality, but it is just the fact that when it happens so many times, and sometimes you can't even feel, like you can't even gather your own thoughts because it happens again, and you are just like, 'Whoa! ... it was just like, 'If I don't do something about it now', it was like I would - - Because I started to get really bad and it was like nothing was working. Yeah, I was thinking about really bad things, like, a lot of bad things. (Storyteller 6)

For this group of bright, strong and intelligent young people, the reality of youth suicide and of tragic loss that it brings is very much a part of their lives. For Storyteller 10, issues such as, drugs, suicide, poor mental health are all considered typical issues for families to be constantly dealing with.

For her, the feelings, consequences and reality of this is quietly revealed in the idea that the pain and trauma is too heavy to carry and if she is unable to let some of it go, she is to be overwhelmed, drowned by it. All the other threads carry a similar sense of almost drowning, of just “keeping your head above water”.

Storyteller 5 also shares how youth suicide and poor health outcomes are part of her family and that for many Aboriginal people, the size of the family and extended family as well as the way we do family means that these losses are continually impacting on the complex and close relationships and family systems. For her, the loss of several young people in her home community while she was studying in Perth was stressful for both her and her family. The impact of grieving on young people when off Country is very relevant to facilitating culturally safe educational contexts and opportunities. Having to return home for funerals is a common part of many Indigenous university students’ life, setting them apart from most of their peers and adding more pressure to already low attendance and completion rates. The advice from her mother to just keep going, despite experiencing a “lot of youth suicides,” is less about resilience than about simply protecting and surviving.

For Storyteller 9, his experience of multiple losses to suicide is evident in his tone, body language and sadness when he speaks of this grief. The deep sadness is that it is part of his identity, part of his Aboriginality.

Storyteller 6 seriously questioned her capacity to ‘not to go nuts’ when faced with the seemingly continuous losses she has experienced.

Feeling like there is no time to gather your thoughts or to process the grief that you are experiencing was exacerbated by the seeming normalisation of loss. She felt ‘stomped’ on and overwhelmed and her capacity to be strong in the world was severely compromised.

Fractured families and intergenerational trauma

You know none of us out there want to live like that...we want a better way for them fellas out there that got it hard... they don't want to live like that and be poor or sick or in jail. (Storyteller 11)

Poverty, violence, despair, hopelessness - these are not chosen as a way of life but, as Storyteller 11 explains, they are consequences of the fracturing of families, of history and from the inherited pain.

This young woman makes herself very vulnerable in this thread and in doing so exposes the multiple challenges that she has faced- (and in her own terms survived). The impact of multiple deaths of family members and friends, family fracturing, drug addiction and suicide have left her scarred physically and mentally. She spoke about the tensions that exist with her early memories of family and culture as her strength and her mother's addictions and actions as one of her greatest challenges. This highlights the complexities of family and community as both a protector and a challenge. An understanding of past policies and practices that have left many scars on people and place are clearly within her personal and familial space as well as in the larger community context. The importance of Elders, community and family as the core to making changes are reiterated even in the midst of sharing the violence, addiction and fracturing.

Mum and dad were the worst part of me growing up. They are breaking up and we moving to Me mum and little brother took off. Didn't really have much to do with dad, mum turned us against him, and mum was always trying to kill herself, popping pills, OD (overdose) all the time so I was looking after my brother, sister you know cooking cleaning, getting us all to school all that stuff getting through all that. I guess not having mum or dad there and having to be the grown up was really hard. Well and truly before my time, it was really hard. ...When I was 14 and had come up to Perth to stay with my uncle two of my best friends killed themselves. Within 20 minutes of each other. I started to cut myself- (shows me scars) mum stopped me from really hurting myself. Ever since I was young, I didn't want to be like my mum and the family you know, drinking and fighting.

I wanted to make something of myself, make something of my life. I'm a lot more like mum that I ever wanted to be with the pot and the suicide and stuff. The lifestyle growing up you know it was what I seen and did. I was always seeing mum trying to kill herself, taking the easy way out and I don't want to be like that. Putting my family through that, nah I don't want to do that... there is more to me, I can make more of myself. Hopefully I won't end up in lock up in the future but maybe...maybe in the mines, no kids and working. That would be better than lock up unna? (Storyteller 11)

Fractured families for her are symptomatic of the wider social, economic, political and cultural oppression that Indigenous people, families and communities have survived, and it is through these fractured but not broken families that resilience is often nurtured and grown. The importance of being and doing Family as a core component of culture and identity is shared across many of the different threads.

As both a challenge and a protection, family is key to the success and wellbeing of the young people in this project. Understanding these challenges and protections from a place of strength shows how young people, despite many challenges, remained solid and strong in themselves and in their connections to and with family and culture. The intercultural and intersectional positioning of the young Storytellers is problematic and difficult. Navigating the multiple cultural spaces that they occupy is possible because of and in some cases despite their families. Supporting and developing the strengths of fractured families and eliminating the problematizing narrative that only sees Indigeneity as a risk are essential to addressing systematic disadvantage and oppression. While the capacity of family to support the development of resilient strong young people is clear, a nuanced and culturally safe approach to identifying and working with family strengths and resilience in the face of continued policies of separation and removal is required. For these young people, it is the strength of family that has enabled their own successes and capacity for aspirations and hope.

Well, I'm trying to be the father and be the real man, but just everyone the trouble man, they see the trouble not the struggle. (Family Yarn- Brother1)

Family yarning session: Fractures and strengths

The importance of hearing the Stories from this family unit prompted the approach taken to understand and retell the Stories shared. The value of hearing from this family in a discrete and separate thread is evident in the way in which the yarn pulls together many of the strengths and challenges other Storytellers have shared. The family yarning circle conducted with a father and two sons (Storytellers 4) offered a unique opportunity to hear a family's Stories of successes, challenges and the role of cultural connectedness, particularly around family and cultural knowledge and cultural activities. All of these men were open and honest about the ongoing issues their family experiences and of the grief and sadness that sometimes tests their capacity to do better. The yarning circle took place in the boardroom at an Indigenous centre on a university campus in Perth. The family live locally and have been involved in many cultural and educational activities at the university and suggested conducting the yarning circle there. After getting a cup of tea, we yarned a little about the weather, the football and the research.

They all expressed how important it was to get a family yarning together to hear about their strengths and how they, as a family, navigate and negotiate the rough times. All three said they were strong and well, although Brother 1 acknowledged that for him it is more like a 70/30 split as he attempts to address his own addictions and behaviours. He has spent time in both juvenile and adult prison and is accessing programs to support the changes he wants to make in his life. They all credit and value role models and a strong family and cultural identity as keys to staying strong.

The intrinsic value of family and culture in the healing process is clear in this thread; however, it is this space, the family space that the violence often occurs that threatens the development of positive cultural identity and resilience. For this family, for these men, it is also that space that offers them the most hope, support and acceptance, despite many challenges.

The following thread is presented as a combined narrative to capture how the Storytellers relate with each other and with each other's Story. At several key moments during the yarn, there was a real sense of deep and respectful listening and hearing.

When Dad sat back on his chair and acknowledged that he was yarning with his eldest and youngest son, there was a moment of connection between the three men that is impossible to articulate in words. As an Aboriginal woman with many healed and mending fractures in my family, this connection felt familiar. In this interaction the capacity of their family to heal, nurture and sustain was made very evident. The cultural and social relationships in Aboriginal families are centred on belonging and responsibility - you belong to and with your family, and you are responsible to and for your family: these are the strengths of this Aboriginal family.

After some generalised social yarning, we started the research yarn with a question about what they felt they needed to grow up strong and well and how they managed stress and challenges.

Brother 1: Big brothers and big sisters, that's what makes you grow up well and strong and ambitions, goals. If you want to be strong, go to the gym. If you want to be a doctor, study, all that kind of stuff.

Brother 2: Yeah, good family, great role models in my family, to show you a good pathway, and hopefully you make that right decision to take the good pathway, which in my case I think I have now, and slowly getting more positive and stronger each day. And if you want to be healthy, hang around your healthy family and friends.

Brother 1: And don't touch drugs.

Brother 2: Or alcohol, yeah. In my opinion, it does help a lot when you have got good friends, sober, healthy friends and family. It does help a lot.... Stay away from friends and family who do that. (drink and use drugs)....

Brother 1: I reckon sports helps you. I've been in jail, so I agree with little brother here, friends and family. I had to make choices on the ones I hung around with and the ones I didn't hang around with, and the only reason why I'm here and not in jail is because of the choices and, number one, my family.... I've got a very strong family unit. If I didn't have that there, I would still be in jail now. My family is vital (to good mental health) in my eyes because growing up when I was on the drugs and alcohol, I listened to gangsta rap, and because my mind was distorted and intoxicated I started believing I was a gangster and I went to jail. When I got out at 18 or 19 that was when my father grabbed me and joined me into the dance group that he had made and built up. For me, that was a clash of identities. I thought I was this one persona and then back to another persona.

So, when I did the dance through the tuition of my father, — God bless dad and mum! — I found out who I really was and so I stopped listening to 2Pac and all that kind of stuff. It makes all these young punks think that they are gangsters and thugs, when they are Aboriginal men and this is our island and we've got to fight, you know. So, that is very important. Our culture is very important to identity issues because I found myself through following mum and dad.

Brother 2: Yeah, and our mother and father are very strong into their culture which is awesome and great. We love our culture dearly and they taught us to understand it and cherish it, you know, and , be strong for you and your people and your culture...But through mum and dad doing their culture ever since they were young, it has just opened us children's eyes, a better perspective, and, yeah, we love our culture and we do it, you know, 110 per cent.

And my brothers and sisters are doing great in sports. We all have our ups and downs in life, and they are great role models, too, because my older brothers and sisters are doing the men's dance group, the brothers, and the ladies, my sisters, are doing the ladies, so the women's dance group. So it is really good. Well, it brings a smile to my face every time and makes me happy, especially in front of my own mob.

Brother 2: Yeah, I just get excited. It is like I'm just engulfed by fire and the whole world can sing.

Brother 2: Well, (stress, hard times) it does affect all the family if it is something major like a death in the family. I like to talk to each of my family members, especially my parents and my older brothers and sisters, and I always like speaking to my grandmother. She is a very wise old lady. And just speak to family and hopefully that person, whoever passed away, it was from natural causes and not through any violence or any arguing and stuff. Yeah, I like to talk to my family when the bullshit hits the fan, you know, and stuff like that, and like to sort it out. And if there are any family disagreements, I like to talk also and sort it out before any other bullshit hits the fan.

Brother 1: Well, can I tell you something? Before, when I was sad, especially when I was inside prison the last time I heard about deaths in the family, I heard about my family, the woman and the kids and how they were having some hardship, so I would play football. And the natural endorphins, sort of I get a natural high and then I'm sort of like in euphoria, you know. When I lay back on the bed, I feel light and I feel happy that I've done some exercise to make me go to sleep that night because when my head is racing, I can't sleep. So I used to run laps, 30 laps a day, and then punch a bag and then walk around, just intimidating everyone, and that's the way I survived in jail. But out here, ... I'm over the sad period and I'm going to go back to the gym.

Brother 2: That's good. That's good, bro.

Brother 1: And I'm thinking about playing football again because basketball is good, but it is a non-contact sport., I'm trying (laughing and smiling at his brother and father.).

At his point the two brothers notice that their father has been quiet as they spoke and respectfully sat back to hear their father's thoughts.

Dad: ...I've been listening. It is good. I think a couple of things, if families, adults and children can have reference points to talk to mum and dad or uncle and aunty or other siblings who are sober and strong, you know, especially if gunja and grog are a problem, that is really important.

I keep saying to my family, you know, 'If people are drinking like that, that is not the norm. That is not normal. You are drinking and taking drugs to excess and if you are going to start mixing with people that all make it the norm, I'm telling you it is not.' So that is my reference point. That's me; I'm pretty firm on it.

The second thing is accepting there is no such thing as problems really. There are just challenges. There are tasks. You know, if you look at things as problems, well then they really do become a problem in your head, in your spirit, but if you look at it as a task to be solved as a family, I mean, then you rise to the challenge and it makes better people of us because we have to work it out.

Now, in our family, one good thing is we don't hold things in. We have fights all the time, you know, verbal stoushes. And, you know, we had one coming here this morning. We had a big one coming here this morning. Can I tell her about that conversation?

Brother 1: Yeah.

Dad: It was just the fact, the fact is that it leads to mob bottling things up. You know, it is good that we are getting it out in the open and we disagree and we agree and we finally work it out. I think you'll all agree that if you hold things in, it is worse for you in a lot of ways, isn't it?

Brother 2: That's right, too much build-up.

Brother 1: The first point was good, dad, because when I have been trying if I know that one of my sisters are drinking, I dodge them, but the other sister might not be drinking, so I'll go down the street to her house. But that's a daily thing because that sister might be drinking the next day: Yeah, so I'll dodge her and I'll find little brother.

I: So, what do you reckon, the three of you, what are the most important things in your life?

Dad: I would say family, respect for others and your family, of course, and being Aboriginal, just be strong and proud, you know. It is not like back in the days, my mother and father's days, you know. They were way harder than the days we have now. And I won't even go to my grandparents' days. They were even real hard. My mother was in a mission, you know. My father's older sisters were taken to the mission, you know. Thank God his younger siblings weren't. But all my mother's siblings were all taken. Yeah, it is not like back in that day now. Walk around with your chin up. Walk around with a smile on your dial.

Brother 2: And just try and, you know, just live life and be happy, you know, because it is not back in the days. And it is really good for us Aboriginal people right now, I can say, and especially in the city areas, you know. There's a lot of help. If you just look, you will find.

Brother 1: I'm similar to Dad, respect our family, love and respect, and fucking loyalty. ...Yeah, sorry for letting go. It just goes back to my wife again.

Brother 2: Yeah, you are right, bro.

Dad: Well, I'm always passionate about family, like, the two sons here, and I've always loved and cherished our culture. It has been like a passion of mine. You know, I say things like I'm really thankful I was born Aboriginal, because it just makes life so interesting in this country and it gives me access to a lot of mysteries and a lot of ancient knowledge that I know nothing about. Even with some of my knowledge today, I still know nothing about it. I just love, everybody needs a cause, everybody needs a tribe. So a lot of the wadgelas, they will become Gothics and God knows what else! God help them and bless their souls! But with us, we are born Aboriginal, so we do have this already in this country.

And I just like the way Aboriginal people relate to each other. I notice the elders always are completely respectful to each other, when I was a kid growing up, from different tribes. You know one elder would just be quiet while the other one was talking, and then he would come and have his say and then the women folk would do the same, always concerned about the other person, not about themselves... Yeah, so they are the sorts of things that I think are important...but look . I'm sitting with the oldest and the youngest in my family.

Brother1: What you are doing is very positive, dad.

Brother: 2 The audience enjoys it; we enjoy it.

Dad: I went to school on cattle stations in the Kimberley. And then I got sent to (Midwest regional centre) first, a private school ... And, yeah, the racism, I just noticed it straightaway. Well, I saw injustices in the Kimberley, but this different type of racism I saw in the schools, you know, with the students.

I was boarding, so I was exposed to it. You know, I had to fight, me and my brother, physically, you know, fight people. And we were good at that from the Kimberley, so they lost out. But it could have been me being the bully, and then look out, you know. It could have been my brother...but it wasn't us. We were nice people. We got brought up like that by our parents and lots of exposure to tribal Aboriginal people. You know, 'Be nice!' And this aggression I found was, oh man, very foreign... What was the question again?

Brother 1: What did you find hard growing up? (laughing)

Dad: Racism... what else? We could speak English and in fact we spoke better English than the farmers, the cockies' sons, when we hit town. They were illiterate compared to us and we were running around barefoot in the bush where we come from.

Brother1: Yeah, I've experienced racism a lot and stuff... What I found in school, because we moved around a bit when I was a young fella, and when I got to new schools the blackfellas from that country would say,

'Where are you from? What's your tribe?' and I didn't know how to answer them. ...It was a bit hard, because as a young boy I didn't know what the hell they were talking about. I just thought of myself as an Aboriginal and I didn't know about all the wonderful beautiful tribes in our country, you know.

And then the alcohol and drugs when I was 15 or 16, so, yeah, my identity, the history, and alcohol and drugs growing up....

Brother2: Well school was real good for me. I was lucky enough to be the youngest out of my family and when I went to school my mother was a teacher there, an Aboriginal Education Officer and my father was doing didgeridoo all around WA and making people aware of our Aboriginal culture, especially in the south-west here. Yeah, at school primary school was good. No one really messed with me because I had a lot of brothers and sisters. In primary school, it was pretty much good, very multicultural and, a lot of blackfellas there. When I got to high school once again it was really good. Everybody knew my family, and nobody messed with me. I had it really good at high school...

I had a really good upbringing, not really too much trouble, just a bit of trouble I caused myself in the teenage days. I have a lot of nieces and nephews, and every time I dance or get up and go to work and stuff, I just think of my nephews and nieces. It just brings a fire to my eyes. I want to be a good role model like my brothers and sisters were good role models, and mum and dad, you know. And I want to show them the healthy way. If they can see it, they say, you know, 'actions speak louder than words.

Brother2: If I can show them the right activities, the healthy activities, that brings a fire to my eyes. And, yeah, the younger generation, you know.

Dad: Well, they all love hanging around you, Uncles (laughing and reaching out to his son)

Brother1: It puts a fire in your belly!

Brother2: A fire in my belly, yeah. Yeah. When I think of my culture, I think of all my people and that there is enough to get me out of my clothes and into my traditional outfit and perform with a smile on my dial.

Brother1: I want sobriety because I have a wonderful life, don't get me wrong. But when the stresses and the struggles that every family face, whether it be bills, domestics or whatever, and I've seen the way that my uncles and aunties grew up and their children now, you know, some of my cousins are not as bright as me, you know, because they didn't have the mother and the father or they had the mother and father but they were always smashing them or something like that. I don't want my kids growing up like that. I want them to have all these good memories, because at the moment that is the way it is now.

Mum and dad are still together, but we smash. I want to improve that and solve that, because our family that sticks together - - You know, the family that plays together, stays together.

And like Jimmy said, be a positive role model, make money. I have a VRO on all my kids and my wife. So, Christmas was pretty sad because I couldn't be there ...and I couldn't be there for the birth of my newborn ... So, yeah, this year is about success and improving ... And I can be sad every day and lay down in the gutter and wake up and stink like urine and shit and then get up and drink another bottle again, but that's not the solution. My kids and my partner give me strength, and I want to be the strong family member, so they feel good, confident, safe and all that sort of stuff

Dad: I put myself into rehab, alcohol, about two times in, like, at safe houses, stayed in there, you know, phoned my wife and kids every day, but I just had to get off the drink back in the day.

Brother1: I'm talking to an Aboriginal men's group. That's part of what the judge has ordered me to do. It has got to do with domestic violence, family violence. It is all a group of Aboriginal men and it is with the Department of Community Corrections and it is part of my bail conditions. But I love the fact that the judge is working with me, because I told her I want to go back to how can I put it?

You have to listen to the right voice in your head, especially when alcohol and drugs knock you up because the bad ones, they say things.... Well, now I'm trying to be the father and be the real man, but just everyone sees the struggle at the moment. They don't see my - - Oh, the trouble man, they see the trouble not the struggle.

This last quote succinctly sums up the lived experiences of this young man and of the deficit approaches to us as a people. The troubles with addiction and family violence are visible and have caused real harm to his partner and children. These troubles are also what society sees - not the struggles behind them. His own family unit has been fractured by his struggles and this is his motivation for making the changes needed. He is working through his troubles with counselling and through strengthening his cultural connectedness with performances with his family. It is in this space that he feels most alive, on fire and at his strongest. He is seen by others as a strong young warrior, a proud Aboriginal man, not as trouble in this space. It is here that his resilience is grown- not in reaction to risk but as protection against it. The obvious strengths he gains from being intimately connected to his culture, sharing it with family and others provide him with some protection against

the challenges he is working through. They act as a buffer, a shield of resilience, and are fundamental to changing the violent and addictive behaviours that have fractured the life of his partner and children, his extended family and himself.

When Dad shares his own struggles with alcohol, the two brothers are clearly moved, and both cast their eyes towards the floor before moving on. The intergenerational addiction thread that runs within this family is also touched on when the older sisters are spoken of. These women also have their own struggles with alcohol and as a family, they are pragmatic, real and supportive. The older sisters in this family all experienced a very different childhood to Brother 1 and some of the issues that they face are in part at least connected to these experiences. The complexities and devastation of family violence runs through this Family Story and through other yarns shared in this thesis. The stories of fractured families and violence are not separate or disconnected. They are part of the fabric of their childhood - threads that have carried through to their adult lives.

Brother 1 is attempting to find a way through the troubles and the struggles. These troubles started when he was a young man, experiencing a lot of anger and frustration from feeling disconnected from culture, family and from his own cultural identity. Early experiences with drugs and alcohol led to ongoing struggles with addiction, violent behaviours, and multiple incarcerations. Outwardly, and perhaps to some who have not had the opportunity to sit and hear His-story, this young man's life does not present as a positive example of wellness. However, when you listen and read looking for strengths, the reconnections with family and culture provide the foundations needed to make the very difficult changes he is faced with. He is very cognisant of the impact his behaviour is having on his children and, for him, being a better man, father and role model is facilitated by family and culture. The fractures in this family are deep, and women and children have been hurt, so ensuring their safety is paramount. This thread highlights that healing these fractures is a long and painful process. For Brother 1, cultural connections, identity and family, seeing himself through the eyes of others, his nieces and nephews and feeling like he belongs and is part of something bigger, are the strength he draws on to try and do better, to mend his fractured family. His regret and shame around the behaviours that resulted in missing important times with his family, like

Christmas and the birth of his child, were palpable as he told his Story, and both his brother and father reached over to physically comfort and support him.

Finding ways to support and heal perpetrators of violence in fractured families is complex and complicated. For Brother 2, jail is the easy option - finding ways to make sustainable changes is where the challenges lay for him. Being part of an Aboriginal men's group, where shared values, beliefs and experiences form a culturally safe and secure environment, is one strategy he is using to work through and find answers for his anger, addiction and pain. Being part of this group provides him with another layer of cultural connectedness and a sense of belonging and hope. The connections he makes through 'doing' culture and family are also clearly grounding him and keeping him 'out of trouble' and safe.

The younger Brother in this family yarn (Brother2) has had very different life experiences to his older brother and other siblings. He completed year ten of high school and had worked as a cultural performer since finishing.

His relationship with his parents was also very different to that of his brother and other older siblings. During his early childhood and teenage years, his family underwent major changes, dealing with addiction, revitalising connections to land and culture and, importantly, to each other. This led to the establishment of a family business that showcases culture and dance to national and international audiences. The cultural and economic benefits greatly impacted on the capacity and strengths of the family and, in turn, on the childhood experiences of Brother 2. Before these changes, during the childhood of Brother 1 and the older siblings, the family moved around a lot and Dad was struggling with his own addiction and the behaviours, choices and consequences that it had on the family.

The importance of role models and strong family runs through the Stories of the three men. All three acknowledge the importance of strong, solid and sober friends and families and give a small glimpse into how this has been dealt within their own family and extended family. The values and respect of family members, despite their troubles, is an important point to take on and understand in terms of the strengths that need to be acknowledged.

If there is to be any real change to the way our Families are represented across all of the SDoH, developing these strengths will ensure capacity-building and culturally informed and contextually positioned family preventions, interventions and responses.

Chapter 8

Understanding mental health

We have to change how guddias understand, how we understand mental health and maybe we as communities need to change how we understand mental health. It is that whole, what's that word they say, paradigm shift. (Storyteller 9)

Exploring how the young Storytellers understand and define mental health from a place of strength was a key aim of this project. The standard open-ended questions used for this part of the yarn were:

- What does the term mental health mean to you? or
- Tell me a few things that come into your head when I say mental health?

These questions were left to the end of the yarning session when rapport and trust were established. The broadness of question allowed young people to take the yarn wherever they needed or wanted to go with. Some shared Stories of family trauma and stress, others shared Stories of hope, strength of culture and identity and determination to be part of the changes needed to address some of the disparities that they live with daily. All of the Stories shared offered insights into the complex understandings and experiences that form and define mental health as a concept and reality. The idea of mental health and wellness for all of the young people who shared their Stories is heavily informed by the *dis-ease* that they and their families and communities function in. The importance of having cultural understandings of the words, ideas and actions around mental health is desperately needed, not only to inform policy makers and practitioners but also communities and families.

Cultural knowledge and understanding supports community-based programs and practices that speak to the cultural understandings of mental health rather than the dominant understandings that often fail to take into account the sociocultural, historical and contemporary impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal Australian communities. The threads shared are part of a growing and evolving cultural narrative around mental Health and wellness for Indigenous peoples in Australia.

Holistic understanding of mental health encompasses strong identity, connection to culture, family and obligations to provide support to those who are struggling. Mental health is not so much about the individual for these young people; rather it is about the overall wellbeing of their family and community, and for some, Place or Country. Mental health is seen in a broad sociocultural as well as health context.

Mental health issues and concerns are a part of life for most of the young people who shared their Stories. Many of them have experienced multiple losses through youth suicides, fractured families and the lived reality of overall poor health outcomes, Racism, and the shortened life expectancy of family and friends. This impacts on a family's capacity to heal and to reach to their full potential. These factors also create and perpetuate cycles of avoidance of services and support that results in increasing poor mental health outcomes.

Cultural and family understandings

As soon as I think of mental health, I think of bad things. Like, addictions and that sort of thing. Yeah, drug users and that sort of thing, and then you've got your people who are bipolar and those sorts of things, so conditions... And probably stress as well.... At the same time, it is a name too. Like, if I hear 'mental health program' I'm thinking,... they are going to be blasting this information in my head. Like, that is like mental health awareness and that sort of thing is like. I'm like a typical male in my family. I don't like asking for help. It is not really something I would want to do. Like, I know it is bad and, like, I should want to do it... it is a name too. Like, if I hear 'program' I'm thinking, 'Well, I'm going to be a student. Like, sort of no choices, I've got to do it.' That is just programs for me. Like, they are going to be blasting this information in my head...

When my dad first split up with my mum, he became part of this single fathers' group sort of thing, so maybe if it was like a group maybe with other people with similar problems with you...: I would probably think about it and then I'd be like, 'No, because if people see me, like, it is going to' - - Yeah...shame. That's, like, in our culture anyway, I think. Yeah...A lot of males don't like opening up... So, those who you can see if they don't get support, they are going to slip, you help them up so that that is not another person giving Aboriginals a bad name. So that is that cultural pride, too, I guess. Yeah, self-belief basically. (Storyteller 3)

This thread shows the cultural, social and gendered implications around the term mental health for the Storyteller.

His experiences with addiction and family fracturing informed his understanding and his willingness and capacity to engage in support services and programs.

He sees mental health in a very negative way on the surface, but the thread goes on to show how he struggles with the importance of finding support, the way his father did, and the shame that he feels, as a man, accessing mental health programs. He vacillates between these feeling throughout the thread and the struggles he had getting his head around this were emphasised by hand gestures, tone and pace of speaking. This was a difficult part of the yarn for this young man and it made the tensions he experiences and lives with very real for him. He gives insights into the importance of terminology, gendered approaches and culturally specific meanings of words such as shame. Shame, for him, is an important component of his hesitancy and distrust around accessing support services. In Indigenous contexts, the term shame is complex and nuanced. It can be about being singled out and being seen as weak. This is carried through in the connections he makes with the term mental health and 'bad Aboriginals', addiction and impacts on his engagement with services. For him, 'bad Aboriginals' are addicts, who are in trouble and needing help and support. His fear is that accessing services or admitting to hospitals/ clinics and/ or services for any mental health concerns would make him one of them and, as a consequence, he would be viewed as a 'bad' Aboriginal. This, he believes impacts on his strong sense of self-belief, self-worth and his capacity to support others. He feels his identity would be undermined by engaging with mental health services or programs. Shared responsibility and reciprocity are very important values that promote a sense of cultural strength. Mental health, for this Storyteller, is about peer and community support. Both of these are valuable resources in maintaining and/or restoring his cultural pride and positive mental health and in his capacity as a role model and support person. He also touches on the terminology and beliefs around programs and services. The lack of personal agency he believes will occur when and if he engages is a real hurdle for him. He believes he has little choice or power in engagement with services and institutions - this limits his engagement in support services even as a student.

Don't try and tell us we sick when we not. Some of us are just sad...(Storyteller 11)

For Storyteller 11, the impact of her fractured family and her experiences with grief and suicide are the main point of connection she has with the term and experience of mental health. In a previous thread, this young woman shared a sense of hopelessness and despair at the fracturing of her family and of Aboriginal communities. In this short thread, she speaks about this and the intergenerational sadness that defines mental health for her. This sadness is about the Racism, poverty and oppression that have fractured and damaged her family and community. It is about the grief and loss that, for this young woman, has impacted heavily on her wellbeing and her perceptions of mental health. For her, this is not depression or a mental health problem and she was passionate and adamant about not labelling her or others as 'sick' or 'mental'. She speaks openly of the sadness that is symptomatic of the trauma and stress that has been placed on her family and community, internally and externally. Her understanding of mental health is layered and reflective and her approach to her own wellness is pragmatic and determined.

First things that come into my head when we talk about mental health is me mum...because she's mental, my family because they are cracked... For wadjulas, mental health is like a medical thing and them mob try to say to me you are depressed but I'm just sad, not mental. Don't try and tell us we sick when we not. Some of us are just sad I know there is more to me, I can make more of myself...I'm not looking after my mental health at all right now you know but I'm trying...

Sometimes there's just nothing to be hopeful for. ... I get why we fight so much its cause of our history and that there, jealousy for what some black fellas got and what they haven't but most I think it is we just hurt you know, hurt from history hurt from how we all treated now. Yeah, we hurt. Our Aboriginal community needs to stand together, stop smashing and come together as one to help sort out us young fellas out. Engage in more blackfella things, you know like the community coming together, standing as one...Having a yarn and helping each other, we don't want to live with the smashing and that....People in the community that are okay need to help others make the change, to make them and the mob happy and come together to make a difference. (Storyteller 11)

The difference between her own beliefs and experiences and that of wadjela's (white) medicalisation of mental health and sadness is very clear in this thread.

Her own understanding of mental health encompasses the long and oppressive historical experiences of colonisation and the subsequent Racism and oppression that have direct and indirect consequences.

For Storyteller 11, this holistic view of mental health is what she lives with and experiences and it reflects the cultural and family values she was raised with. The hurt experienced through 'history and through how we are treated now' is a big part of the hopelessness that she feels. This very complex understanding is anchored in her lived experiences of interpersonal and institutional oppression. She speaks of the jealousy within the community that manifests as lateral and inter/intra-family violence and internalised Racism. She is clear that this is not a place that we (Aboriginal people and communities) are willingly and complacently occupying and that no-one wants to live with the 'smashing', sadness and trauma. The impact of this is also seen in other threads around identity and connection to people and place. The importance of connections to family are threaded throughout all themes and the profound sadness and pain that family and community fractures cause are felt at all levels of this young woman's life.

As an individual, she is taking steps every day to stay mentally and physically healthy and well and parts of her family are working towards mending the fractures that addiction and violence have caused. The last few sentences of this thread highlight strengths, personal and community, and the importance of supporting and encouraging people who have the capacity, who have the resilience. It also points to the importance of community-led and -driven responses, supports and ownership of healing the fractures. This young woman knows that the capacity to heal and move forward is vested in a community and family that has their strengths recognised and appreciated. She calls on people in her family and wider community who are doing well to offer support, guidance and to support the changes needed to be strong and well. She calls on whitestream Australia to acknowledge that Racism and intergenerational trauma, the legacies of colonialism, continue and people sometimes feel hopeless; this reality makes her profoundly sad for herself, her family and her community. Although this hopelessness is tempered by her own resilience, it is an important part of her Story and of many other young Aboriginal people who feel trapped, isolated and alone.

The feeling of being alone is particularly profound for people who live in a collectivist and family-focussed culture and is an important part of understanding where this young woman has been coming from and where she can go in the future. For this Storyteller, without systemic, personal and cultural change, the picture of mental health is incomplete. We can provide culturally safe opportunities to explore, heal and articulate mental health; however, a framework will also need to be put in place to challenge the systems that continue to support the status quo.

Mental health, for many of the Storytellers, is very complex, layered and conflicting idea that heavily informs and is enacted within traumatised and fractured families and spaces.

This next thread makes these points explicit as the Storyteller shares the historical implications of mental health for him and his family.

... Graylands.... You know Graylands? (Mental Health Hospital in Perth) Yeah, gurangi. That's another word for crazy, hey..., I just get negative connotations from that word anyway, 'mental health'. And it has never been too pretty with us Aboriginal mob, anyway... Yeah, well that's the thing; it's that whole history behind that word....Being aware that there are all these things here to combat, you know. Spirituality is a big thing, especially when people go off the rails. Like, understanding the right channels to go to for sport, for mental health, for leisurely activities, you know...

If you are bored or you are out on the streets running amuck, you know, you could be out playing a footy game or something like that. Or, you know, you could be hanging out in a drop-in centre, you know, with other like-minded kids as well who just want to chill out, and if it is unsafe at home. But just, yeah, identify the appropriate channels.... cultural activities like taking kids out hunting, you know, I know for a fact back in (Home Community) they do that through the drop-in centre there.

You know, when it comes to that time of season for whatever animal is in season, they take them out, you know, whether it be a goanna or if it is salmon season or if it is stingray season or whatever, you know, you take them out and just get them out from that environment pretty much. And, yeah, trust me, you know, when you do get out of (Home Community) or out of the city area, you know, some healing does go on... I feel...we have to change how guddias understand, how we understand mental health and maybe we as communities need to change how we understand mental health. It is that whole, what's that word they say, paradigm shift. (Storyteller 9)

For this Storyteller 9, his beliefs and values around the idea of mental health are heavily informed by the worldview of his family, culture and community.

For him the term mental health triggers negative connotations and is tied to being gurangi-mad and to hospitalisation. His personal and cultural understanding of a much broader framework for mental health is evident. A sense of belonging, connections to and practice of culture, and being on Country are the core components of his mental wellness and health.

He shares how in his home community; the youth drop-in centre and cultural and sporting activities are important to the overall mental health of young people. They provide a safe place if there is violence or fracturing at home and help to combat the boredom that leads to 'running amuck'. The hyper-surveillance of young Indigenous people means that this can and does lead to increased attention from police and community services departments. The cultural safety of the youth centre spaces provides alternatives and opportunities for young Aboriginal people.

Participating in seasonal hunting and camping on Country offers opportunities for healing and provides a very real sense of connectedness. These activities and services draw on the strengths of the community and Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding and reinforce connections to Country, people and culture. For this young man, these are culturally relevant approaches to building his mental health and supporting healing and resilience. Being mentally well, for him, encompasses family and community experiences and relationships based on collaboration, trust and the strengths of the individual and community.

He talks about the need for a paradigm shift around how we all understand the term mental health. The shift that he refers to is challenging negative perceptions, and exploring culturally safe and relevant ways to engage with services and programs that are centred on family, Country and community - the very things he explains as central to staying strong and mentally well. The paradigm shift needed for guddias in this space is about understanding how the past has impacted and shaped the worldviews and defined Indigenous mental health discourse and practices. Cultural safety begins with this kind of reflective approach to your own identity and in the case of a health-care worker, the relative and contextual power that you have as a practitioner and your own conscious and unconscious bias.

When this young Storyteller speaks of the 'right and appropriate channels,' he is talking about the services and the people who are culturally safe and who have a more complex understanding of their own values and beliefs - institutional and personal. This is not just about non-Indigenous practitioners, services or policies. He speaks very passionately of the need for Aboriginal people to make shifts in how we view and understand mental health and the need to remove the stigma and become part of conversations that broaden community and medical definitions. He also touches on the historical implications of the term mental health and how, in the past, it has been 'not too pretty' for us. His very clear and layered understanding of mental health as words, concepts and practice are embedded in intergenerational knowledge and experience. The fear and mistrust of mental health services and provision is evident and the paradigm shift he talks about is essential for all of us if we are to be part of the changes needed.

Moorditj people and communities

Mentally healthy? Just not getting too down, depressed and stuff. I knew I was when I had that whole year and a half off. I just knew I was getting a little bit depressed and I was thinking, 'Oh just don't worry about it', just whatever. Yeah, everyone, my cousins and everything, started to come over, so that was alright. It helped me through. It was pretty cool.
(Storyteller 2)

The consequences of self-harm and suicide impact upon many families and geographic spaces and some of the Storytellers shared how they were affected by suicide and other mental health issues. For Storyteller 2, who faced Racism and bullying at school that resulted in a yearlong struggle with depression, the role of his cousins in his recovery was crucial. In Aboriginal kinship systems, cousins are like brothers and sisters. Kinship systems, both traditional and contemporary, provide layers and levels of support and strength and relationships with cousins are crucial for understanding the complexities and support systems in many Indigenous families.

The importance of supporting a whole-of-family or community approach to mental health is evident both in the thread from Storyteller 2 and the following thread from Storyteller 7.

This short thread is also quite complex and layered. Initially, it is family that provides stability and a strong sense of positive mental health but Family is also a major trigger to feeling overwhelmed and alone.

He talks openly about his suicidal ideation and the 'really big blues' he has with his parents that lead to these feelings.

Mental health, just well-being, family..., mentally healthy means not running away from home... I've thought about suicide on a couple of attempts, a couple of times. Yeah. But after those really big blues with mum or dad, like I said, I would just walk to the park and sit there, and I would think and I get my mind straight. I'll be like, 'Yeah, don't do that. That is a stupid idea.'
(Storyteller 7)

Connections to family and to a sense of self are evident in this young person's ideas around mental health. His suicidal thoughts are situational, impulsive and contextual. His protections against them are family and the sense of safety and security that comes with it. As with many young people, he also experiences the family as a site of tensions and stress. This small thread speaks about this but also shows the strength and capacity of family to promote wellness and strength. Seeing the fracturing and tensions from this space of strength and potential opens up possibilities and promises of cultural and family security and safety. These strengths are the foundation of mental, physical and spiritual strength.

The idea of being mentally healthy for the young people who shared their Stories with me encompassed family and community experiences and a clear understanding of the history of conflict, coercion, and complacency that has led us to where we are now: lacking the understanding that mental health, like all areas of health, is culturally, politically and socially constructed. Complacency is manifested in the lack of outrage around breathtakingly high suicide, incarceration rates, child removals and intergenerational poverty that has ravaged and compromised our children and young people's capacity to be the best version of themselves. Without systemic and institutional change, the picture of mental health is incomplete.

We can provide culturally safe opportunities to explore, heal and articulate what mental health is. There also needs to be a framework put in place to challenge the systems that continue to support the status quo. All of the themes that came out of this study, including the young people's understandings of mental health, are underpinned by Racism and oppression.

The downward pressure exerted multiplies the complex journeys of healing that need to occur. Current discourses that are aimed at building community capacity need to be underpinned by a commitment to the kind of change needed for real efficacy. Recognising and drawing on the strengths of culture, family and identity as the vehicles for change at a community level acknowledges the capacity and strength of community and family as a rich and valuable resource - not just the site of dysfunction. Mental health for Aboriginal young people is about the ability to be self-determining - the ability to have a sense of hopefulness for the future and the opportunities to realise their potential without the barriers.

This research started with community and professional yarns around the idea of hearing and retelling the Stories of success of Indigenous young people, living and studying on Wadjuk Boodjar. Culturally safe and co-designed approaches provided opportunities for the core Indigenous values of connection to people, place and culture to be heard and understood from a position of cultural strength. The Stories provide insights into how these values anchor relationships and support and nurture our young people to grow up strong and well. The importance of these connections is evident throughout the yarns shared and align closely with areas identified in broader Indigenous youth research (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Young, 2017). The position of strength and wellness that these Stories are shared from can provide different views, narratives and understandings of how to raise strong and resilient young people who are living and learning in urban, intercultural contexts.

Strength, culture and identity

The stigmatisation of poor mental health is heard in several of the Stories and in the following thread this young Noongar Storyteller shares the importance of feeling strong in your identity, value and worth as a central to understanding mental health for her.

Well that is the first thing being a positive person, seeing the world, being strong in your identity. I think that is a massive thing. Yeah, okay, identity, happiness and I guess liking yourself and liking your life and being really comfortable and, you know, feeling like you are successful and feeling like you are dealing well and all that sort of stuff.

But, yeah, your mental health, I know that is like really, really important. Yeah, sometimes I think people unfortunately don't think they are worth it, don't think they are worth looking after. It is sort of like a form of self-harming and things like that, because you can get really low like that. I have seen that happen, yeah. I guess it is going with the negative stuff. When it is not happening to you, when you are seeing it happen to somebody you love, you sort of develop these new ways of seeing the world and, like, appreciating the good things that you do have and acknowledging how important some stuff like mental health is for the rest of your life. (Storyteller 10)

For her the three main ingredients to maintaining good mental health are positivity, strong cultural identity and a strong sense of self-worth. The next part of her thread really captures just how important these strengths are and the very real and often deadly consequences occur when young people do not feel they have worth or value. She is speaking from her very intimate experiences of loss and grief in her family and community.

Her capacity to use these experiences to see the world differently is linked strongly to her strong sense of self and her belief in her own potential and capacity. Other threads shared from this young Storyteller show her strengths in 'walking in two worlds' and her capacity to operate in intercultural spaces as fundamental to her overall wellbeing. Her strong identity enables and facilitates this understanding of mental health, what it is and how to stay strong.

The way I see it, if you need to go talk to someone, professionally, you should treat your mental health the same way you treat, like, your physical. Like, if you go to your doctor just to get checked up on or something and you think something is not quite right, you just go to the doctor and you get that sorted out. You do the same thing with a psychologist or something like that. You know, there is a stigma attached to that, but you have got to ignore that for yourself. I still have days where like yesterday uni gets so overwhelming, like, and I just wanted to sit there and cry in class because I didn't get it. But, yeah, it is about being able to get back up as well and keep going and being fine the next day. Like, you are allowed to have those moments. No one is happy, like, every single day. Yeah. And that it takes work to get there, too. If you had have asked me this even, like, two years ago I would have had all different answers here I reckon. (Storyteller 10)

As a third-year medical student, this young woman's attitude and beliefs around health-seeking behaviours, particularly in relation to mental health, acknowledge the stigma around poor mental health and the mistrust of services and institutions that many young people feel and experience.

However, she also articulates the importance of understanding why she feels this way and actively working to change her behaviours and attitudes. She sees mental health services as a support service that has an important part of your overall health and wellbeing. Clearly her capacity and strength are built on very positive self-esteem and a strong and healthy cultural identity. The damage and fracturing are manifested in self-harm, and sadness. This thread ends with a very salient point around the fluidity of mental health and wellness for her. This is relevant because the deficit, negative and entrenched narratives around Indigenous youth are often very one-dimensional and offer no real alternatives. Our young people have enormous capacity for 'coping' with the many obstacles that are part of being young and Indigenous in Australia. This thread provides a very personal and real look at the high cost many pay in order to cope or succeed.

Connections

Cultural, social, spiritual and geographic space have been part of Indigenous SEWB for thousands of years and Western medical and educational models are now starting to understand the importance and the impact they have across the range of social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing). Understanding the importance of these connections, particularly in relation to urbanised contexts and the maintenance of cultural continuity and connection to Country, are integral to addressing disparities across all of the determinants of social and emotional wellbeing (Dudgeon, 2017; Lines & Jardine, 2019).

The consequences of connections are far ranging and are evidenced across all areas of disadvantage that young people experience (Paradies & Cunningham 2009; Paradies, Harris, & Anderson, 2008; Paradies, 2012; Ziersch et al., 2011). Understanding the consequences, adaptations and changes to these connections that young people can experience as they move into different contexts, move out of or off Country, are core to addressing issues such as retention and completion rates in education and overall SEWB for Aboriginal young people (Boulton, 2016; Greenop, 2013).

Chapter 9

Weaving the threads

This research started with community and professional yarns around the idea of hearing and retelling the Stories of success and resilience of Indigenous young people, living and studying on Wadjuk Boodjar. The explicit aims were to listen to these Stories and articulate the barriers and facilitators experienced from a strengths- based framework. The use of research approaches that honoured and respected Indigenous cultural values was also seen as fundamental to capturing and retelling these Stories from an Indigenous perspective.

The culturally safe and co-designed approaches taken provided opportunities for narratives of family and culture to be heard and understood as Indigenous core strengths. It also made space for these Stories to be told, heard and shared from a position that prioritises strength and resilience.

The Stories of the young people draw our attention to three major areas:

- Growing up and staying strong-Connections to people, place, culture and self
- Challenges –Racism, Grief and Fractured Families
- Understandings of mental health.

The key messages of strengths in the Stories told align closely with areas identified in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Adolescent and Youth Health and Wellbeing Report (2018). Research by Young et al (2019) also found that key indicators of resilience were centred on these areas.

Identifying to and with their cultural or kinship group and a strong sense of cultural obligation and responsibility also came through the Stories, as did the complexities of living with and in multiple cultural spaces. The position of strength and wellness that these Stories are shared from can potentially provide different views, narratives and understandings of how to support the growth of strong and resilient young people who are living and learning in urban, intercultural contexts. The ideas around resilience and strength and the metaphor of a shield, with culture, identity connections, and aspirations the protections that it offers, were shared by the Storytellers.

Connection to place

Understanding the importance of cultural connectedness and the role that it plays as a determinant of health is threaded through the yarns shared. Country and place, people and the spiritual, cultural and physical connections to them are the foundations of strong SEWB (Snowshoe, 2017, Kirmayer 2011; Gray, 2018, Hopkins, 2014). Many of the key factors that are identified as integral to being strong, resilient adults in this project add to the findings of other research looking at resilience and overall SEWB in Aboriginal youth and include:

- Connection to culture and Country -
- Strong connection to family
- A strong sense of self and cultural identity
- Ability to navigate complex intercultural spaces such as education and employment (Fogarty, 2018; Hopkins, 2014, 2018; Walter, 2017; Young, 2018; Zubrick 2014.)

Land or Country as a determinant of health in a youth context is explored by Lines et al (2019) in the work done with Native Canadian youth (Lines & Jardine, 2019). The idea of understanding the role of Country and connection to it as determinants of health from a youth perspective is also validated in the Stories shared and gaining more insight into this youth centred perspective is “particularly important, as it reflects both current and future health determinants” (Lines, 2019, p. 9).

This connection to Country is also an important component of a strengths-based approach to supporting our young people to grow into strong and resilient adults.

Country is an important determinant of health that needs to be more closely explored in an urban context, where access to traditional lands can be limited or not an option. Cultural, social, spiritual and geographic spaces have been part of Indigenous SEWB for thousands of years and Western medical models now starting to understand the importance of this connection and the positive impact it has on health, health outcomes and resilience (Lines & Jardine, 2019).

For some of the young people in this project, ‘Country’ or home is Perth or smaller towns. These landscapes are now dotted with buildings and roads that overlay many significant cultural sites and spaces, but have not diminished the profound connection that the Storytellers felt. For some, being on ‘Country’ was not a choice

that they were given when they wanted to further education, employment or training as many of the regional or discrete/ remote towns and communities do not have the capacity or resources or infrastructure needed. For others, however, opportunities such as scholarships, travel and employment that take them away from Country are choices that the Storytellers made based on their personal and academic goals, dreams and aspirations.

Understanding the importance of connections to Country and place, particularly in relation to urbanised contexts, and the maintenance of cultural continuity and connection to Country are integral as more of the Indigenous youth population moves into urbanised and intercultural spaces. (Lines & Jardine, 2019).

The movement of Aboriginal youth to major cities in WA in relation to resilience and successful or self-identified positive outcomes is relatively an unexplored area. Where you come from or your Country is of great importance and the consequences, adaptations and changes to that connection for young people who are living off Country long-term is an important conversation that needs to be continued if we are to address the disparities in education as well as other social determinants of health (Boulton, 2016; Greenop, 2013; Gray, 2018).

Doing Family

Concepts of family are informed and enacted through cultural lenses. Indigenous families have been subjected to consistent and extreme violence since invasion (Walter, 2017). The intergenerational traumas that are now unfortunately part of Ourstories have battered and fractured many of our families.

The forced disconnect and disruptions in the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices and the removal of generations of children has demanded many changes and adaptations of families and wider kinship systems. These adaptations and changes are more often than not viewed through a deficit lens. However, it is the strength, resilience and core of Aboriginal families that ensures the continued renewal, revitalisation and restrengthening of the diversity in contemporary Aboriginal cultures. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people consider relationships with their family and the associated obligations that go along with these relationships extremely or very important (AIHW, 2018, p. 80).

For many Indigenous people, family life is practiced within a much wider family and community environment. Walter (2017), drawing on the work of Silva et al., (1999) discusses the concept of 'doing family' in an Indigenous context. Indigenous families, irrespective of geographic area, 'do' family outside of the normalised parameters. Doing family is a term and concept that captures the active, complex and dynamic space of family and encompasses the ongoing social and cultural interactions and relationships with people and place. It is about maintaining relationships, supporting cultural capacity and cultural growth. Family is not something that you have but rather something that you do. Doing family is about participation, action and commitment (Silva, 1999, p. 8). For the Storytellers, 'doing family' was central to their growth and development as young adults. Family is culture, so doing family is doing culture. This is evident in the way these young people spoke about how they do family, about the 'tightness' of Aboriginal families, the solid belief in family always 'having your back,' and the security and responsibility that comes with it.

Doing family extended to an even more widened circle of influence and support such as universities and other educational spaces as these young people grew up and made choices about their futures. Relationships were formed and kinship systems honoured through the support networks and through the provision of culturally safe and secure spaces. This positioning of people within a family context is about cultural respect, protocol and engendering a sense of belonging and these familial type relationships are central to many of the yarns shared.

The threads shared show us that building networks and support systems that are based on trust, reciprocity, relationships and connections supports the growth and resilience of these young students. It also engenders for some a real sense of responsibility to give back to others, to set an example and to provide the kind of support and encouragement that they received to others, as evidenced in their capacity and leadership in their families and communities: Programs or policies directed at young Indigenous people, particularly like those in this project who live and learn in urban, educational contexts, need to be cognisant of how embedding the doing of family and belonging to place into support structures may facilitate better retention and, importantly, better experiences (Perry & Holt, 2018).

There were connections in the Stories shared around the role of Indigenous spaces in educational contexts. For many of the young people, the support they received in cultural spaces within tertiary institutions enabled them to finish their studies and achieve the goals they had set themselves. The Moorditj people, staff and fellow students, and the physical spaces set up, provided affirmation of their identity, confirmation of their place in the education system, and protection against the Racism that many experienced in their wider university context. These culturally safe places are central to retaining our students and driving and supporting culturally safe practices and policies in the wider tertiary sector.

The support staff, Moorditj people, other Indigenous students and the physical spaces of Indigenous centres affirmed the sense of belonging to people and place that grounds our identity. They confirm the diversity of Indigenous identity, by referring to the staff and student cohorts that are often made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The role they play in protecting identity is articulated beautifully by Storyteller 10 who talks about being surrounded by people on the same journey and of sense of community and strength she gains from not being the 'only Aboriginal kid' in the school. The Stories articulate the importance of having other Indigenous students around you at university as a protective factor. The family-like connections acted as extended family for many and provided both passive and active support within the hostile and racist spaces that many of our young people encounter in lives.

Perry et al (2018) use the cultural concept of Songlines to discuss and understand the importance of providing culturally safe and appropriate education processes and spaces for our mob. Songlines, put very simply, were and are part of the spiritual and cultural belief and values systems or Dreaming in Indigenous cultures (Perry, 2018). Songlines are the "footprints of our Ancestors" that provide complex knowledge systems and understandings of creation and existence (Perry, 2018). Sometimes imagined as invisible paths that crisscross the Country, Songlines were and are the freeways of information and knowledge. The Songlines that provided the basis for education prior to colonisation were severely disrupted and, in many cases, broken, 'silenced, or no longer breathing life into our traditional beliefs and the soil that sustains our very being" (p. 347)

In a contemporary educational context, these pathways or Songlines can be seen as part of positive engagement with education and can provide footsteps or stepping stones for those who come after. The creation, traversing and extension of these pathways are strong threads in the yarns shared. The Stories provided insights into the importance of education and the potential benefits associated. The values of the young Storytellers forging new pathways and the obligations and responsibilities that they take on to set positive examples for their families, highlights the integrational impacts of culturally safe education. In educational contexts, identity is at times challenged, disregarded, assumed and discounted with institutional and personal racism and unconscious bias. And where questions around their levels of 'Aboriginality', levels of intelligence and authenticity were common. Many of the Storytellers are a first-in-family to attend university and their experiences and the ways in which they have navigated the spaces inform and encourage others in their family.

What is clear from the yarns shared is that connection and belonging to people, place and culture are central to the positive identity development. These connections provide a buffer or shield against the imposed and often negative stereotypes associated with Indigenous youth and are the basis of positive self-esteem and self-worth. Factors such as stability, trust, solid role models, good boundaries, connections to people and place, and a solid belief in the strength of your family's loyalty and support are the key supports needed to grow up and stay strong and well.

Any attempts to improve outcomes for our children and young people need to be grounded in a strengths-based approach to understanding the values and importance of these factors, the centrality of family to growing up strong and well and to providing the kind of foundations needed by our young people to buffer the multiple stressors that are unfortunately part of their daily existence. These connections provide a shield against the imposed and often-negative stereotypes associated with Indigenous youth and are the basis of positive self-esteem and self-worth.

The diversity of cultural values and identities played out at a family level can be both stressful and protective. Family can provide you with the tools needed to function in two worlds but can also cause stress and tension in relation to cultural identity, loyalty and intracultural and internalised Racism (Bodkin-Andrews, 2017; Walter, 2017). This is the reality for the young people in this project. Living and functioning in the dominant world must be considered a strength to build on, and in this project, the capacity to operate effectively in an intercultural space was clearly seen as a strength. Learning how to do this begins in the family and/or community context.

The impact of family violence, poverty and loss - both cultural and loss of people - continues to fracture families. Across Australia, our children are nine times more likely to be living in out of home care and over twenty-five times more likely to be in detention (AIHW, 2018, 18). The idea of 'dysfunctional' does not really capture what has happened and is happening in our families. The fracturing of relationships to people and place are more descriptive of the reality experienced. The Storytellers raised these tensions as a major challenge to staying well, but also as a motivator for success.

Threats and rates of violence are higher, across all geographic areas, higher rates of poverty or exposure to other major stressors, lower education attainment, all of these high risk factors were raised and identified across the yarns (AIHW, 2018, 18: Walter, 2017). How these risk factors played out varied, but the realities expressed in the Stories highlight how these negative forces and factors erode families and their capacity to provide a strong and supportive base for young people.

Hopkins (2014, p. 10) comments on the complexity of the protective factors of family, cultural identity and connectedness and underscores the importance of working with families to start healing the fractures and making sustainable changes that support self-determination, personal, familial and cultural growth and a greater capacity to provide a base of stability and strength. Hopkins (2014) also noted that some of the very factors that contribute to risk are also a source of strength, connection and solidarity.

Further qualitative research with and for young Indigenous people can support understandings of how the duality of protection and risk are both culturally and environmentally constructed and experienced (Okamoto, Helm, Po'A-Kekuawela, Chin, & Nebre, 2009; Rudzinski et al., 2017). Working with families and young people to build the capacity of the individuals, families and communities, whether they are fractured or functional, is the basis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB.

Identity

Growing up knowing who you are and where you come from offers protection, strength and an anchor to your Aboriginality. To grow up strong, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to be strong in health, education, in family, in culture, in their identity and in how they see their own place within Australian society (Walter, 2017, p. 3). The capacity of a positive cultural identity as a protective factor has been well established in international literature (Chandler, 2008; Fforde, 2013; Kickett Tucker, 2009; Lines, 2019; Theron, 2015) and for the Storytellers the strength and protection they get from their Aboriginality and/or cultural identity was immense. It is in their blood; it is who they are, and it is how, in some cases, they choose to be identified. The centrality of these components as protective factors, as sources of strength in the overall SEWB of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, is clear in stories shared and supported by existing literature (AIHW, 2018; Hopkins, 2018; Zubrick, 2014).

Connections to culture and relationships with family and country provide certainty around their cultural identity, practical skills and knowledge as well as threads to hold onto as young people navigate multiple political and cultural spaces.

This connection is the strength of these young people and provides them with the capacity to stay strong and well (Chandler, 2008; Dickerson, 2014; Dudgeon & Holland, 2018; Dudgeon et al., 2014).

Our identity is complex and dynamic and influenced by a range of external factors such as culture, class, gender, sexuality and age (Paradies, 2006). For Indigenous people, our identities have been the object of concern and preoccupation since the invasion and subsequent colonisation of the country (Paradies, 2006).

Approaches to defining Indigeneity were and are about control, mobilisation, surveillance and reproduction – they were about keeping Indigenous and non-Indigenous people separated (Paradies, 2006, p.355). In the last two centuries, there have been scores of definitions imposed on Indigenous people in relation to identity that have left lasting and painful scars on communities, families and individuals. Policy eras and racist ideologies, such as dispossession, segregation, protection and control, assimilation and Social Darwinism have been the building blocks of the racist and dehumanising definitions that have led to systemic racism and sustained disparities across all SDoH (Ziersch, 2011; Durey, 2010).

Identity as a protective factor is expressed in all of the Stories and is in line with other research findings (Fforde, 2013; Gray, 2018; Greenop, 2015; Kickett-Tucker, 2009; Roxanne, 2016; Snowshoe, 2017); however, so too is the risk of racism and stereotyping of Aboriginal people that are associated with this identity, youth in particular. For these young people the core of who they are, their Aboriginal identity, is both a protective factor and a risk (Hopkins, 2014) If we take a moment to unpack this, the tensions that exist in this space are overwhelming. The ways in which the Storytellers deal with this give us some insight into the complexities of Aboriginality in Australia. They challenged, subverted, confronted and existed within the very narrow stereotypes placed on them by 'whitestream' society. They developed and grew in strength as a result of strong connections to people, culture, identity and place. The yarns shared support international and national research around the importance of identity to overall SEWB (Adams, 2006; Burack, 2007, Chandler, 2008) and provide very candid and open perspectives of Storytellers about their personal and cultural experiences and beliefs.

The Indigenous population is highly diverse in terms of beliefs, cultural practices, languages, level of western/Aboriginal education, and appearance. Many of us are descended from both colonised and colonising ancestors (Kowal, 2017, p.4). However, there has been little research into the diversity that exists within Indigenous identities and how it is actualised (Kowal, 2017, p.5). These Storytellers, like most young Aboriginal people, function within very complex inter- and intracultural spaces.

These skills have supported and enabled the Storytellers to navigate the familial, educational and social intercultural spaces that they occupy daily. Their capacity and skills to walk into two worlds is shared with us through several of the threads and is a real source of strength.

What this means for these young Storytellers is complex, highly political as well as cultural formation and expressions of cultural identity that can result in intracultural as well as institutional and interpersonal Racism. Family and Country mitigate cultural discordance between external attributions of Aboriginality and personal identity; that is, your identity as an Indigenous person comes from who you are and where you come from- not from the way you may outwardly present to the world. This is clearly summed up by Storyteller 10 who denies assimilation and asserts her Aboriginality in family and public spaces. Her light skin and bicultural family are a part of her, but it is her Aboriginality that is the anchor point of her identity.

The issues of degrees of colour in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is much more complex. Given the underlying thread of Racism that permeates almost all of the stories shared, there are some clear points of difference in the experiences of the families and Storytellers who had fairer skin (Doyle, 2017). The common feelings expressed by the fairer-skinned young people in this project included feelings of disjointedness rather than disconnection. That is, they felt that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and society judged them but it never compromised their sense of identity. This ran across all of the yarns shared - the strength and importance of a solid cultural identity that has been developed as a result of connections to family and Country (Doyle, 2017).

The skills to negotiate two worlds have supported and enabled the Storytellers to navigate the familial, educational and social intercultural spaces that they occupy daily. Their experiences, particularly in the educational contexts, are complex and their identity is at times challenged, disregarded, assumed and discounted with institutional and personal racism and unconscious bias. This is evident in the yarns they shared, where questions around their levels of 'Aboriginality', levels of intelligence and authenticity were common.

Finding ways to support young people navigate these spaces requires a real willingness to look at this intersection of cultural identities and the ways in which our cultural values, beliefs and practices can coexist and be strengthened. The centrality of positive cultural identity is linked to resilience and positive self-esteem, both of which build the capacity and strengths of young people (Chandler, 2008, 2016; Fleming, 2007; Wexler, 2009).

Racism

Racism was an integral part of each and every one of the yarns shared. Overt, blatant Racism is experienced in public spaces and institutionalised Racism is reinforced by the media daily and within institutions such as universities and health care settings. It is felt in the suicides, early deaths and poor health outcomes that the Storytellers, their families and communities deal with every day. How young people experience and react to it has been linked to increased rates of ill health, poor school performance, anxiety and depression (Bastos, 2018; Priest, 2011, 2013). Data from the AIHW (2018) shows that most experiences of Racism occur in educational contexts and the ramifications of this are wide ranging and significantly affect the retention of students. Racism impedes the opportunity to provide culturally safe education and it also violates the basic human rights of people to education and to be free from discrimination. The impact on young Aboriginal people who are living in an urban context, sometimes without any cultural or familial support is revealed in the stories and correlate with other research into experiences of Racism. (AIHW, 2018; Paradies, 2013; Priest, 2017). The complexities of culturally diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and the issue of intracultural Racism that some of the Storytellers share highlight the very complex, challenging and difficult context our young people work and live in. Issues of authenticity, judgements on degrees of Aboriginality, and slurs such as 'coconut,' 'flash black,' 'textbook black' and 'air-conditioned black,' serve to divide, fracture and apportion privilege and value (Gorringe, 2011).

Experiences of Racism, interpersonal, institutional and intracultural, and their impact are profound and well-documented (Paradies, 2008, 2013; Priest, 2011; Ziersch, 2011).

The life-long emotional and physical impacts of Racism are well articulated (Paradies 2008). The yarns reveal the impact of dominant ideas of Aboriginality, intracultural tensions, culturally diverse identities, and Racism. Racism was, for every participant, a part of life and the dominant stressor and barrier to staying well for this cohort. Several of the open-ended questions asked the Storytellers to yarn about what Aboriginal identity, their 'Aboriginality,' meant to them and to identify some things that, as an Indigenous youth, they might experience and that non-Indigenous youth do not. Within the yarns, there were anecdotes shared that spoke of dominant media and social stereotypes of 'Aboriginality' and how they could erode their sense of strength and wellness. Challenging the dominant deficit narrative has given some of the Storytellers a very insightful and critical understanding of the power of stereotypes - but at a cost. (Browne-Yung, 2013; Dudgeon, 2018; Fforde, 2013; Point, 2019; Skerrett, 2018).

The relationship between Racism and health is complex and the impacts of Racism are felt across our mental, physical, emotional and cultural health. The consequences of Racism for Indigenous people are higher levels of stress, physical assaults, dysfunctional and incredibly damaging behaviours such as drug and alcohol addiction, suicidal ideation and actualisation and the constant effects of the negative stereotypes and narratives that permeate the national discourse. They all leads to the extreme disadvantage experienced across the SDoH (Paradies, 2013).

Grief and Loss

Sadness and loss are part of life of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Like Racism, grief and loss have had a profound impact on the lives of the young people in this project. As with Racism, grief and loss has become normalised both inside our communities and by the wider society (Zubrick, 2005).

This normalisation is problematic on many levels but, fundamentally, there is an expectation that Aboriginal youth will need to develop protective skills, resilience in order to mitigate the impact of early death, high risk of disease and intergenerational poverty.

'Sorry Business' is one of the main cultural gatherings or ceremonies that many of our young people participate in (AIHW, 2018).

The grossly disproportionate incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people also adds to the loss and grief that are experienced at an individual, family/kinship and community level. The cycle of complex grief and loss has been well documented as being at the heart of Aboriginal experiences; however, there is still little work that tries unravels the complex relationship that this cycle of grief and loss has with overall SEWB (Wynne-Jones, 2016). The yarns in this project give some insight into the impact of loss and how an almost perpetual grief is taking a toll on the resilience of this cohort.

In Western Australia, the crisis in the Kimberley and the recently released Coroner's report on youth and child suicides reiterated the need for and importance of working at a community level, with appropriate pre- and post-intervention strategies. Working with communities, young people and Elders to provide community-led, -driven and -owned strategies and programs that are appropriately funded, staffed and evaluated are key to effecting real change in these distressing losses of young lives and to addressing systemic disadvantage (Dudgeon, 2018; Foglian, 2019). It is not just the work that needs to be done within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, it is also the systemic issues of Racism and poverty. These changes cannot be made by communities – these are issues that must be addressed within the very institutions that perpetuate them (Dudgeon, 2018; Foglian, 2019).

Systemic Racism is at the core of many, if not all, of the challenges experienced by the Storytellers in this project and in the wider Indigenous population (Dudgeon, 2017). The impacts on overall SEWB at an individual, family and community level are threaded throughout the Stories shared. Many of the Storytellers have learnt to cope with, live with and ignore Racism, some from a very young age.

The strength and courage of the young people in this project give us real insight into how they manage to navigate Racism by drawing on the connections to people, place and culture.

Addressing the entrenched disadvantage that often defines Aboriginal people, in particular our youth, requires dismantling of the deficit discourses that continue to see our families and communities as problematic.

Nurturing and supporting the assets and strengths of individuals and communities and locating them in a strengths-based SEWB framework is vital in overcoming systemic disadvantage and the neglect of culture that has been identified as barrier to achieving overall health and wellbeing (Dudgeon, 2017).

Providing programs, policy and challenging narratives that are embedded in negative and deficit views and understanding of our needs are also core to providing a safe and nurturing environment for young Aboriginal people. Seeing our cultures, identities and worldviews as our strengths and not as a disadvantage or an opportunity for assimilation is also the way forward to more equitable and sustainable health and social outcomes. As cultural groups, we have only so much capacity and opportunity to make changes in our lives and society at local, national and international levels to challenge and dismantle systems that are built on and benefit from systemic Racism. This we, as Indigenous people, cannot do alone.

Mental Health and SEWB

The Storytellers articulated a broad range of ideas and concepts that they associated with mental health and shared a range of experiences, beliefs and realities. The high levels of hopefulness and passion for change shared in the Stories also highlight that this cohort of young Aboriginal people is very aware of mental health.

To articulate how young Aboriginal people see, understand and enact mental health, there needs to be a close examination of how mental health as a concept and reality are culturally defined and understood (Adermann, 2007, p.75). Most of the young people involved had very negative connotations and experiences with the term 'mental health'.

This discrete cohort of purposively sampled voices has allowed a glimpse into the important factors that have shaped their ideas and understandings of mental health.

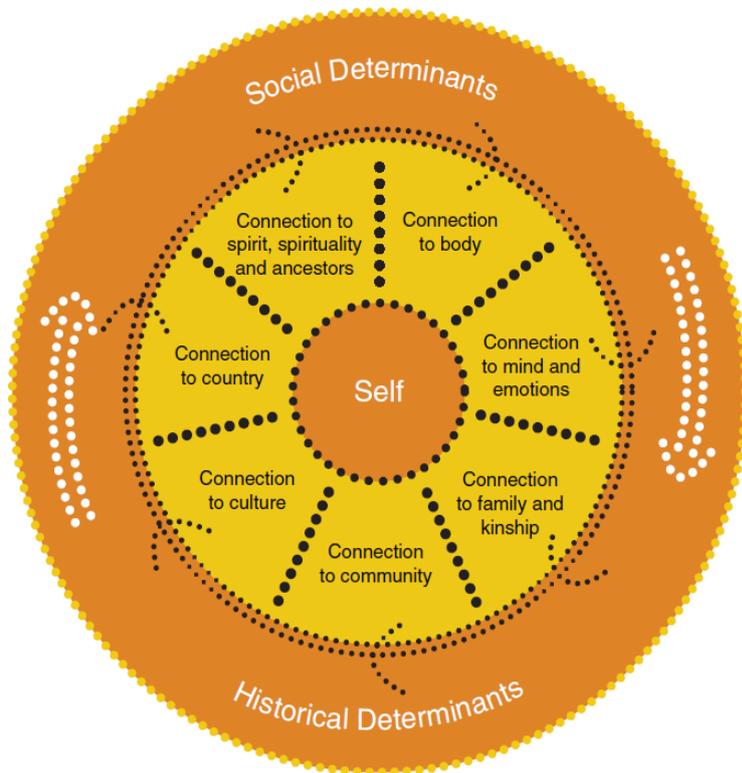
It is not as simple as being mentally well or not - perceptions and understandings of mental health are informed and understood from personal, familial, cultural and broader societal stories and experiences of mental health.

The importance of having cultural understandings of the words, ideas and actions around mental health is needed not only to inform the work of policy-makers and practitioners but also to inform community and family support networks.

The impact of mental health-related harm in the Indigenous youth population extends across many families and geographic spaces (Azzopardi, 2013; Ypinazar, 2007). Mental health issues or concerns are a part of life for most, if not all, of the young people in this project. Experiences of the tragic reality of youth suicides, long-term depression and anxiety in their families and in some communities has obviously shaped and formed their definitions and understandings. The Stories do address mental health from a place of hope and strength; however, SEWB is not as simple as positive or negative views of mental health. Understandings of mental health and illness are nuanced and are embedded in history, family, social expectations and affected by experiences of identity, Racism, culture and Country (Dudgeon, 2000; Kelly, 2009; Gee, 2014; Westerman, 2000). Mental health needs to be understood in this broader framework that accounts for cultural specificities as well as the downstream impacts of colonisation (Young, 2017, p.12). As one of the Storytellers clearly shared, a paradigm shift is needed in this space – and at the community and institutional levels that allow for cultural understandings to be seen, given importance and heard. Developing more culturally contextualised understandings based on strengths and wider social and emotional well-being approaches offer alternative perspectives to the predominantly deficit-based narratives around Indigenous youth and mental health (Dudgeon, 2000; Westerman, 2000; Zubrick, 2014).

All of the Storytellers spoke to these nuanced and connected ways of understanding their mental health. The Social and Emotional Well-being framework (below) and others like it capture the importance of this approach to Indigenous wellbeing (Dudgeon, 2017).

The absolute importance of Connections to good mental health are clearly threaded throughout the Stories shared and add to a growing body of evidence that advocates these wrap around approaches to Indigenous mental health.



(Dudgeon, 2017, p.317).

These kinds of approaches are grounded in cultural safety, community and family (Wright, 2011). Viewed through a SEWB lens that sees family, culture and community as central to resilience and capacity, rather than from a deficit position, we can start to recognise strengths instead of problems (Fogarty, 2018). Removing the lens of dysfunction and despair and recognising the Racism that Australia was founded on and continues to benefit from, economically, socially and politically, is fundamental to the systemic changes that need to occur. The capacity of our young people to continue to manage the multiple life stresses that they are directly and indirectly impacted by and still achieve their goals and aspirations is a testament to their resilience and that of their families and communities.

Limitations, Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

While this research has limitations given the small sample, the challenges and strengths that are shared contribute to the broader narratives around the health and wellbeing of our young people. All but one of the Storytellers were engaged in tertiary education, which also limits the broader application of the research, however it is important to note that the findings that came from their Stories have many points of connection with national and internal research around Aboriginal young people. Given that the Storytellers were from diverse cultural groups and geographical areas there are clearly similarities in the way that they experience the world and the way in which they broader Australian community perceives and treats them. While this project is discreet and drawn from a small sample group the findings can and do have wider implications, particularly for our young people who are engaging in higher education. The research also adds weight to the growing body of work that supports the necessity of finding ways to support and nurture Aboriginal young people based on culture, identity, nuanced and often geographically or culturally determined definitions and understandings of concepts such as mental health and SEWB.

Our young people need and deserve approaches to their overall SEWB that are grounded in success and hope, not overwhelmed by narratives of despair and dysfunction. We cannot afford to continue to apply reductionist interventions that fail to take into account the broader social determinants of health that impact on their daily lives and, ultimately, their overall potential and capacity. The value and importance of services - health, housing employment, justice, education and so on - cannot be seen in isolation but rather need to be addressed holistically, taking into account systemic Racism and oppression. Aboriginal-designed and implemented programs have the capacity to foster and support practice and policies that are informed and enacted through cultural lenses, building self-determination and empowerment.

Understanding that resilience can be an outcome of negotiation between individuals and their environments to develop and sustain self-defined success, happiness and health recognises the importance of understanding contexts- current and historical (Oliver, 2015). Many of the young people in this project speak to the impacts of colonisation that they experience intergenerationally, and their Stories also describe the intergenerational Racism fostered in and validated by mainstream Australian society. The Stories of resistance and strength evidenced in the continuing cultural connectedness shared by the Storytellers is the current iteration of the ongoing struggle we have experienced since colonisation. Over the years we have consistently rallied against the deficit discourses, practices and policies that are entrenched in systemic Racism. These are the Stories of strength and success that our young people have an inherent right to.

Despite years of assimilationist policies, Aboriginal people have fought for and maintained their right to self-determination. Aboriginal young people have a right to this history of resistance and strength on which they can build their identities, their self-esteem, and their resilience. (Oliver, 2015, p.24)

Approaches to the SEWB of our young people need to be framed by and with their strengths and the strengths of their families and communities. Central to these strengths are relationships - to people and place. Dismantling these deficit discourses is grounded in seeing these familial, community and cultural connections as assets, not as challenges, in mainstream approaches to working with us as individuals, families and communities.

A very tangible shift in both the thinking and doing of research, programs or policies that impact on our young people and their communities is required to ensure that they are culturally safe and secure. Central to achieving this is the building of trust and relationships;

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, access to culturally secure mental health care in an early and timely manner has the potential to have significant impact across the life-span. Cultural security is an essential component of health services delivered to Aboriginal people, however it is often misunderstood or unaddressed in mainstream services. (Wright, 2019, p. 1506).

The importance of culturally secure, safe and relevant services for our young people cannot be underestimated. The ongoing disadvantage, systemic and personal Racism, poverty and limited opportunities to fully reach our potential are constant sources of sadness and hopelessness. The increasingly high suicide rates see our young people overly burdened with grief and yet, despite this, the Stories shared in this research describe the healing that is found in our relationship to each other, to our cultures and to the land that we come from and/or live on. Relationships are central to changing the way that Indigenous people are viewed and understood.

Wright et al, in their work with young people and Elders in the mental health space, clearly articulate the centrality of relationship to ensuring meaningful and sustainable change.

When youth mental health services undertake systemic change through their direct collaboration with Elders and young people, their work practices will be more culturally secure, resulting in an increase of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth engagement and better mental health outcomes for young people and their families. ... the local Aboriginal community will develop greater trust and confidence in the services and their ability to meet the mental health needs of young people. (Wright, 2019, p.1508)

Building relationships, understanding cultural values, and worldviews provides opportunities for non-Indigenous mental health clinicians and services to reframe how they work with and understand our young people: real people rather than with stereotypes.

...establishing ongoing relationships between young people and support staff to which youth could later turn for help was a key part of the cultural appropriateness of the model (Skerrett, 2018, p.21).

In both research and service delivery, collaborating with Elders, young people and others in the mental health space allows for narratives of strength to be heard and for those strengths to be seen.

Writing about a group based Indigenous SEWB programme at *headspace*¹⁷ Inala, in Queensland, Skerrett et al (2018) emphasise the ineffectiveness of mainstream programs historically and the negative impact this has had. The lack of collaboration and understanding of the importance of cultural safety has resulted in the delivery of health care has led to predominantly

(e)urocentric services and treatment models, which over-, under-, and misdiagnose mental illness and have been ineffective in meeting the mental health needs of Indigenous young people.(Skerrett, 2018, p.14)

Skerrett et al (2018, p.15) go on to describe the development of youth suicide prevention initiative based on a framework of cultural validity - community ownership - developed by and for the community and relationship building and engagement.

Using community-based participatory action research (CPBR) the knowledge, skills and expertise of young people and Elders was central to the development of a framework that resulted in a holistic SEWB suicide-prevention program that was grounded in our ways of being, knowing and doing. The results were a significant decrease in suicidal ideation (Skerrett et al 2018, p.15).

Both of the research approaches mentioned are grounded in the understanding that we, as Aboriginal people, have a vested interest in the health and wellbeing of our young people and communities and that we are the experts in this space. It also speaks to the importance of understanding that relationships with us, based on cultural safety, respect and cultural security, are key to implementing the kinds of systemic and sustainable changes needed.

¹⁷ Headspace is a he National Mental Health Foundation, providing early intervention mental health services to young people aged 12-25,

Reflections

Over the course of completing this project, many of the Storytellers have kept in touch and shared with me their successes and their failures. I have seen them complete their studies, start families and grieve for those lost in their families and communities. In my own journey, I have also experienced the profound loss of young people dear to my heart, the early passing of relatives, and the cumulative effects of ongoing grief and loss. Along with the Storytellers, I have also experienced bittersweet successes that my loved ones cannot share with me.

Working together to achieve more positive and appropriate outcomes was the driving motivation behind this research and was fundamental to facilitating a process that centred on Indigenous young people's realities. This encompassed the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences associated with a commitment to Indigenous ways of thinking, working and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities. This research project has been in my heart for many years and the process of putting into words has been very daunting. The Stories of our young people, our Elders and our Ancestors, are Stories of strength, courage and resilience. The grief, sadness and oppression that is evidenced across all of our communities were the driving force behind finding platforms for our strengths to be heard.

On a very personal level, the yarns around identity, being 'fair skinned' and the problematic space that people like me often live and work in resonated deeply. As someone who can 'pass' as 'white,' the idea and reality of privilege is something that I reflect on constantly. In my personal and professional life, I have experienced similar situations to those of some of the Storytellers: too white to be black and too black to be mainstream. I am fair skinned, I do pass every day. This is privilege. When I am out in the world with someone society deems to be an identifiable as an Aboriginal person, I am very cognisant of the differing ways in which the world sees and treats you based on skin colour. The impact of Racism on our collective mental health is profound and it was no surprise that Racism was one of the major challenges to staying strong and well for the Storytellers.

The translation of this research into practice began during the initial yarns many years ago. Each yarn was informed by the one before, and strength, adaptability and courage were embedded in all of them. The Stories become part of my teaching and learning practice in my role of educator and mentor. My involvement in Indigenous health curriculum development was guided by a success-based approach- framing our health and wellbeing in terms of our strengths not just the statistics that fail to represent the whole of us. My teaching and research practices are enriched and guided by the courage of the Storytellers, who despite the enormous odds stacked against them, found ways to thrive and flourish-providing a pathway for those coming behind. Their Stories are now part of the narratives of strength and resilience that are finding their place in our classrooms, research projects and most importantly they are embedded in the Stories that we tell and retell to each other.

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Appendix 1
Participant Information Sheet- Yarns

If you're Kaarty and you know it clap you hands

Mental wellbeing and Aboriginal youth: an examination of the attitudes and beliefs of 18-25 year olds residing in Perth WA

My name is Michelle Webb and I am an Aboriginal researcher at Curtin University. My research is looking at how young Aboriginal people from around WA, who are living in Perth understand and define good mental health.

Part of this research involves talking or yarning with young people to get their ideas and thoughts on how they achieve good mental health or wellness. By looking at what is working I hope to tell your stories of strength and resilience.

I am looking for young Aboriginal people 18-25 who would be willing to have a yarn about what mental health is and how you keep well and strong. The yarns or interviews would be recorded and then transcribed.

You will be given access to any transcriptions or recordings made of you in a follow up yarn after the interview.

This project is all about looking at important issues like mental health, identity and community from your perspective. It is also about using your stories to look at what is working and using that information to help develop better programs and policies.

All participants are volunteers and you can withdraw from the project at anytime during the research. If you decide to withdraw all of your information will be returned to you and not used in the research without your consent.

Support workers will be available to help you if you have any issues that come up as a result of your participation in the project.

The final results of the research will be presented to all participants in a format to be decided by the participants. Your identity will not be revealed in the research, unless your written permission is given. It will be coded to ensure your confidentiality.

All of the stories gathered will be stored in a locked cupboard and will not be used without your expressed, written permission.

If you would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact me on **0402354315**. Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor **Jan Piek, 08 92667990** or email j.piek@curtin.edu.au

Thank you very much for having a yarn, your participation is greatly welcomed.

This project has been reviewed and given approval by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (HREC415) and Curtin University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 36/2012)

Appendix 2 Consent Form

If you're Kaarty and you know it clap you hands

Mental wellbeing and Aboriginal youth: an examination of the attitudes and beliefs of 18-25 year olds residing in Perth WA

- I have been given time to understand the information sheet and have asked questions if necessary.
- Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to participate in this research but understand that I can change my mind or withdraw at any time
- I am aware that the yarns or interviews will be recorded and then transcribed.
- I agree that the yarns recorded may be published provided names or any other information that may identify me are not used unless I give written permission.

Signed _____

Date _____

Witness _____

Date _____

This project has been reviewed and given approval by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (HREC415) and Curtin University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 36/2012)

If you would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact me on **0402354315**.

Appendix 3
Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Participant number:
Site ID:
Data number:
Date of interview:

If you're Kaarty and you know it clap you hands

Mental wellbeing and Aboriginal youth: an examination of the attitudes and beliefs of 18-25 year olds residing in WA

SECTION ONE

Please fill in your responses

Gender

Male Female

Other

Age

Where do you call home?

Do you have any siblings?

How many?

Are you living on country?

Yes

No

Sometimes

Not Sure

Do you live with

Family

Buying your own home

By yourself

Friends

Hostel

Other

Did you go to high school?

Where?

.....

.....

.....

Highest grade completed?

.....

Have you done any further education or training?

.....

If so what and where

.....

.....

Do you consider yourself strong and well?

.....

Do you have a cultural group/s that you identify with?
Eg- Noongar, Wongi, Bardi

.....

.....

.....

Do you have any children?

.....

How many?

.....

Are you employed?

.....

If so what do you do?

.....

Appendix 4 Yarning questions

Participant number:
Site ID:
Data number:
Date of interview:

What do you believe you need to know to grow up well and strong?

What does success mean to you?

What do you do to get through the hard times?

Family/school/work

How do you describe people who grow up well despite the many problems they face?

What does the word resilience mean to you?

What are the most important things in your life?

Why?

What kinds of things were most challenging for you growing up?

As a young Aboriginal person what are some of the difficulties that happen in your life that you think maybe different to non-Aboriginal young people?

What about some of the good things?

Has there been a time or times in your life where you feel things have reached a turning point?

Can you share a story about how you have managed to overcome challenges you face personally, in your family, or outside your home in your community?

What do you think Aboriginal families and communities need to be strong and well?

What do you do to keep healthy, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually?

Can you tell me about someone who has grown up strong in despite facing many challenges?

What does being Aboriginal mean to you?

How important is culture and cultural knowledge to you?

Can you tell me if and how your identity impacts on your overall social, emotional and physical wellbeing?

What does land and home mean to you?

Do you think being on country or off country impacts on your overall health?

If so how and in what ways?

Can you tell me what motivates you to succeed?

What kinds of programs or activities do you believe will help young Aboriginal people to stay strong and well?

Can you tell me three things you think of when I say mental health

Where do you see yourself in two, five, ten years?

Thanks so much for your time and energy